AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

TRANSLATING TO INSPIRE: A CASE STUDY OF THREE ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF LABĪD'S *MU'ALLAQA*

by
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ABSTRACT

OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: Translating to Inspire: A Case Study of Three English Translations of Labīd's *Mu'allaqa*

The *Mu'allaqa* of the poet Labīd is one of the most analyzed poems of the massive pre-modern Arabic corpus in modern times. It comes as no surprise that the poem is also one of the most translated into foreign languages, with its first translation into English tracing back to 1742. Scholars over the centuries, inspired by early Victorian and post-Victorian generations, experimented in their translations with metrical and often rhymed renderings. But above all, a scholarly translation ethos dominated the translation methodology, usage, and goals. This study presents a textual analysis of three English translations of the past 50 years that aimed at rendering the poetry to a general readership rather than aiming solely at a narrow, scholarly audience. It examines the use of four rhetorical devices—assonance, alliteration, rhyme, and repetition—in each translation while also reflecting on diction, syntax, and fidelity to the source text. It concludes with a brief discussion on the differences, whether the respective translators under study were loyal to their projects and who most succeeded in rendering the verses into inspiring English poetry.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Translations done well can give us a unique window of access into the world's cultures, past and present.[1] But can they also inspire? Arabic texts have long been a source of translation, both from and into other languages. It was not until the late 18th century, however, that the translation of Arabic texts into European languages emerged. This coincided with the rise of a globalized capitalist economic system, and the arrival of European colonial powers to the Arab world's shores. Among the early works of Arabic poetry translated into English were the *Muʿallaqāt* (odes), a collection of what many consider the apotheosis of not just pre-Islamic poetry but Arabic poetry in general. The late scholar Jaroslav Stetkevych called the *Muʿallaqāt*, alongside the Qur'ān, as "one of the twin foundations of Arab-Islamic literary culture."[2] Indeed, pre-Islamic poetry, which embodied the classical *qaṣīda* pattern, formed the basis for subsequent Arabic poetry and became an essential referent for Arabic grammar, and Qurʾānic exegesis. Analyzed collectively, the structure, motifs, and images served as a literary model for Umayyad, Abbasid, Fatimid, Andalusian, and Mamluk poets, and went as far as influencing Persian, Turkish, and Urdu poetry.[3] What we now think of as the *Muʿallaqāt* are works by seven

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[1] David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature? | Princeton University Press* (Princeton University Press, 2003), 34.
[2] Jaroslav Stetkevych, *The Zephyrs of Najd: The Poetics of Nostalgia in The Classical Arabic Nasib* (University of Chicago Press, 1993).
[3] Robert Irwin, *Night and Horses and the Desert: An Anthology of Classical Arabic Literature* (New York: Anchor books, 2001); Raymond Farrin, *Abundance from the Desert: Classical Arabic Poetry* (Syracuse University Press, 2011). In this book, Farrin explains the impact of the *qaṣīda* on Hebrew and Persian poetry and affirms the organic unity of the poems, a key point underlined in the book. Debate concerning the unity of the *qaṣīda* has split contemporary scholars into several camps. On the one extreme, Geert Jan van Elder has argued that the poems are not concerned with structural cohesion. On the other, Michael Sells, Renate Jacobi, Suzanne Stetkevych, Raymond Farrin and others have demonstrated that the poems are characterized by a high degree of structural and thematic unity.

poets: Imru' al-Qays, Labīd, Ṭarafa, Zuhayr bin Abī Sulmā, 'Antara ibn Shaddād, ʿAmr ibn Kulthūm, and Al-Ḥārith ibn Ḥilliza. Three more pre-Islamic poets are sometimes grouped with these other seven. They are: al-Nābighah al-Dhubyānī, al-Aʿshā, and 'Abīd ibn al-Abraṣ. Containing the beginnings of Arabic poetic memory, the importance of this poetry in the study of pre-modern Arabic literature and Arabic literature in translation cannot be underestimated.

A critical moment in the history of Arabic translation into Anglophone spheres can be traced back to St. Anthony's College at Oxford University in the 1960s. At the time Jaroslav Stetkevych delivered a talk to a group of Orientalists later published in the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* calling in to question what scholars of Arabic literature had been doing. In unabashed terms, Stetkevych laid out an indictment of his field, proclaiming, "*We* orientalists are used to behaving like an exotic, esoteric clan," and "*we* think the outside world does not and is not qualified to understand us."[4] Stetkevych went on to state that there was once a purpose for the foreignizing impulse that had come to characterize English translations of pre-modern Arabic texts, but Arabists (and he does not exempt himself, for the blame is self-referential) had now surpassed the innocence of the Romantic tradition. Rather, Orientalists should ask themselves:

> Do we still believe that by conveying our experience with Arabic literature to our own readers we shall be making a contribution to the creative literary processes that are going on in our native literatures? Can we in any way stimulate a nascent poet in the English language, for example, to find some creative affinity with *Imru' al-Qays* or *al-Mutanabbī*? And if we feel that this is possible, what approach shall we adopt? Will translations, simply more translations, be enough? [5]

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[4] Jaroslav Stetkevych, "Arabism and Arabic Literature. Self-View of a Profession," Journal of Near Eastern Studies 28, no. 3 (July 1, 1969): 13. *Emphasis* my own.
[5] Stetkevych, 146.

The choice to begin with these questions is a conscious one. It points to a critical intervention in the practice of Arabic translation into English, a call to change the status quo of dominant scholarship of the time. In fact, if I were to summarize the main preoccupation of this study it would be the search for English translations of the *Muʿallaqāt* that carry creative potential for a wide influence with a particular focus on translation approaches and decisions. In other words, J. Stetkevych's intervention is an illuminating point in my search. In my case study, I select three translations that appear to take his claims seriously.

Thus, to situate the translations of the *Muʿallaqāt* in its present locus, in chapter one, I provide an overview of translations of the *Muʿallaqāt* looking specifically at various moments of translation and studying their context: Why and where was the poem(s) translated? How do translators of these classical Arabic odes differ in translation and why did they differ? What are the causes and/or what gives rise to different translations and interpretations? While chronological order, especially when it comes to literary history, can sometimes be counterproductive,[6] in this study a linear chronology is the most helpful given the discursive nature upon which translations improved upon one another, even including, or acknowledging prior translations.[7] Furthermore, many of the *Muʿallaqāt* were translated together, or with several in a collection, rarely in isolation. Therefore, in this overview, I look at attempts to translate the *Muʿallaqāt* spanning over two centuries. What I find is that

[6] Fakhreddine, *Metapoesis in the Arabic Tradition, From Modernists to Muḥdathūn*, 36:2–3.
[7] Raymond Farrin regularly includes in his footnotes other translations such as Arberry and Lyall but also the more recent translations by S. Stetkevych found in her book *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual*. See: Farrin, *Abundance from the Desert: Classical Arabic Poetry*. In addition, Pierre Larcher provides a similar sort of chronological mapping in an article in the French, titled: Pierre Larcher, "TRADUIRE LES MU'ALLAQĀT: HISTOIRE D'UNE TRADITION," *Quaderni Di Studi Arabi* 5/6 (2010): 49–74.

most translations discussed in chapter one aim to be purely scholarly and targeted for a narrow scholarly audience.

In chapter two, I place two contemporary translation theorists—Antoine Berman and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak—in conversation with Jaroslav Stetkevych's guiding queries. Although different, it is evident that Stetkevych's call for the translator of pre-modern Arabic texts to translate creatively intersects with Spivak's tangible advice for translators to be intimate with language. In addition, the spirit of Berman's critique also emphasizes carrying the literariness of the text in his coining of the "ethical" and "poeticality" criteria of a text for the critic judging the translation. It would be impossible to discuss the entirety of the gargantuan body of translation theory that has emerged in recent decades, and which coincides with J. Stetkevych's criticisms, but I selected these two scholars precisely because of their powerful convergence on the role of the translator in ensuring the text maintains the literary, aesthetic and sensibilities of the source text. Alongside J. Stetkevych's initial intervention, I find these theorists' spirit on translation criticism useful and illuminating. Although in this study, I aim to provide some initial empirical findings and a systematic treatment without focusing largely on extra-literary categories such as the politics and patronage of production, materiality of the translations or paratexts, or the judgement of each translation, I ultimately use this theory to make a judgement on inspiration. This is the analytical spirit marking my approach. Moreover, this study can be considered a sole contribution in that it is the first that analyzes these three contemporary translations of Labīd's *Muʿallaqa,* and the first textual study, to my knowledge, of a part of the recent *The Muʿallaqāt for Millennials* project.

A. The Text: Translations and Analysis:

By employing a textual approach, in chapter three, I meticulously analyze three translations of Labīd's *Mu'allaqa* (d, between 40-42/660-662); the first is by Michael Sells rendered in a book titled *Desert Tracings* (1989, *Wesleyan University Press*)*;* the second is a translation in a travelogue style book produced by William Polk titled *The Golden Ode* (1977, *The American University in Cairo Press*); the third is Suzanne Stetkevych's translation in the recent *The Muʿallaqāt for Millennials: Pre-Islamic Arabic Golden Odes (2020)* project sponsored by the Saudi King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (Ithra), the most current and comprehensive English language translation project to date on the *Muʿallaqāt,* which includes all ten.

In the following analysis, I include individual lines of the Arabic version of the *qaṣīda* using the Iḥsān 'Abbās edition[8] followed by a treatment of each line. To demonstrate my command of Arabic and to situate this thesis in the Department of Arabic and Near Eastern Languages at the American University of Beirut, I begin my line-by-line critical analysis by translating the obscure, convoluted Arabic words. Instead of going through various commentaries, a work that is also too extensive for the confines of this thesis, I rely on *The Muʿallaqāt for Millennials* Arabic commentary *(sharḥ)* provided in the Labīd section which is translated by Suzanne Stetkevych, one of the foremost scholars in the field of pre and early Islamic Arabic poetry.[9] The commentary was provided in Arabic in the Arabic section of this bilingual translation with the "two-fold goal of defining obscure words and

[8] Labīd ibn Rabī'a al-'Āmirī, Sharḥ Dīwān, ed. Iḥsān 'Abbās (Kuwait: Maṭbaʿat ḥukūmat al-Kuwayt, 1962), 297-321.

[9] Oddly, it does not say which commentary was used by *The Muʿallaqāt for Millennials* project for translating *Labīd*.

furnishing the verses with exegesis and interpretation,"[10] and I take that Arabic and render it into English. The most useful part of the commentary was the section called *Lugha* or "Language" which is displayed in an end-note sub-section to the left side of the Arabic text and includes explanations as well as "contemporary names for the ancient locations mentioned in the odes, along with some biographical information about the poems' characters, human and non-human alike."[11] After discussing individual words, I comparatively analyze the rendering of each *bayt* by the three translations discussing diction, style, and faithfulness to the original. In my analysis, I sometimes, albeit not systematically, reveal clear examples where a word in the original Arabic was rendered idiomatically as opposed to literally. Lastly, I present a statistical table that displays the number of times four rhetorical devices—repetition, assonance, alliteration, and rhyme—appeared in each translator's rendering. I close by summarizing and discussing my findings.

Labīd is a natural choice for a case study given the abundance of commentary that has been produced on his poem as the most often studied and translated poem of modern studies of pre-modern Arabic.[12] In addition, Labīd's *Mu'allaqa* is one of the longest (88

[10] King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture and King Fahad National Library, *The Mu'allaqāt for Millennials: Pre-Islamic Arabic Golden Odes*, 2020, 17.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Geert Jan van Elder states this point as well in his article "An Experiment with Beeston, Labīd, and Baššār: On Translating Classical Arabic Verse," *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 36 (2006): 7–15. Indeed, the poem has been used by many to test new literary experiments, theories, and methodologies. For example, Kamal Abu-Deeb considers the poem "a key poem" for its study of themes, motifs, structures, morals, values and ideas of Bedouin poetry and life. See: Kamal Abu-Deeb, "Towards a Structural Analysis of Pre-Islamic Poetry," 1975. See also Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych's first chapter of her book *The Mute Immortals Speak* where she analyzes how Labīd's *qaṣīda* confirms three moments of the rite of passage: separation from the initial community, a liminal period of separation and quest, and a final reaggregation with the community in a new social position. See: *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual* (Cornell University Press, 1993). A. F. L. Beeston has an interesting translation of the poem where he experiments keeping the Arabic syntax intact as far as possible in the English so as to preserve the original

lines) and most pristine exemplars as a result of its clarity and cohesiveness of form, of the tripartite pre-modern Arabic *qaṣīda.*[13]

That explains why I chose Labīd, however, what about the translations under study? These three texts were selected out of the fecundity of translations on Labīd because of their unique qualities. Returning to Stetkevych's initial questions, the respective translations explicitly state striving to be literary or poetic with an effort to carry out a "creative" core. For example, Polk writes in his preface: "What we offer here is not an abstract linguistic analysis. Rather, we have sought to pay homage to one of the world's great poets by treating his writing as he intended it to be treated, as poetry." Sells' states in his introduction that "the goal is a rendition of the poem in a "natural, idiomatic, and contemporary American verse." In a section titled, The Muʿallaqāt Book: Story, Map, and Contribution, Hatem Alzahrani, Content and International Communication Supervisor, states that an essential decision that led to the style and format of *The Muʿallaqāt for Millennials: Pre-Islamic Arabic Golden Odes* was to make the odes "more accessible to the non-specialist."[14] In addition, the introduction consistently talks about the ode's place in world literature because of their "human" element. Although changes abound, these three translators state a shared belief from the outset in their efforts to translate the poems as poetry, an attitude that stands out amongst many of the other translations (especially before Stetkevych's intervention).[15]

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sequence of concepts as they manifest in each line. See: "An Experiment with Labīd," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 7 (1976): 1–6. There are many other studies.

[13] King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture and King Fahad National Library, *The Mu'allaqāt for Millennials: Pre-Islamic Arabic Golden Odes*, 2020.

[14] King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture and King Fahad National Library, 15.

[15] I am not suggesting that J. Stetkevych's call was a turning point in the approach to Arabic literature into English translation. I did not try to study its tangible impact. Rather, what I am arguing is that, with few exceptions, many translations of the *Muʿallaqāt* into English prior to 1969 and after 1969 did not treat the

While the pre-Islamic period has been dealt with extensively in its treatment as both an elegiac topos[16] and as a problem to be worked out,[17] I depart from a sweeping traditional view of the Jāhiliyya, which is just, after all, another period in history, and engage with a specific poem by Labīd that happens to be composed in the qasida genre during this period. What follows is a study of this poetry in English translation both generally and carefully including an original, rigorous textual study of three contemporary translations of Labīd.

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poetry as having intrinsic literary value for enjoyment and access to an audience beyond the parochial Arabist circles of their respective times. William Jones and Desmond O'Grady are exceptions.

[16] For many contemporary poets, such as Mohammad Maghout, Mahmoud Darwish, and Adonis, *al-'Asr al-Jāhilī* is used as a topos, a way to return to the beginnings. The way that poetry and the legend of the epoch is mobilized and employed is a gold mine of a topic of potential interest for me in future research. One fascinating study is by Sinan Antoon, "Mahmud Darwish's Allegorical Critique of Oslo," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 31, no. 2 (2002): 66–77.

[17] Other scholars have worked on jāhilī poetry as a problem, a set of issues to work out. For example, notably in an article published in 1925, D.S. Margoliouth, Laudian Professor of Arabic at Oxford, argued that all pre-Islamic poetry had been fabricated by subsequent generations. A year later, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, the distinguished Egyptian novelist and man of letters, produced a book titled *Fī al-Sh'ir al-Jāhilī* which made essentially the same case; he cast doubt on the authenticity of much of the corpus of pre-Islamic poetry. His main point can be summarized in the following: "The abundance of what we call pre-Islamic poetry is not from the pre-Islamic era in any way, but is a plagiarism from the advent of Islam, for it represents the life of Muslims, their matters and whims more than it represents the pre-Islam, or Jāhiliyya life" (my translation, p. 8). The book aroused the extreme anger and hostility of the religious scholars at al-Azhar and many other traditionalists, and he was accused of having insulted Islam. As a result, a fervent debate in Egyptian literary, political, and religious circles erupted in the middle of the 20th century around this topic. What is clear is that today there has been a lot of methodical and scrupulous work inspired by oral composition theory that allows us to understand how this poetry could have been passed down.

CHAPTER II

HISTORY OF A TRADITION IN ANGLOPHONE SPACES

In 1742, the *Muʿallaqāt* stopped being the exclusive product of their original culture and transcended to the fragile and permeable stage of world literature. They were first translated that year into Latin, the language of scholarly discourse, by German émigrés to the Netherlands.[18] In the Anglophone sphere, the "discovery" of the *Muʿallaqāt* traces to British Arabist Sir William Jones (d. 1794). Jones provided the first translation of these ancient odes into English, citing the prior Latin translations as inspiration.[19] Published in 1782, Jone's "Moallakát, or Seven Arabian Poems" appeared right before his service in India. This achievement gained him the distinction, as W.A. Clouston (d. 1896) remarked in his introduction to Arabian poetry for English readers, of having been the first to translate the seven Arabic odes into a European language.[20]

Jones' impetus to render the poems into English was explicitly political. According to the 20th century British Arabist A.J. Arberry (d. 1969), "It was political partisanship and aesthetic appreciation which urged [Jones] to bring the Golden Poems to the notice of the British public."[21] An ardent supporter of the American colonists in their quest for independence from the start, Jones envisioned a prosperous career in British politics. The year after he published his "Moallakát," he wrote a revolutionary tract titled "The Principles of Government" and was called by Benjamin Franklin to assist in drafting the

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[18] Kevin Blankinship, "The Seven Hanging Odes of Mecca," *New Lines Magazine* (blog), May 28, 2021.
[19] A. J. Arberry, *The Seven Odes: The First Chapter in Arabic Literature*, 1st ed., vol. 2, Book, Whole (Routledge, 1957).
[20] Heather Bleaney, ed., *Islamic Reflections, Arabic Musings: Studies in Honour of Professor Alan Jones* (Cambridge: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2004), 122.
[21] Arberry,:8.

new U.S. Constitution (an offer Jones refused).[22] In his remarks about a pre-Islamic ruler, he writes: “The king of Hira like other tyrants, wished to make all men just but himself and to leave all nations free but his own.”[23] The allusion to politics of the time was unambiguous.

Yet beyond political aims, his motivations were also scholarly, to invite readers to study the language. He writes in the prologue of his translation, “When I propose a translation of these Oriental pieces, as a work likely to meet with success, I only mean to invite my readers, who have leisure and industry, to the study of the languages, in which they are written, and am very far from insinuating that I have the remotest design of performing any part of the task myself.”[24] In addition to being a pioneering translator of the 18th century, Jones was responsible for establishing the International Phonetic Alphabet, including a transliteration of the original Arabic. The transliteration served to correct errors of past scholars, “to end the inconsistent spellings that often-misled Europeans into believing that a given person or place was actually two or more persons or places.”[25] Although his audience was scholarly, his transliteration system sought to provide a slight idea as to how the rhyming poems might sound in their original language, perhaps to allure non-Arabists into studying the language.

It appears that Jones revered the cultures that he studied. Two decades before his translation, Jones makes a remarkable plea for the benefits of comparative literary education. He contends that a general education including “the principal writings of the Asiaticks”

[22] Ibid,:12.
[23] Ibid,: 8.
[24] Ibid,:9.
[25] 9/14/22 7:28:00 AM

would provide “a more extensive insight into the history of the human mind’, as well as ‘a new set of images and similitudes.’”[26] His suggestion comes in light of his critique of the state of European poetry, which he deplores for its “perpetual repetition of the same images and incessant allusions to the same fables.”[27] It is here that we best see his goals of influencing poets and scholars alike, for he writes:

> “It has been my endeavor, for several years, to inculcate this truth; if the principal writings of the Asiaticks …were printed with the usual advances of notes and illustration, and if the Eastern languages…were studied in our places of education… a new and ample field would open for speculation. We should be furnished with a new set of images and similitudes, a number of excellent models would be brought to light, which future *scholars* might explain and future *poets* might imitate.”[28]

Furthermore, in an article titled *Sir William Jones and the Associated Between East and West,* Garland Cannon presents a positive view of Jones and his contributions as an Orientalist scholar both to Arabic and Persian works but also to Sanskrit, challenging the deeply ingrained belief that Indians were a savage uncivilized people devoid of literature and science.[29]

While Sir William Jones was most known for his work on Sanskrit, his translations of the odes marked an important catalyst for future translations in European languages.[30] Enthusiasts in France and Italy but most famously in Germany accessed them for the first time thanks to his translation. In Germany, the luminary philosopher and poet Johann

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[26] Robyn Creswell, “Playing a Part: Imru’ al-Qays in English,” *Ginko Press*, January 1, 2019, 125.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Sir William Jones, *Poems Consisting Chiefly of Translations from the Asiatick Languages*, The Second Edition (London: W. Bowyer and J. Nichols, n.d.).
[29] Garland Cannon, “Sir William Jones and the Association between East and West,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 121, no. 2 (1977): 183–87.
[30] There are many examples of the Mu‘allaqāt studied and translated in other languages, including French, Swedish, Latin, Russian, Spanish, and more. For an overview of those as well as another chronological history of the translation tradition, including editions and commentary, see: Larcher, “TRADUIRE LES MU’ALLAQĀT.”

Wolfgang von Goethe (d. 1832) drew inspiration, writing about them his 1819 *West-östlicher Divan*. In Britain, the famous poet Alfred Lord Tennyson (d. 1892) was also influenced. Lord Tennyson acknowledged that Sir William Jones' prose translations of the "Moallakat*"* gave him the idea of *Locksley Hall* (1842), the long dramatic monologue that one contemporary judged to have "had most influence on the minds of the young men of our day."[31] We see the direct influence in a line where the kilted lover sees a future rivaled by her husband, saying in a tone resonant of the boastful eroticism from Imru' al-Qays:

> Baby lips will laugh me down: my latest rival brings thee rest.
> Baby fingers, waxen touches, press me from the mother's breast.[32]

Tennyson also translated Imru' al-Qays' metaphor for rain:

> The cloud unloads its freight on the desert of Ghabeit,
> like a merchant of Yemen, alighting with his blaes of rich.[33]

At the time, Sir William Jones' translation ventured beyond literary influence, serving as a reference for historians alike. The great British historian Edward Gibbon, who corresponded with Jones, marveled in his work *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* that "we may read in our own language the seven original poems which were inscribed in letters of gold, and suspended in the temple of Mecca."[34] Jones'

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[31] Creswell, "" Playing a Part," 128.
[32] The translation of William Jones' rendering of this part of Imru' al-Qays' ode reads: "Many a lovely mother have I diverted from the care of her yearling infant… When suckling behind her cried, she turned round to him with half her body; but half of it pressed beneath my embrace was not turned from me."
[33] Christopher Ricks, "'LOCKSLEY HALL' AND THE 'MOÂLLAKAT,'" *Notes and Queries* 12, no. 8 (1965): 300–301.
[34] Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire by Edward Gibbon* (Strahan & Cadell, London, 1777).

influence, in sum, extended to litterateurs, poets, philosophers and men of letters across Western Europe.

Although Jones' translation is obsolete and in many places error-strewn,[35] it an exemplary example of a work that influenced European translators and writers of the time. According to Arberry, Jones' rendering, though not free of faults, flows smoothly and pleasantly enough, not impeded by the pedantic over-scrupulosity which makes so many scholars' translations of classical Arabic virtually unreadable.[36] Some critiqued Jones on account of his understanding of the term 'Arabia Felix' ('Happy Arabia'), which had given him a fanciful notion of a verdant, rather English-looking countryside prevailing in Arabia.[37] This is a point that Robert Irvin and Jaroslav Stetkevych agree upon when assessing Jones' translation: that he transformed the untamed desert landscape into the bucolic countryside of Claude Lorraine.[38] Despite his pioneering role, Jones was still a product of his time and environment, which most perceptibly is shown in his translations that reflect an intimate link with English neoclassicism. In Stetkevych's assessment, he belonged to an "enthusiastic" school of Orientalism. The "Asiatick," as William Jones insisted, was the object of pure emotional genius of primitive man. Goethe, too, as reflected in his *West-östlicher Divan*, engaged with the *Muʿallaqāt* in a straightforward, romantic, anthropological way. But perhaps Jones most aptly practiced what many contemporary

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[35] This is the opinion of Arberry. Despite these "errors," he still believes that Jone's translation is undeserving of the unsympathetic treatment which it received in a volume of essays published in 1946. See: Arberry, *The Seven Odes*.
[36] Arberry, 2:53.
[37] Robert Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and Their Enemies* (Allen Lane, 2006), 280.
[38] Jaroslav Stetkevych, *Arabic Poetry & Orientalism*, Arabic Poetry and Comparative Poetics 2 (Oxford: St. John's College Research Centre, 2004), 33–35.

scholars and critics of Arabic literature argue we must do: he approached literature from his own critical and conceptual language.

Stetkevych highlights the essential difference that came to mark early romantic enthusiasts like Jones and that of the subsequent "pseudo-romantic philologists."[39] For the former, Arabic poetry was admitted into European literary sensibility both practically-experientially and theoretically as a homage to an already existing or newly evolving poetics, whereas, in the case of the latter, Arabic poetry and its study were moved ever farther from the notion of the literary, until the only rationale left was that a more ideal knowledge of that poetry as ethnography could produce most valuable documentary material for social and cultural history.[40] Romantics such as William Jones and Friedrich Rückert were followed by a philologically-minded generation of scholars who developed an unwritten rule that dismissed any further attempts at a poetic understanding of Arabic poetry. This shift is perhaps best represented by the prominent German Arabist Theodore Nöldeke (d. 1930) who changed his mind about the value of old Arabic poetry. Gradually, Nöldeke concluded that poetry deserved the attention of the researcher as a tool to penetrate the character of the Arabs rather than as a source of artistic expression, replacing the neoclassical and romantic poetic attitudes of enthusiasm with a kind of devaluation.[41] In light of all this, Jones' translation perhaps embodies Stetkevych's challenge for producing consequential translations (it was arguably more influential than any modern version including the ones under review in the third section of this thesis). His translations,

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[39] Stetkevych, *Arabic Poetry & Orientalism*.
[40] Stetkevych, 38-39.
[41] Stetkevych, 37.

after all, had enormous reach, influencing creative minds from Goethe to Tennyson and extending to most literary men of nineteenth-century Europe.[42]

On the other hand, over one hundred years later, Frank E. Johnson's 1893 translation was born an anachronism and remained as such, never reaching an audience for evident reasons: he never intended a literary translation. As a captain member of the Royal Artillery at Kirkee, he found himself in contact with Shaikh Faizullahbhai, a "first-class Arabic scholar" from Bombay. Under his tutelage, Johnson translated the Seven Poems "intending to be nothing more than an aid to the student, and for this reason, it has been made as literal as possible."[43] Every word is grammatically and linguistically explained, with interjections from different commentaries. Captain Johnson printed for the use of Indian students a slavish adherence to the literal word in unadorned prose.[44]

15 years after F.E. Johnson's esoteric version, Wilfred Scawen Blunt and his wife Lady Anne Blunt determined to produce a translation that outperformed all prior renderings. Working as a dynamic duo, Lady Blunt translated the odes, and her husband Wilfred, a poet of his own merits, turned them into poetry.[45] In transforming the translation into verse, Wilfred Blunt aimed to "present a true poetry, a new flower of strange and interesting kind added to the body of English classics."[46] He admired this kind of poetry because it was "native in its display of emotion, uninhibited and

[42] Majida Mufti, "A Critical Appreciation of the English Translations of Three Mu'al-Laqat by Jones, Blunt and Arberry" (Beirut, 1971). In her thesis, she refers to Marie E. Meester's study titled, *Oriental Influence in English Literature of the Nineteenth Century.*
[43] Arberry, *The Seven Odes*, 27.
[44] Arberry, 28.
[45] Majida Mufti, "A Critical Appreciation of the English Translations of Three Mu'al-Laqat by Jones, Blunt and Arberry" (Beirut, 1971). Mufti cites A.S. Blunt the Seven Odes p. xxi. He was a poet whose best known volume of verse was titled: *Love Sonnets of Proteus.*
[46] Ibid.

hedonistic."[47] In Wilfred Blunt's book *The Future of Islam,* he appealed to his countrymen to remember the "tremendous influence which Semitic thought had and still has on the minds of nations… Chivalry is a notion purely Bedouin. Romance is the off-spring of the Pre-Islamic Arabia."[48] In this sense, he approached the poetry with a reverence similar to Sir William Jones. However, Wilfred Blunt complained in his introduction that Jones translation reflects the English of the 18th century: "polite, Latinized," and hardly suggestive of the "wild vigor of the original."[49] The Blunts sought to make their translation more readable. [50]

In terms of translation technique, the Blunts applied an energized biblical style to catch the Arabic. The translators acknowledged the help of Cairene advisors, "receiving the imprimatur of the more learned Grand Mufti, Shaykh Muḥammad Abdu."[51] In doing so, the Blunts also religiously restricted the number of syllables and kept this system as a procrustean rule. In the words of Majida Mufti who wrote her dissertation on three translations of the *Muʿallaqāt* of Imru' al-Qays, Ṭarafa, and ʻAntara using a textual analysis focusing on "authenticity of rendering, style, and diction," the restrictive measure of Blunts' lines imposed certain structures that "sometimes blur the meaning or at times miss the nuances and shades of meaning."[52] She provides, for example, a line of the Blunts from Imru' al-Qays, translated as "Man! Not of grief thou diest," which is more of a negative statement, while the Arabic counterpart is an imperative. Blunt also

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[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Arberry, *The Seven Odes*, 2:30.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid,: 283.

distinguished himself in his diction by using words of French or French origin, keeping in line with his overall mostly old or Middle English diction. This choice mimicked a dominant trend of the 19th century, a time when French words or words of French origin started to replace the classical elements, which were found in the 18th century. The translation of Blunts was reminiscent of the early works of Yeats and other poets who were in contact with French writers and were preparing for the Modernist Movement.[53] It is also noteworthy that Mufti believes that the *Muʿallaqāt* "should not be modernized with time, but should preserve the distant, unfamiliar sensibilities of the time."[54] Thus, Blunt's use of archaic language achieves Mufti's aesthetic ideal.

As these renderings demonstrate, translators carried—and still to this day often carry—the assumption that meaning takes precedent over the sound. Therefore, imitating the rhythmic pattern of the original is forgone.[55] One such exception is Sir Charles Lyall (1845-1920), another British translator of the ancient Arabic odes. Nearly a century after Jones, like F.E. Johnson, Lyall entered the Bengal Civil Service in India. Translation of early Arabic poetry became a craft he devoted himself to during most of his leisure hours. Unlike Jones, however, who showed deterrence to the Arabs and their poetry, Lyall appears to have had some reservations, observing: 'To us much in these poems seems tedious and even repellent. The narrow range of the Kasida [ode], with its conventional framework,

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[53] Ibid,: 287.

[54] Mufti, "A Critical Appreciation of the English Translations of Three Mu'al-Laqat by Jones, Blunt and Arberry."

[55] In a talk delivered at Cornell University in 2013 by Shawkat Toorawa titled *How Not to Translate the Qur'an*, he raises the point on forgoing sound in translation, saying: "The biggest mistake that is made in my view is that translators that don't rhyme. 99 percent of people will say: well aren't you sacrificing the meaning? Do not function under the delusion that you are sacrificing the meaning. You are sacrificing the sound. Is meaning more important than sound?" See: *How (Not) to Translate the Qurʾān*, 2013.

tends to produce monotony, and it is not easy to come into close touch with the life that is so realistically described."[56] Despite his expressed reservations about the *qaṣīda*, he rendered them into an English that was poetic in its own time and right. Where he differs from Jones in his attitude, the two converge as translators' part of a Romantic age of translation whose aim was to enrich their own national interests, bringing the *qaṣīda,* as poetry, into contact with their literary and critical world.[57]

The original inspiration for Lyall's metrical translations of Arabic poetry came from his reading of the lyrical translations of Oriental poetry by Friedrich Rückert. But Lyall was also a meticulous philological editor and he followed the example of the Germans as well as the Dutch."[58] Although his versions are inevitably somewhat archaic today, a product of their time, Lyall sought to imitate the meter (which is *ṭawīl*), an observation that reminds us of the extent to which the Victorian poets, Tennyson among them, sought to extend English prosody to take in the exciting rhythms newly discovered in the East.[59] While on leave in Europe, Lyall studied with Nöldeke, to whom he dedicated his two collections of Arabic poetry and whom he called the master of all European scholars in this field of study. The discussion of Nöldeke's shift from viewing the poetry through literary optics to an unfavorable lens as a mere object was already mentioned. Lyall descends from the same tradition as Nöldeke. Through Lyall's background and own reflections we understand why and for what purpose he translated the odes.

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[56] Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing*, 476.
[57] Michael Sells, "THE QAṢĪDA AND THE WEST: Self-Reflective Stereotype and Critical Encounter," *Al-'Arabiyya* 20, no. 1/2 (1987): 309.
[58] Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing*, 476.
[59] Arberry, *The Seven Odes*, 2:55.

The 20th century witnessed even more renderings of the *Muʿallaqāt*. The best known to academics is Arberry's "The Seven Odes," partly because it tackles the question of pre-Islamic authenticity.[60] Arberry is another example of an Orientalist who displayed reverence toward Islamic culture and Arabic poetry. When translating the Qur'ān, for example, unlike most Orientalists, Arberry was not motivated by a mission to refute its veracity. Rather he writes in his introduction to the Qur'ān translation that "the rhetoric and rhythm of the Arabic of the Koran are so characteristic, so powerful, so highly emotive, that any version whatsoever is bound in the nature of things to be but a poor copy of the glittering splendor of the original." [61] In the same introduction, he explains how he, as the "infidel," came to appreciate the Koran and react to the thrilling rhymes. His strategy for the *Muʿallaqāt* was to maintain the original lexicon that hallmarked them, including names of places (villages, rivers, valleys, and mountains) as well as different types of plants that grew where the beloved's tribe once dwelt. These, as J. Stetkevych states, are "key elements of the Arabic poetic lexicon."[62] But his literalizing paraphrases, once again, do not stand on their own as poetry. Can the preservation of the representative patterns in the *Muʿallaqāt* only be made possible through literalism, which contradicts the poetic spirit? For Arberry, the answer is a resounding yes. He sought to highlight the author's text as an unparalleled literal artifact with the wholeness of the tribal and cultural fundamentals contained within it.[63] This approach appears to run contradictory to his claims in the

[60] For more on this debate, refer to a footnote in the introductory chapter.
[61] A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted: A Translation* (Simon and Schuster, 1996).
[62] Stetkevych. J. (1993) *The Zephyrs of Najd: The Poetics of Nostalgia in the Classical Arabic Nasid*. Chicago Univ. Press.
[63] Benneghrouzi Fatima Zohra, "Arberry's Rendition of Imru'al Qays' Mu'allaqa: Translation and Gender Issues," 2016, 12.

introduction where he wrote that the poets spoke into his ear as "a natural, even at times a colloquial language: such I feel sure was the effect they produced on their first audience."[64] Arberry's translation is a typical modern version of the mid-20th century with a clear scientific devotion to simplicity and accuracy. The modern demand for plain verse compels the translator to prune away at the complexities and sacrifice sound.[65] As such, the entire body of English translations of the odes in the 18th, 19th, and mid-20th centuries stated in explicit terms that they were primarily scholarly in aim, directed at an audience of specialists with a heavy philological approach to translation and a close adherence to the literal world. In the view of Geert Jan van Gelder, much of this poetry read "like the worst products of Victorian English poetry."[66] This paradigm would be slightly shaken only at the end of the 20th century.

In the year 1997, the project *The Golden Odes of Love* was published, following the spirit of *Desert Tracings* (which will be treated below as one of our case studies) in its aim to be a readable, inspiring English version. Translated by the Irish poet Desmond O'Grady, which he dedicates to Doura Shoukri and his first wife Olga, he explicitly warns that "these renderings do not pretend to be scholarly translations."[67] Thus, we are presented for the first time with a version that attempts to target solely a lay audience. Yet in this version, we see the risks of disregarding scholarly sensibilities: it produces an inaccurate translation.[68]

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[64] Arberry, *The Seven Odes*, 2:61.
[65] Mufti, "A Critical Appreciation of the English Translations of Three Mu'al-Laqat by Jones, Blunt and Arberry."
[66] van Gelder, "An Experiment with Beeston, Labīd, and Baššār," 9.
[67] Desmond O'Grady, *Golden Odes of Love-- Al-Muʿallaqāt* , 0 edition (Cairo, Egypt: American University in Cairo Press, 1997).
[68] Blankinship, "The Seven Hanging Odes of Mecca."

As Shawkat Toorawa has demonstrated, the errs come to light first in examining the biographies of the poets. It becomes clear upon scrutiny that O'Grady merely paraphrases Arberry and further takes over his titles, not as chapter headings like Arberry but as titles for the poems themselves.[69] In the instances where he does not borrow from Arberry, O'Grady is imprecise, such as in the passages of Zuhayr.[70] Moreover, numerous translator decisions need better justification or explanation such as the omission of place names.[71] The title's choice — Golden Odes of Love — is also ambiguous. While Golden Odes has precedent, such as in the Blunts version, the addition of the word love is unclear. Lastly, the selection criteria for the verses of calligraphy that adorn the volume is not explained. In short, according to Toorawa's assessment, there are some poetic renderings and lines that inspire, but they do not make up for the slew of errors, including orthographic issues that are unmentioned. What O'Grady's rendition reflects are the risks of not being scholarly, if by scholarly we mean accurate, methodically justified, and punctilious.

Raymond Farrin's presentation of classical Arabic poetry in *Abundance from the Desert* (2011), includes translations of the *Muʿallaqāt* of Imru' al-Qays, Labīd and al-Shanfarā's *Lāmiyyat al-ʿArab*, the arguably "three most-often discussed early Arabic odes,"[72]

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[69] Shawkat M. Toorawa, review of *Review of The Golden Odes of Love: Al-Muʾallaqat. A Verse Rendering from the Arabic*, by Desmond O'Grady, *Al-'Arabiyya* 36 (2003): 169.
[70] Toorawa, 171.
[71] Ibid. According to Kareem James Abu Zeid, keeping the place-names "lend to the mystique a little. They lend to the sense that this is a different world. Even the names, there's a spring in part of the Imru al-Qays that's called Dar al-Juljul, and, even in Arabic it sounds foreign to me. I felt that was a problematic choice, as a translator. I'm not against those kinds of choices, but in this specific instance it felt a little bit much. See more: Marcia Lynx Qualey, "On Bringing the Muʿallaqāt into English: 'There's Such a Divide That Needs To Be Crossed by the Translator' – ARABLIT & ARABLIT QUARTERLY."
[72] Farrin, *Abundance from the Desert: Classical Arabic Poetry*.

amongst many other translations of later canonical Arabic poets. Although Farrin's writing vacillates in tone from that of a specialist to that of someone writing to a general audience, the general audience is not so much a public or a nascent English language poet but an undergraduate student of Arabic literature. The readership aims are elucidated in the introduction, as the final aim of the book is to "contribute measurably to recent scholarship" and examine the credibility of a thesis that states classical Arabic poetry lacks coherence.[73]

Building off prior views of the Arabic ode, Farrin's study takes inspiration from James Monroe's scholarship refuting the German orientalist Wilhelm Ahlwardt to "demonstrate that ring composition is indeed a greatly important structural pattern that occurs repeatedly in classical Arabic poetry."[74] In general, the book brings in various authors and commentaries to ultimately argue that all selected poems display ring composition. Chapter seven presents a discussion of the 'Abbasid period, perhaps best targeting the generalist and freed from unnecessary jargon. In a review, Majd Al-Mallah writes: "This representation is all done carefully and without any assumptions so a non-specialist can easily follow and benefit from the plethora of information."[75] According to Geert Jan Van Gelder, the translations do not have poetic pretensions and are generally reliable.[76] In assessing the translations, Jocelyn Sharlet goes one step above. She writes "[they are] readable and will no doubt inspire readers to learn Arabic and pursue the study of Arabic poetry.[77] The book,

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[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Majd Al-Mallah, "Classical Arabic Poetry in Contemporary Studies: A Review Essay," ed. Margaret Larkin, Samer M. Ali, and Raymond Farrin, *Journal of Arabic Literature* 44, no. 2 (2013): 245.
[76] Geert Jan van Gelder, review of *Review of Abundance from the Desert: Classical Arabic Poetry. (Middle East Literature in Translation.)*, by Raymond Farrin, *Speculum* 87, no. 4 (2012): 1190–91.
[77] Jocelyn Sharlet, review of *Review of Abundance from the Desert: Classical Arabic Poetry*, by Raymond Farrin, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 74, no. 1 (2015): 184–87, https://doi.org/10.1086/679679.

according to Sharlet, holds promise for the teaching of classical Arabic poetry in translation.[78]

A cursory albeit diverse overview of some of the most important Anglophone translations of the Seven Odes has been summarized above.[79] Ultimately the purpose of this chapter was to display how most translations of the *Muʿallaqāt* are academic in nature translated with the aim of targeting a specific audience of specialists often at the expense of Stetkevych's call for a disposition towards creativity. The three translations I have selected for my textual study are all unique in that they have a creative aim aimed at a wide audience. Geert Jan van Gelder also cites Stetkevych and Sells as having produced two "reasonably successful" translations of Labīd, in which he means translating the poems as poetry, that is translations that are not literal and layered with footnotes.[80] In the following section, I discuss some translation theorists' musings that echo Stetkevych's initial call for the literary.

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[78] Sharlet. It is also important to note, however, that in the note's section Farrin states that his renditions reflect his own readings of the poems but at times follow closely the renditions of Michael Sells in his *Desert Tracings,* which is one of the texts under review in this thesis.
[79] This chapter does not by any means attempt to be exhaustive but provides some of the most famous and accessible translations in English language.
[80] van Gelder, "An Experiment with Beeston, Labīd, and Baššār."

CHAPTER III

A SPIRIT OF TRANSLATION CRITICISMS

"*One is not born a reader of translations, but made one*" — Antoine Berman, *Toward a Translation Criticism: John Donne*

Antoine Berman's book on criticism *Toward a Translation Criticism: John Donne* originally published in 1993 and translated by Françoise Massardier-Kennedy in 2009 presents a prescriptive frame for analyzing and critiquing translations. Translation criticism, defined by Berman, is a rigorous analysis of translation, its fundamental traits, the project that gave birth to it, the horizon from which it sprang, and the position of the translator.

Berman's practice breathes an entirely different ethos than the so-called Tel Aviv school of translation, represented most prominently by figures such as Gideon Toury and Annie Brisset, which views translation through a prism of "secondariness."[81] From the outset, this school seeks to study in a neutral, objective, and "scientific" way what they call "translated literature," which is an integral part of the literary "polysystem" of a culture or nation. For Berman, on the contrary, a translation criticism can, in no way, be subjective. Translations must be judged through the socio-historical, cultural, and ideological conditions which determine their translating position, project, and horizon.[82]

So, what are the goals of translation criticism? Berman makes it clear that it is not enough to merely criticize. In fact, criticism has mainly been conceived as a negative director,

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[81] Françoise Massardier-Kennedy, *Toward a Translation Criticism: John Donne / Antoine Berman, Translated and Edited by Francoise Massardier-Kenney* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 2009), 39.
[82] Ibid, 37.

focusing almost obsessively on translations as insufficient, bad, or defective, without ever questioning the talent or the professional ethics of their authors. Overall, translations are not a topic in which reviewers spill much ink. But when critics do write about translations, it is often to denounce them in the shape of bellicose reviews.[83] Following the Tel Aviv school logic, the translated text seems affected by an original flaw, its secondariness.[84] Yet the critic's goal, if the translation is problematic, must be to not only shed light on the reasons for the translation's failure but to "prepare the space for a retranslation.[85]" Criticism of translation, not too different from the translation itself, lacks a certain symbolic status, the "secret dignification without with no discursive practice can literally be established as legitimate."[86] Contributing to this dignification, which the criticism of literary works achieved in the nineteenth century, is a primary goal of translation studies.[87]

Three technical steps can be taken toward the praxis of producing a "productive" criticism.[88] The first step of a productive translation involves completely setting aside the original, resisting the urge to compare, and reading the translated text to see if it "stands."[89] This reading is aimed to find problematic "textual zones" where "defectiveness" is spotted.[90] Conversely, there are also zones in which the translator has foreign-written in the target language (in Berman's case French) and produced a new language that are zones full of grace

[83] Ibid, 78.
[84] Ibid, 28–29.
[85] Ibid, 78.
[86] Ibid, 29.
[87] Ibid, 30.
[88] Here, Berman quotes Friedrich Schlegel. When facing a good translation, a criticism would "send back to the reader, this excellence or greatness" and when faced with a bad translation it would "shed light on its failure and prepare *the space for a retranslation."*
[89] Massardier-Kennedy, *Toward a Translation Criticism: John Donne / Antoine Berman, Translated and Edited by Francoise Massardier-Kenney*, 50.
[90] Ibid, 50.

and richness, that carry felicity. Examining zones of defectiveness or felicity in a translation appears as a slightly more productive schema than an overall blanket binary assessment of good or bad.

The second step in the hermeneutics of translation involves going back to the translator, to determine her translating stance, her translation project, and her translating horizon and ultimately seeking to understand the logic of the translated text.[91] Horizon, in fact, borrows from modern hermeneutics, referring to the linguistic, literary, cultural, and historical parameters that determine the way of feeling, acting, and thinking of the translator. This involves reading everything the translator may have said in various texts (prefaces, afterwords, articles, and interviews, about translation or not, for everything here is a clue) and interpreting her words. Berman offers some more questions to ask the author regarding her nationality, her profession, her oeuvre, her relationships with these works, what types of works she usually translates, and what other works she has translated.[92] Finally, "we want to know if she has written about her own practice as a translator, about the principles that guide it, about her translations and translation in general."[93] Scholars operating out of a strict Barthian post-modernist perspective will likely vehemently argue against this step since the author's background should not be a determining factor in the practice of interpretation that is intrinsic to translation. But Berman primarily believes the translator's past work—not his life and moods—are the concern of the critic.

[91] Ibid, 57.
[92] Ibid, 58.
[93] Ibid, 59.

The third step is a concrete and critical phase in the criticism of translation: the well-founded confrontation between the original and its translation. In principle, there are four acts to take in the third and final part of his translation criticism. First, there is a confrontation between the selected elements and passages in the original and the rendering of the elements and corresponding passages in the translation.[94] Secondly, there is an inverse confrontation between the textual zones of the translation found to be problematic or accomplished and the corresponding textual zones of the original. Third, there is a confrontation — within the first two — with other translations. Fourth, there is a confrontation between the translation and its project, which reveals the ultimate "how" of its realization, linked, in the final analysis, to the translator's subjectivity. From here, we can understand how almost identical projects always lead to different translations. In this last step, what can appear as discordant is the gap between the project and the translation, indeed the defectiveness found in the initial act of translation. Since the results are invariably tied to the project, the critic must read the translation based on its project. In my own analysis, although I apply a non-prescriptive approach, I take interest in the translator's faithfulness to the guidelines stated in their respective introductions, a technique borrowed from Berman.

Gayatri Spivak's interventions in the context of translating "third-world" women writers can also be insightful.[95] Writing against the racist assumption that all third-world women's writing is automatically good, she offers another sort of prescriptive blueprint for translators. Her point is that the task of the translator is to surrender herself to the linguistic

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[94] Massardier-Kennedy, *Toward a Translation Criticism: John Donne / Antoine Berman, Translated and Edited by Francoise Massardier-Kenney*, 68.

[95] Spivak's article is strangely titled. Perhaps instead of "The Politics of Translation" it should be called "The Aesthetics of Translation," its true subject.

rhetoricity of the original text to avoid imposing foreign notions on feminism. For her, this means translating initially at speed, surrendering without thinking about what is happening in English and often being literal, until she can then go back and revise, without aiming at an audience but abiding to her protocols.[96] Furthermore, zooming out from her position, she gives a helpful hint to decide whether the translator is prepared to start translating: The translator should be able to speak of intimate matters in the language of the original.[97] In this light, we should also ask the translator about her intimacy with the language of the source text– although it is again hard to quantify, it is, at the least, a thought-provoking impulse in the act of translating. Her translation focuses on the inherently political role of a translator but is largely about the "jagged relationship between rhetoric and logic," by which she means aesthetics, the feelings of translation. A translator must have a sense of the "rhetoricity" of the text, which brings us back to Berman's push for translations to be both ethical and poetic in nature.

In close, Berman's definition of the poeticality of a translation lies in the fact that the translator achieves a real textual work, that she creates a text [*faire oeuvre*] in close correspondence with the textuality of the original. Ethics lies in the respect, or rather, "in a certain respect for the original, an offering made to the original text."[98] Beyond the notion of "servile" attachment, the ethics of translation are threatened by the inverse threat of deception. This, after all, is what caused the Italian saying *traddutore traditore* (translator

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[96] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Politics of Translation," in *The Translation Studies Reader*, 4th Edition (Routledge, 2021), 406.
[97] Ibid, 404.
[98] Ibid, 75. Here, Berman quotes Yves Masson, who asserts that the translation "must stand up" to the original, that it is an "offering made to the original text."

traitor). Yet, there is treachery only insofar as the manipulations are silent, unacknowledged, perhaps in the preface, the introduction, or notes. The ethical nature of a translation may vary depending on the additional material accompanying the translated text. A Bermanian analysis comprises rigorous criteria for both traditional translations as well as modern ones. Ethics and poetically guarantee correspondence to the original and one's language. It is through this method presented to the scholarly translation community that we understand criticism from a refreshing timeless perspective.

At the same time, the biggest criticism that Berman's guidelines are susceptible to is his ultimately subjective translation schema. What, for example, is a "defective zone" and what is a "felicitous zone"? Perhaps a felicitous zone of translation is what was called for by J. Stetkevych and echoed by these theorists: it is an intimate literary translation that is perhaps less literal, can be easily read and understood and might even move the reader to inspiration. Yet for the scholar, a felicitous zone may precisely be the more literal philological translation. In this debate, we come to understand translation as a Sisyphean activity.[99] In short, it may be most impartial to conclude this section with the thought echoed in my introduction: different translations serve different purposes depending on their various goals.[100] To avoid

[99] Tarif Khalidi opens his introduction of his translation of the *Qur'ān* with the title "*Problems of interpretation,"* which already indicates a sort of unwelcoming or challenging obstacle facing translation. For him, translation is inherently a Sisyphean activity, a falling short of perfection. In his search for, what Seamus Heaney calls, the 'tuning fork,' he realizes that although he may never reproduce the cadence of the Arabic, he could still strive for what, again, Heaney calls "a directness of utterance,' to convey something of the power of juxtapositions, rhythmic recurrence, sonority, verbal energy and rhymed endings of the original. Thus, Khalidi's translation of the Qur'ān perhaps best tries to preserve sound and meaning. See: Tarif Khalidi, *The Qur'an: A New Translation* (Penguin Books, 2008).

[100] Again, for example, translating the Mu'allaqāt with a pedagogical goal to instruct students is very different from translating the Mu'allaqāt with the goal of creating a literary best seller.

the pitfalls of translation criticism, I have opted for a more objective way of analyzing three translations of Labīd's poem, which we now turn to.

CHAPTER IV

A TEXTUAL APPROACH TO THREE LABĪD TRANSLATIONS

"*English translations of Arab poems differ widely and sometimes when reading several versions of a passage I have wondered if their translators were actually working on the same poem*," — Robert Irwin, *Night & Horses & The Desert*

A. Introducing the Poet:

Labīd ibn Rabīʻa (d, between 40-42/660-662) is an Arab poet and knight of the Jāhilī tribal aristocracy. He is representative of the *mukhaḍram* (the period bridging the Jāhiliyya and Islam) and belonged to the family of Banu Djaʻfar, a branch of the Kilāb, who belonged to the Banu ʻĀmir ibn Ṣaʿṣaʿah. In addition to his extraordinarily long life (he was counted among the *muʿammarūn*, those granted long life), he stands out because he converted to Islam with a delegation of his tribe to the Prophet and lived well into the Islamic period, thus embodying both paganistic Jāhiliyya and Islamic values.

In his youth, Labīd appears to have attained an elevated position in his tribe because of his precocious mastery of language. In one well-cited anecdote, he is reported to have accompanied a deputation from his tribe to the court of King Abū Qābūs Nuʻmān of al-Ḥira (circa 580-602). There they stumbled upon the king's drinking companion, an enemy of Labīd's tribe, who had previously defamed them. In exchange, Labīd, launched some invective poetry so strong at the king's friend that the king would never welcome his friend back.

In other poems Labīd often boasts on having helped his tribe by his eloquence. He remained faithful to his clan even after stardom. In addition to the *qaṣīda*, he proved himself equally master of the *hijā'* (invective) and the *marthiya* (elegy). Al-Nābigha is said to have declared him the greatest poet among the Arabs or at least of his tribal group, the Hawāzin, on account of his *Mu'allaqa*. In his *Mu'allaqa*, he employs traditional pictures of fauna from his setting—wild asses and antelopes fleeing before the hunter and fighting with his dogs—and equally paints images about his beloved Nawār, the description of the *aṭlāl,* which he compares with artistic calligraphy, drinking bouts, *maysir* and more. He has a liking for memories of places of his native district, the palm groves and irrigation channels which continually inspire him to picturesque descriptions. He often turns to Nawār, combining the *nasīb* with the main part of the *qaṣīda* into a tripartite cohesive whole. Indeed, Labīd's *Mu'allaqa* exhibits the three-part *qaṣīda* structure with an elegant balance of the parts: the elegiac prelude (*nasīb*), lines 1-21; the journey section (*raḥīl*), lines 22-54; and the personal and tribal boast of the virtues and glorious deeds (*fakhr*), lines 55-88. In his book *Early Arabic Poetry*,[101] Alan Jones breaks down the form of Labīd's tripartite *qaṣīda* in ten sections, which are rendered as follows:

a) 1-9, *nasīb* one: deserted territory
b) 10-15, *nasīb* two: women's departure
c) 16-20, *nasīb* three: Nawār
d) 21-24, transition: journeying on camel

[101] Alan Jones, *Early Arabic Poetry,* vol. 2nd ed (The Netherlands: Brill, 2011), 453.

e) 25-35, she-ass and mate

f) 36-52, oryx

g) 53-56, looking back to (d) and (c)

h) 57-69, experience: wine (59-61), tribal service (62-65), his horse (66-69)

i) 70-77, personal *fakhr*

j) 78-89, tribal *fakhr*

In addition, Labīd's verse stands out from that of other poets of the pagan period by a certain proto-Islamic religious sentiment. Whether he foresworn poetry upon his conversion to Islam, however, is up for debate, as are many historical details. According to Ibn Nadīm's *Fihrist,* his *dīwān* was edited by several of the greatest Arabic philologists: Sukkarī d. 275/888 , , al-Aṣma'ī (d. 216/831), al-Ṭūsī (d.?), and Ibn al-Sikkīt (d. 244/858). Of these recensions, only half of that of al-Ṭūsī, together with a commentary, has survived.[102] All in all, despite the various details that tradition relays, these are of secondary importance, for what remains clear is that his *qaṣīda* is a bijoux of world poetry.

[102]W.P. Heinrichs et al., "Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition — Brill," 1986, 583–84; Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual* (Cornell University Press, 1993), 44–47; King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture and King Fahad National Library, *The Mu'allaqāt for Millennials: Pre-Islamic Arabic Golden Odes*, 2020, 207–11.

1. Comparative Translation and Textual Analysis:

Verse 1:

عَفَتِ الدّيَارُ مَحَلُّهَا فَمُقَامُهَا بِمِنًى تَأَبَّدَ غَوْلُهَا فَرِجَامُهَا

'Afat al-diyār is a common phrase in the *nasīb* section of the *Muʿallaqāt* in general, not just Labīd's, and gives the sense of effacement and desertion referring to the disappeared traces of the beloved's abode. *Al-maḥall* is a place of temporary or brief residence and *al-muqām* is a place of longer residence. The Arabic pronoun *hā* thus refers to the beloved's dwelling places. Minā, Ghawl, and Rijām are all place names and neighboring mountains in the upper section of Najd which can still be visited today. *Ta'abbada* means it became wild and deserted. It could refer to a place where wild animals and other fauna have taken over, or it could refer to simply *jinn* or a barren space dominated by flora. The meaning is imprecise. Yet according to Kamal Abu Deeb, it also carries another meaning: to remain.[103] Thus, in a quintessential matter, the poet stops over the ruins of his beloved's tribe which have, over time, become wild and deserted.

[103] There are far too many literary analyses of the *Muʿallaqāt,* including of Labīd's poem, to discuss in the confines of this thesis. Yet I would like to summarize briefly Kamal Abu-Deeb's fascinating and intensive study of the Labīd's *Mu'allaqa*. He writes that the first brief statement of the effaced *aṭlāl* ('afat) is followed by an element of paradox in the word *ta'abbada* (to last/remain). This fundamental opposition expressed— between temporary residence and permanent residence—permeates throughout the entire multi-dimensional poem. In the end, however, only the *ṭūlul* are left. Thus, for Abu Deeb, the dominant theme is not one of loss, sadness and vanishing. The *ṭūlul* are illuminated through an image of permanence and eternal existence. He has also demonstrated that the animal scene of the journey are rooted in both imagination and symbol as in real life observation and descriptive detail. For a more detailed discussion of this analysis, turn to Michael Sells, "The Qasida and the West: Self-Reflective Stereotype and Critical Encounter," *Al-'Arabiyya*, 1987, 307–57.

Polk:

Effaced are the campsites, both the stopping points and the campgrounds:

In Minan [in the Central Najd] both Ghaul and Rijam have become the haunts of wild beasts.

Sells:

The tent marks in Minan are worn away,

where she encamped

and where she alighted,

Ghawl and Rijam left to the wild

S.S.

Effaced are the abodes,

brief encampments and long-settled ones;

At Minā the wilderness has claimed

Mount Ghawl and Mount Rijām.

Polk's translation of the *bayt* is lengthy, quite literal but also, in my view, aesthetically pleasing in this anomalous instance. Unlike Sells and Stetkevych, he specifies the rendering of *ta'abbada* as the "haunts of wild beasts," whereas in its original definition the interpretation is left open. It could be said that wilderness is a more accurate choice. He also interjects with brackets to help contemporary readers understand that the location of these places still exists today and is, in fact, in "Central Najd." The fact that the stanza is

composed of two long lines also adds a sort of lengthiness (a general pattern specific to Polk's translation).

Sells rendition rearranges the structure of the original and complicates the meaning with the word choice "alighted." The line is composed of a stanza of four lines that form a quatrain. Sells allows himself poetic license in handling the verse, paying more attention to the stressed patterns. "The tent marks in Minan are worn away" is a contemporary English verse that provides an intelligible bridge across the cultural gap for his readers. The repetition of "where she" is to compensate for lost rhyme and emphasizes the feminine sense of the source target rhyming scheme corresponding to the link *maḥalluhā fa-muqāmuhā.* The order of the translation is switched since Sells places Minā in the first line of his quatrain and not the third (where it should be if followed literally). In addition, the idea of "tent marks" is not accurate. *Diyār* is a common word and "abodes" is, in my view and the view of van Gelder as well, a better choice.[104]

S. Stetkevych's translation is the most literal in terms of structure but also word choice. "Effaced are the abodes" is a natural rendering of the Arabic. It is as if she attempts to translate the text as literally as possible, as it is rendered in a version presentable for scholars with proper transliteration. Her "Mount Ghawl and Mount Rijam" comes from an old commentator who identifies the places as mountains, although this is up for debate since another says al-Ghawl is a "well-known water."[105]

[104] van Gelder, "An Experiment with Beeston, Labīd, and Baššār," 10.
[105] van Gelder, 10.

Verse 2:

فَمَدَافِعُ الرَّيَّانِ عُرِّيَ رَسْمُهَـا   خَلَقَاً كَمَا ضَمِنَ الوُحِيَّ سِلامُهَا

Madāfi' are the water courses of Jabal al-Rayyān. The *fa* is used as a link with the previous line. *'Ariya* is he undressed or uncovered. *Rasm* refers to the beloved's remaining trace and is a very common word of pre-Islamic poetry in the *nasīb* section referring to the traces. *Al-wuḥiyy* should not be confused with divine revelation or inspiration but in this context of writing, meaning inscriptions or writing, and *silām* is rock.

Polk:

And the flood channels of Ar-Raiyan, their traces are stripped away,

Worn smooth, just like writings on rocks.

Sells:

And the torrent beds of Rayyan

naked tracing

worn thin, like inscriptions

carved in flattened stones.

S.S.

And the torrent beds of Wādī Rayyān,

their tracings are laid bare,

Preserved as surely as inscriptions

Are preserved in rock.

Polk's translation is literal. In fact, it also reflects how a nearly imperceptible difference in orthography reflects a pronounced difference in the reader's absorption. "Ar-Raiyan*"* in Polk's version assimilates the article, perhaps so non-Arabists will not be misled into pronouncing the "al" with an "l."

Sells again uses the quatrain form, the commonest unrhymed four-line stanza in English language poetry, employing words and phrases of poetic tone. As opposed to Polk, Sells' rendering of "*Rayyan"* flows smoother. Sells' phrase "inscriptions carved in flattened stones" is also a more poetic, tangible, descriptive image than, "like writings on rocks," and is arguably a free interpretation, since the more literal rendering is just "rock."

S. Stetkevych's rendering is also literal with some flavoring reminiscent of Sells' translation in terms of diction and form (quatrain). The clearest example of literalism is perhaps the rendering of "'*Urriyya,'* which she renders in its literal passive in her translating, "tracings are laid bare." The expression "torrent beds" is the same expression as Sells' earlier version but with a bit of an obscure usage.

Verse 3:

دِمَنٌ تَجَرَّمَ بَعْدَ عَهْدِ أَنِيسِهَا   حِجَجٌ خَلَوْنَ حَلالُهَا وَحَرَامُهَا

Diman are the remains of the abodes that are left behind and what was blackened. *Jarrama* implies the years that have passed. *Anīs* is a companion (in this context: people). *Ḥijaj* is the plural of *ḥijja* which means *sana,* a year. *Khalā* means it passed, referring to the years. *Ḥalāl* and *ḥarām* refer to two different periods of time: the sacred and profane months of the Jāhiliyya calendar. During the *ḥalal* period fighting was allowed whereas during the *ḥaram* period fighting and bloodshed were forbidden. The verse gives the reader an idea of the poet stopping at the ruins of the abandoned encampment of the beloved's tribe that has become blackened and completely effaced.

Polk:

Dung, no longer renewed after a period of the frequenting of the site:

Years, both the free months and the forbidden months, have

Passed.

Sells:

Dung-stained ground

That tells the years passed

since human presence, months of peace

Gone by, and months of war

S.S.

Their grounds are now dung-darkened patches

over which, since they were peopled,

Years have elapsed, the profane and sacred months

all passed away.

Polk’s translation is literal and somewhat ambiguous. A reader unfamiliar with the context would not be able to distinguish the free and forbidden months, only explained in the footnote below. He seems to miss out on the translation of *anīs,* or does not translate it as people, instead inferring it in the context of “frequenting of the site.”

Sells’ rendition reproduces the Arabic’s textual image with liberty, as seen in the rendering of dung as “dung-stained ground.” Sells’ rendering is self-explanatory. Take, for example, his use of “months of peace and months of war.” As a reader we now understand that there are months were peace was ordained as well as an ordinary season were war was waged.

S. Stetkevych’s translation is literal in word choice and structure but also more poetic with the clear device of alliteration. She writes, for example, the vaguer “profane and sacred.”

Verse 4:

رُزِقَتْ مَرَابِيْعَ النُّجُومِ وَصَابَهَا وَدْقُ الرَّوَاعِدِ جَوْدُهَا فَرِهَامُهَا

Marābi' al-nujūm are spring rains and *wadq al-rawā'id* is the rain of thunderous clouds. Ibn al-Anbārī said that *jawd* is the rain that pleases its inhabitants.[106] *Rihām* is soft rain. Thus, the thunder clouds rained abundantly and softly.

Polk:

Replenished by the rain stars of spring, and smitten by the blows of the thunderheads, both the downpour and the drizzle

Sells:

Replenished by the rain stars

of spring, and struck

by thunderclap downpour, or steady,

fine-dropped silken rain.

S. S.

They were watered by the rain

The spring stars bring:

Upon them rained the thunderclouds,

Downpour and drizzle

[106] King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture and King Fahad National Library, *The Mu'allqāt for Millennials: Pre-Islamic Arabic Golden Odes*, 2020.

Polk's translation is literal in terms of word choice and structure. The phrase "smitten by" is a more creative interpretation of the verb *ṣāba* which more simply and literally could be rendered as struck.

Sells' translation is most descriptive, describing in detail the type of rain as "steady, fine dropped silken rain," versus Polk and Stetkevych's drizzle (or *rihām)*. Sells characteristically changes the syntax to accord with a translation that maximizes cadence.

S. Stetkevych's translation is reminiscent of Polk's in terms of its literalism with both structure and diction. Further of note in this comparative analysis is the different rendering of thunder (thunderhead by Polk, thunderclap by Sells, and thunderclouds by Stetkevych).

Verse 5:

مِنْ كُلِّ سَارِيَةٍ وَغَادٍ مُدْجِنٍ   وَعَشِيَّةٍ مُتَجَاوِبٍ إِرْزَامُهَا

Sāriya is a heavy cloud that pours down rain at night. *Ghād mudjin* is a cloud that covers the sky in the morning time. *Al-tajāwub* is a reciprocal act that means to respond to one other. *Irzām* is the sound a she-camel,[107] the *nāqa*, makes during thunder. It is as if her thunder responds, resonates, resounds.

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[107] According to J. Stetkevych, the *nāqa,* or she-camel, is a mount whose specifies and gender are both canonically specified. See Jaroslav Stetkevych, *The Zephyrs of Najd: The Poetics of Nostalgia in The Classical Arabic Nasib* (University of Chicago Press, 1993), 27. S. Stetkevych writes that the decision to ride the she-camel in the rahīl, or desert journey, is perhaps self-evident as the beast is the most suited for surviving the arduous desert crossing. The classical commentators point out that the she-camel was employed for travel, whereas the horse (*faras,* m. or f.*)* was reserved for battle and hunt. See: Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak*, 27.

Polk:

From every unseen evening-traveling one and day-traveling cloud that darkens the sky.

And night voyager, the rumbling of thunder answers one another.

Sells:

From every kind of cloud

passing at night,

darkening in the morning,

or rumbling in peals across the evening sky.

S.S.

And every night-faring cloud,

Each early morning horizon-darkener,

And evening cloud

with resounding rumble.

Polk's translation makes the verse seem like both the evening traveling clouds and day traveling ones darken the sky. Polk adds context about a night voyager which Sells does not add.

Sells is most precise in his rendering; some clouds pass at night and darken in the morning. Sells again uses precise diction with the word “peal.” He also maintains the rhythm with the “ing” ending of three consecutive verbs.

S. Stetkevych’s rendering arguably pays the most attention to sound with the poetic device of alliteration as in “each/early” and “resounding/rumble.” She also uses assonance as in the /o/ sound of “morning horizon.”

Verse 6:

فَعَلا فُرُوعُ الأَيْهُقَانِ وأَطْفَلَتْ   بِالجَلْهَتَيْـنِ ظِبَاؤُهَا وَنَعَامُهَـا

Al-ayhuqān is a plant, similar to wild arugula, and *‘alā* refers to the branches (*furū‘)* of the plant that shoot upwards, from the verb *‘alā* which means he rose or ascended. *Al-Jalha* is a side of a valley. *Aṭfala* means that the gazelles (*ẓibā’*) birthed children and *na‘ām* is an ostrich.

Polk:

And then the shoots of the *aihuqan* arose

And the antelopes and the ostriches have given birth on the valley sides

Sells:

The white pondcress has shot upward,

and on the wadi slopes

Gazelles among their newborn,

and ostriches

S.S.:

The ayhuqan thrust up its shoots and

on the two sides of the valley

Gazelles and ostriches

have borne their young.

Polk's translation is unusually concise. He takes the Arabic *al-ayhuqān* and latinizes it as *aihuqan.* He then defines it in a footnote (referencing Lane's dictionary).

Sells, on the other hand, tries to find the equivalent for the esoteric plant (which remains esoteric when he renders it as pondcress). His translation groups the verse in a quatrain while focusing on the poetic image of the original. The expression "The white pondcress has shot upward" is more idiomatic, reflecting modern English poetic techniques in grouping the words in different forms.

S. Stetkevych does not even italicize "ayhuqan" which creates a stilted verse. On the other hand, Sells leaves the word wadi untranslated and Stetkevych uses the word valley to create a cultural bridge for the reader. Stetkevych therefore at times uses a foreignizing and a domesticating approach in the same verse!

Verse 7:

وَالعِيْـنُ سَاكِنَةٌ عَلَى أَطْلائِهَا   عُوذًا تَأَجَّلُ بِالفَضَـاءِ بِهَامُهَا

ʻAlā aṭlāʼihā means on its traces. *ʻŪdhan* means newly born. *Taʼajjal* means he lead a group. *Bihām* are the children of the cows. The verse is highly evocative painting an image of the yearlings forming a group beside their mother. In the *nasīb*, the oryx are referred to by the plural epithet *al-ʻayn*, "the wide-of-eyes" in a context of longing for the beloved sand for the *uns* "companionship" and "intimacy" she represented.[108] According to Berdom *al-ʻayn* is a metaphorical way to refer to the whole body of a wild ass.[109] However, it is also used as a metonym, as wide-eyed was a term that substituted for the familiar oryx cow by pre-Islamic poets.

Polk:

And the large-eyes ones resting beside their fawns; Having newborn, their yearlings form little groups in the open

Sells:

And the wide-of-eyes

silent above monthling fawns.

On the open terrain

yearlings cluster.

[108] Sells, "The Qasida and the West: Self-Reflective Stereotype and Critical Encounter."

[109] Abduladim Berdom, "A Comparative Study of Some English Translations of Parts of Three Mu 'allaqat," n.d., 381.

S.S.

Wide-eyed oryx cows, newly-calved,

Stand above their newborns, motionless,

While on the plain the yearlings,

In clusters, caper.

The three translators render the verses differently with Polk and Sells choosing words as if the poet is describing a fawn and its gazelle. Stetkevych renders the verse as an image of an oryx cow. It appears that Stetkevych is the most accurate because in a review Beeston criticized Polk for mistaking the gazelle for the oryx in the original poetry.[110]

Polk's translation does not include a space between ideas with the use of the word "having newborn" and then "their yearlings" immediately following.

Sells' translation employs the literary use of the word "monthling," which describes a baby that is only one month old. His version is both evocative and concise with the use of "cluster" instead of Polk's "form little groups."

S. Stetkevych uses both the metonymy and the word it is meant to substitute, therefore adding words to the original, as in "wide-eyed oryx cows." Stetkevych is the only one of

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[110] A. F. L. Beeston, "William R. Polk (Tr.): The Golden Ode, by Labid Ibn Rabiah. Xxxii, 177 Pp. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1974. $15, £7.50. | Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies | Cambridge Core.

the three translators to include such an addition. Furthermore, she pays attention to sound with the use of alliteration as in “clusters caper.”

Verse 8:

وَجَلا السُّيُولُ عَنْ الطُّلُولِ كَأَنَّهَا   زُبُرٌ تُجِدُّ مُتُونَهَا أَقْلامُـهَا

Jalā means it uncovered. *Al-suyūl* is the plural of *sayl* meaning stream. *Al-ṭulūl* is the plural of *aṭlāl* meaning ruins. *Zubur* is a piece of writing, as also used to describe the Book of Psalms, or a book. The verse, one of the arguably most famous in pre-Islamic poetry, uses an evocative metaphor to compare the uncovering of the ruined abodes by streams in a matter akin to writing on old scrolls being renewed by pens.

Polk: And the flash floods uncover the traces just as though they were Writing whose text has been renewed by pens.

Sells:
The rills and the runlets
uncovered marks like the script
of faded scrolls
restored with pens of reed.
S.S.:
The torrents have exposed the ruins,
as if they were

writings whose text pens have

inscribed anew

Polk uses more archaic English and opts for a plain translation that misses the idea of scrolls as in the word *matun*, or “scroll,” which Stetkevych also ignores.

Sells’ translation, as usual, employs precise vocabulary, such as the words “rills” and “runlets” instead of just streams, making use of the poetic technique of alliteration. There is a difference between flash floods and rills and runlets. Sells is smoother and poetic.

Verse 9:

أَوْ رَجْعُ وَاشِمَةٍ أُسِفَّ نَؤُورُهَا   كِفَفاً تَعَرَّضَ فَوْقَهُنَّ وِشَامُهَا

Kifaf is the plural of *kafa* which are circles. *Wisham* is the plural of *washam* which is a tattoo. Here the poet compares, in a manner akin to the prior verse, the appearance of the ruined abodes with the renewal of a tattoo after having been exposed by rain.

Polk: Or the renewing of a tattoo by the sprinkling and rubbing of soot in circles above which the tattoo appeared.

Sells: Or the tracings of a tattooed woman beneath the indigo powder, sifted in spirals, the form begins to reappear.

S.S.

Or as if they were tattoo marks

that emerge

As the tattooer re-applies lampblack to

patterns needle-pricked on hands

This is a rare example where Polk appears to create a more lucid, clear straightforward image than the other translators under comparison. Once again, though, we observe how Polk pays no attention to musicality or any sort of poetic devices.

Sells is once again very precise as the only translator to recall the color—indigo—of the tattoo. Sells also uses alliteration with "tracings" and "tattooed" and "sifted in spirals."

S. Stetkevych continues to use a version that is geared to the specialist with the choice of the word "lampblack," referring with precision to the black pigment made from soot. Her use of "needle-pricked" is another testament to her precise diction and renderings.

Verse 10:

فَوَقَفْتُ أَسْأَلُهَا وَكَيْفَ سُؤَالُنَا صُمّاً خَوَالِدَ مَا يَبِيْنُ كَلامُهَا

The term *ṣumm* “hard,” “deaf,” “silent” generates a powerful and diverse resonance used in three other *Muʿallaqāt*.[111] Here, it is used in connection with the *aṭlāl* that do not respond to the poet’s questioning. Yet according to the Arabic commentary provided by *The Muʿallaqāt for Millennials* alongside the Arabic word, *ṣumm* also means a rock, or rock-like. Alas, in Imru’ al-Qays’ *Mu‘allaqa* it is used with the rocks to which the stars are tethered. *Khawālid* is the plural of *khālid,* or eternal. Yet the commentary in *The Muʿallaqāt for Millennials* renders it as a trumpeter or a horn player. We once again are revealed the extraordinary depth of the Arabic language and the playfulness of the poet who undoubtedly would have been aware of how a single word often carries various implications. The line also reveals how various translators invariably prioritize, analyze and structure the *qaṣīda* differently, with Stetkevych viewing this line as most emblematic of the *qaṣīda’s* overall theme.[112] Here, the poet stops to ask himself the conventional rhetorical question regarding those no longer then.

Polk:

And so I stopped, asking them, but how can our questions [get answers]?

Deaf things, rocks of the ages. Their speech is not intelligible.

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[111] Sells, “The Qasida and the West: Self-Reflective Stereotype and Critical Encounter.”

[112] Returning to Stetkevych’s 1993 book *The Mute Immortals Speak,* she analyzes this line as a riddle that not only reveals much about the nasīb but about the entire qaṣida. The profound question is a synecdoche for the ruined encampment and can be viewed within the wider culture/nature dialect; in fact, the only way that man (or culture) can understand this question is by reding the signs and therefore acknowledging his own mortality (etymologically the root ṣ-m-m (deaf, mute, immortal) is also connected to the ’-s-m, w-sh-m, w-s-m group implies a sign). “The message is that the silence of illegibility or indecipherability is death. The poet responds to this memento mori in tow ways. On the poetic level, his realization of his own mortality marks the ritual separation and his embarking on the “heroic question” that is the rahīl (desert journey) section… On the metapoetic level, we can interpret the entire poetic enterprise as the poet’s question for immortality, for a never-muted voice.” See: Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak*, 21–22.

Sells:

I stopped to question them.

How is one to question

deaf, immutable

inarticulate stones?

S.S.:

Then I stopped and questioned them,

But how do we question

Mute immortals whose speech

Is indistinct

Polk again uses brackets. It as if he employs them to make an editorial statement or clarification within a literal verse, but often, the addition does not clarify much. As usual, Polk has a rather literal translation trying to retain the original, adding "Their speech is not intelligible" which corresponds with *mā yabīnu kalāmuhā.*

Sells once again employs the four-line stanza. Almost every line contains the same syllables, between five and six. Sells translates *ṣumm* as stone instead of rock whereas a stone is much smaller.

S. Stetkevych also follows her typical four-line stanza. Here, however, she uses “mute immortals” to translate *ṣumman khawālid* recalling the title of her earlier 1993 book: *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual*.

Verse 11:

عَرِيَتْ وَكَانَ بِهَا الجَمِيْعُ فَأَبْكَرُوا   مِنْهَا   وَغُودِرَ   نُؤْيُهَا   وَثُمَامُهَا

‘Ariya is, again, the idea of being stripped, rendered as it undressed or uncovered. *Abkara* means he left early in the morning. *Al-nu’yu* is a hole around the campsite for water to flow through and *thumām* is a type of grass.

Polk: [These sites] have become a bare void, although the group was there; then they went away in the early morning, Abandoning the rain ditches and the thatch walling.

Sells:

Stripped bare now,

what once held all that tribe–

they left in the early morning

leaving a trench and some thatch.

S.S.

Stripped bare where once a tribe had dwelt

and then one morn departed;

The trench around the tents now lay abandoned

and the plugs of thumam grass that filled the holes.

Polk again uses brackets as a form of addition, translating the first line as "[These sites] have become a bare void." Polk is more specific than Sells in terms of diction describing what Sells renders is a trench as "rain ditches," and the thatch, as "thatch walling." Once again, the mere fact of inserting brackets presumes a secondary status of the translator, or rather asserts the notion of the "original" author as creator, a hesitance to interpret or display any sort of "infidelity." It also, as mentioned earlier, creates a stilted verse.

Stetkevych and Sells both opt for the idiomatic expression "stripped bare now" corresponding to the image of the beloveds' abodes. Furthermore, Sells uses the em dash—a modern poetic device made famous by Emily Dickinson in the 19th century—to separate the bare tent scene with the image of the tribe leaving.

S. Stetkevych's translation is the most lengthy and detailed, using additional context to describe the "trench around the tent" and the thatch as "plugs of thumam grass that filled the holes."

Verse 12:

شَاقَتْكَ ظُعْنُ الحَيِّ حِينَ تَحَمَّلُوا   فَتَكَنَّسُوا قُطُنَاً تَصِرُّ خِيَامُهَا

Shāqa is he longed. *Ẓa'n al-ḥayy* are the tribal women in the howdah. *Ḥammala* means he carried. *Takannasa* is he entered [the howdah]. *Ṣarra* is it creaked. The verse displays the poet's mourning and longing in seeing the women of the tribe pack up their luggage and place it on their camels preparing for departure.

Polk:

When they mount and enter the cotton-like lair whose covering sights [as the camel lifts it away], The Howdah-borne women of the tribe smite you with nostalgia.

Sells:

They stirred longing in you

as they packed up their howdahs,

Disappearing in the lairs of cotton,

frames creaking.

S.S.

The clanswomen departing stirring your longing

when they loaded up their gear,

Then climbed inside their howdah frames

with creaking tents

What does a translator do with a word as particular as howdah? Polk leaves it, although he explains in the footnote that "the howdah is a loosely bound, wood frame box, somewhat

like an eighteenth-century sedan chair mounted on the back of a camel." Polk translates *shāqa* as nostalgia which seems more apt for translating the word *ḥanīn*; longing seems more appropriate in this context.

As for Sells, he simply leaves the word howdah, confronting us with the difference (although it is a word in the English dictionary, its usage is esoteric). Yet the second line clarifies. Now the non-specialist is quick to understand that the howdah is the seat in the back of the camel, made up of "lairs of cotton" with "creaking frames."

S. Stetkevych separates this verse as the start of a new, second theme: *The Departure of the Women of the Clan.* Instead of employing a metonymic pronoun "they," she is direct, beginning with the phrase "the clanswomen." It is also noteworthy that Stetkevych translates *khiyām* literally as tents when the implied is the howdahs, revealing an inclination towards the literal in her translation.

Verse 13:

مِنْ كُلِّ مَحْفُوفٍ يُظِلُّ عِصِيَّهُ   زَوْجٌ عَلَيْـهِ كِلَّـةٌ وَقِرَامُـهَا

Ḥaffa is he enclosed. *Maḥfūf* is the past participle, to be covered—referring to the howdah. *'Iṣiyya* are the two sticks used to support the howdah. *Killa* is the light curtain or the carpet of the howdah whereas *qirām* are drapes. This verse describes the structure and unique design of the women's howdah: it is made of a wooden frame covered by a fine cloth.

Polk:

From every covered thing whose frame is shaded [by a]

Double-lined covering upon which is a carpet and its embroidered cover.

Sells:

Post-beams covered

with twin-rodden curtain

of every kind of cloth brocade

and a black, transparent, inner veil.

S.S. :

Each howdah's wooden frame

was shaded by a double woolen carpet

And covered by fine veil

and figured drape.

Polk's translation is literal in diction and structure. For example, he starts the translation with "from every covered thing," which corresponds directly to "*min kulli maḥfūfin."*

Sells again provides a quatrain form but with much more freedom in the choice and organization of his units, showing a great variety in the arrangement of stresses and words with the alliteration in the three lines: "post-beams covered with twin-rodded curtain of every kind of cloth."

S. Stetkevych again leans towards the literal translation, translating the word *yuẓill* in its passive form as "was shaded."

Verse 14:

زُجَلًا كَأَنَّ نِعَاجَ تُوْضِحَ فَوْقَهَا وَظِبَاءَ وَجْرَةَ عُطَّفاً آرْاَمُهَا

Zujal are groups. Tūḍiḥa is an area in Najd famous for its oryx. Wajra is an area in Taif famous for its gazelles. *'Aṭṭafa* means he glanced over with tenderness. *Ārām* is a gazelle that is pure white. The verse is a simile comparing the group of clanswomen to stereotypical dessert animals such as oryx and gazelles.

Polk:

Calling out as though they were the oryxes of Tudih hovering over [their young]

Or the gazelles of Wajrah with their fawns clinging close.

Sells:

Strung out along the route

in groups, like oryx does of Tudih

Or Wajran gazelles, white fawns

Below them, soft necks turning

S.S.

In clusters the women departed, as if the howdahs bore

the oryx cows of Tūdih

And the white does of Wajrah, tenderly inclining

over their young.

Polk's translation is less literal and more free, most represented in his word choice in the expression "hovering over presumably" for *fawqahā* which literally could be rendered as "above her." He also uses the poetic device of alliteration translating *'uṭṭafan* as "clinging close" which misses the idea of tenderly glancing over.

Sells' translation uses poetic license clearly reflected in how he interprets the word *'uṭṭafan.* He renders this as "soft necks turning," which implies young ones but is not explicit.

S. Stetkevych provides the context, using the technique of addition, adding "the women," which helps situate the *qaṣīda* back in its context of the departing clanswomen for the distracted reader. All three poets use different expressions to stress the rhymed verse in *ārāmuhā* where the suffix *hā* refers symbolically to the antelopes of Wajra. Stetkevych, however, curiously translates gazelles as white does, which implies a female deer familiar to the American or European leader and not the unknown gazelle found in open country in Africa and Asia.

Verse 15:

حُفِزَتْ وَزَايَلَهَا السَّرَابُ كَأَنَّهَا   أَجْزَاعُ بِيشَةَ أَثْلُهَا وَرُضَامُهَا

Ḥafaza means he encouraged or urged on [while walking]. *Zāyala* means it faded. *Ajzā'* is the plural of *jaza'a* is a turning in a valley. Bīsha is a city situated in the modern-day 'Asir province and *ruḍām* are great rocks comparable to camels in their size. In this verse, Labīd paints an image of the tribe's people dissolving into the distance and scattered in the desert—appearing to the poet in a shimmering haze like the trees and boulders of Bīsha.

Polk: Swiftly fading into the distance, the mirage blurs them until they appear like Tamarisk trees and basalt blocks in the valley of Bishah

Sells:

They faded into the distance

appearing in the shimmering haze

like tamarisks and boulders

on the slopes of Bishah.

S.S.:

They were urged on, and the mirage

dissolved them 'til they were like

The windings of the riverbed of Bīshah

With its tamarisks and boulders.

In this rendering Polk is literal and uses the poetic device of alliteration as evidenced in "Tamarisk trees" and "baalt blocks." He also translates *al-sarāb* literally as mirage.

Sells' translation is freer with diction and structure. For example, he translates *al-sarāb* as shimmering haze.

S. Stetkevych preserves the pattern of the original, ending her translation of the verse with "its tamarisks and boulders," similarly to the original *athluhā wa-ruḍāmuhā*. She also offers a translation that attempts to preserve a similar semantic equivalence translating *ḥufizat* as "urged on," which Sells ignores and Polk renders in the adverb as "swiftly."

Verse 16:

بَلْ مَا تَذَكَّرُ مِنْ نَوَارَ وقَدْ نَأَتْ   وتَقَطَّعَتْ أَسْبَابُهَا وَرِمَامُـهَا

Na'ā is he distanced himself. *Asbāb* are bonds of affection. *Rimām* are old, worn ropes. Here we are still in the *nasīb* and the poet is struggling to move on from his estranged lover Nawār whom he recalls. The earliest scene of crying on the ruined abodes is evoked; his sadness is not hyperbolic.

Polk: Nay! [O foolish lover] Do not think longer of the girl Nawar since she has gone far away; And her ties and bindings [to you] are sundered.

Sells: But why recall Nawár?

She’s gone.

Her ties and bonds to you

are broken.

S.S.

What then do you remember of Nawār

when she has gone away,

And her bonds, both firm and frayed,

are cut asunder

All translators render this tense in the second person.

But Sells words it as a question, “but why recall Nawár?” This phrasing implies an extra scornful tone, as if, the poet Labīd, is blaming himself for recalling Nawār after she disappeared in the howdah and in the mirage–yet he never recalls her physical traits, as usually was the case for poets.

Furthermore, Sells’ use of broken is far more modern than Polk’s literary use of “sundered” and Stetkevych’s literary-archaic use of “cut asunder.” Once again, Sells’ verse disregards the characteristics of metrical poem but maintains short, snappy rhythm. Sells and Polk forgo meaning here disregarding the line *asbābuhā wa-rimāmuhā,* which conveys strong or weak relationships (used often to convey strong ropes verses weak ropes).

S. Stetkevych employs her usual proper scholarly transliteration. Her strategy aims at a close structural and semantic correspondence based on the transference of the source text's literal meaning, as evidenced in the phrase *wa-qad na'at* which is rendered as "when she has gone away."

Verse 17:

مُرِّيَّةٌ حَلَّتْ بِفَيْدَ وَجَـاوَرَتْ   أَهْلَ الحِجَازِ فَأَيْنَ مِنْكَ مَرَامُهَا

In this line, there are three place names: *Murriyya* is attributed to the people of Murra*,* as in the lineage of Murra in Jabal al-Mismah and Fayd, which is another known area where Nawār, the inamorata once was (now she is in the Hijaz*)*. A voice interjects and questions the poet saying that Nawār was in Fayd and then in Hijaz. Between the poet and between the Hijaz the distance is far, nearly unattainable. The verse turns to the second person, directly addressing the poet and changing the point of view, questioning: "So how could you possibly meet her again?" This is a good example where the verse needs to be read in its unity and not cut off from previous lines. All three translators render the classical *nasīb* idea of longing here, but there is nuance in their word choice and rhythm.

Polk:

A woman [she is] of the people of Muriyah who briefly camped at Faid and then became a neighbor / To the people of the Hijaz. So, where can longing for her get you?

Sells:

The Múrrite lady has lodged in Fayd,

then joined up with the Hijázi clans.

Who are you

to aspire to reach her?

S.S.

A Murrite woman who alit in Fayd

and then dwelt near the people of Hijāz—

How could you ever hope

to meet with her again?

Polk, in this translation, strives for literal structure and diction, evidenced in the use of the phrase “then became a neighbor,” for the Arabic *jāwarat,* which comes from the root *j-wa-r*, from which the word neighborhood (*jār*) stems. Towards this end, he once again uses brackets [she is], creating a stilted rendering.

Sells creates short punchy prose, preferring a free colloquial phrasing “joined up with” rather than the more literal “neighborhood.” The question again takes an almost reproachful or condescending tone appearing to jab the character of the poet rather than comment on the mere fact of the long distance causing the implausibility of his desires. “Who are you to aspire to reach her*?”* he asks himself.

S. Stetkevych as well prefers a free interpretation, although sticking to a literary word choice with dwelt, the past tense of the verb to dwell, as in to live in or at a specific place. The use of the word "alit" is also peculiar, meaning to come by chance in its archaic usage.

Verse 18:

بِمَشَارِقِ الجَبَلَيْنِ أَوْ بِمُحَجَّرٍ   فَتَضَمَّنَتْهَا فَرْدَةٌ فَرُخَامُهَا

Mashāriq is the eastern side and the *jabalān* are the two mountains where Nawār settled. *Taḍammana* is he included [Nawār]. Muḥajjar, Farda and Rukhām are all places known to the poet. The most difficult part of these verses for the non-specialist is to situate the geographic location of the place names, all locations where Nawār's tribe camped. All three translators decide to render at least some of them literally but with varying strategies and to varying degrees.

Polk: On the eastern approaches of the Twin Mountains [of Tai', near modern Hail] or in Muhajjar, Then Fardah and Rukham would have gathered her in.

Sells:

On the eastern slops

of Twin Mountains of Muhájjar

Lonebutte has taken her in

then Marblehead,

S.S.

To the east of Tayyi's two mountains she alit

or on Muhajjar's Mount,

then the land of Fardah contained her,

then its nearby Mount Rijām.

Polk's translation is literal. He translates *taḍammanthā* as "gathered her in" which sounds puzzling vis-à-vis the more straightforward "taken her in" used by Sells. He also makes use of brackets, only this time it gives it a slightly different sense. Unlike prior usages where brackets were akin to a reticence to interpolate, here he uses them like an anthropologist interjecting to show that the place names are still present (e.g., this place is still around in the modern Hail).

Sells decides to use neologisms employing "Marblehead" for Rukhām which sounds like an American city, creating a cultural bridge to the Anglophone reader. The reason why Marblehead was specifically chosen is lost on me. Does the name relate to the flora of the place?

Once again, S. Stetkevych employs archaic word choice and an addition. In the first line, she uses the archaic verb "alit," as in the place Nawār once lived in, adding the pronoun "she" to situate the English reader in the *qaṣīda's* context.

Verse 19:

فَصُوائِقٌ إِنْ أَيْمَنَتْ فَمَظِنَّةٌ   فِيْهَا وِحَافُ القَهْرِ أَوْ طِلْخَامُهَا

Aymana has two meanings: he went to the right of someone or something and/or he went to the direction of historic Yemen. *Maẓinna* comes from *ẓinna* meaning the place where you think someone is from or is presumably to be found. Ṣuwā'iq is also a place name, situated at the bottom of Hijaz. Ḥāf al-Qahr and Ṭilkhām are both place names familiar to the poet in the south of Najd. Lābid reflects on where Nawār is most likely staying.

Polk: And then Suwaiq if she went to the south, and a sign of her [In] the black rock area of al-Qahr or in its district of Tilkham.

Sells: Then Tinderland if she heads toward Yemen—I imagine her there—or at Thrall Mountain or in the valley of Tilkhám

S.S.

Then in Suwā'iq, if she headed toward the Yemen,

so that by now

She is most likely in Wihāf al-Qahr

Or in Tilkhām.

Polk offers a more creative approach than his usual literal translation even though he maintains the place names and structure of the source text. For example, the line "if she went to the south," is a functional translation equivalent. Polk draws on his geographic

knowledge ostensibly gained or sharpened from his excursion to inform the reader that what *aymana* means in this context is the right, which would be south of the poet's location, hence the verse "if she went to the south." There is some effort to translate geography furthermore with the addition of "the black rock area" to al-Qahr, although his use of district as in "district of *Tilkham*" seems misplaced.

Sells, again, mimics a quatrain stanza, keeping some place names such as "Tilkham" but changing others (replacing, for example, *Ṣuwā'iq* with Tinderland*,* and the typical *al-Qahr* to Thrall Mountain). His idiomatic version is short and to the point, making the expressions more resonant within the context of Anglophone culture.

S. Stetkevych treats the verse as specialist transliterating place words such as "Suwā'iq" and "Ṭilkhām." This verse concludes what S. Stetkevych categorizes as part II of Labīd's verse. Another point of criticism is that Stetkevych did not transliterate Suwā'iq in standard academic form or else she would have accounted for the *ṣaad* and therefore the transliteration here is inconsistent.

Verse 20:

فَاقْطَعْ لُبَانَةَ مَنْ تَعَرَّضَ وَصْلُهُ   وَلَشَرُّ وَاصِلِ خُلَّـةٍ صَرَّامُهَا

Lubāna is a need. *Ta'arraḍa* is he changed. *Khulla* is friendship. *Ṣarrām* is the one who decisively cuts, referring to the bond. This is one of two lines that engenders confusion

over the original words, although the meaning of the *qaṣīda* can be derived. Yet the question remains: Does Labīd praise himself because he initiates cutting off ties, or does he disapprove of Nawār because of her changes and, in his blame over her, in fact strengthen his determination to cut off the bond?

Polk: So [poet], make an end to longing for one whose unison has been thwarted. Even the best lover of women is one who decisively cuts her off.

Sells: Cut the bond with one you cannot reach!
The best of those who make a bond are those who can break.

S.S.:
Cut off your love from one,
whose bond is wavering,
For the best binder of affection's bond
is he who cuts it.

Polk's footnote adds that this verse is difficult to convey in English and his rendering of the poem, with his use of complicated words, alludes to his own difficulty. First, Polk uses a bracket again, adding "poet" (the recipient of speech), reflecting again his reticence for interpretation and his literal approach.

Sells uses assonance at the end of the two verses with the words "reach" and "break."

S. Stetkevych's verse makes use of alliteration, as in "best binder."

Verse 21:

وَاحْبُ المُجَامِلَ بِالجَزِيلِ وَصَرْمُهُ   بَاقٍ إِذَا ظَلَعَتْ وَزَاغَ قِوَامُهَا

Uḥbu means "he gave" but in this context, it is used in the imperative, as in "give!" *Al-mujāmil* is the reward. *Ṣarma* is he cut. *Ẓala'a* is he slanted. *Qiwam* is its straightness. This line is a continuation of the prior conundrum: what should Labīd do about his love for Nawār?

Polk:

Give bountifully to one who gives affection while the option to sever ties remains if she disappears or her posture swerves.

Sells:

Give to one who seems to care,

give again,

but if the love goes lame and stumbles,

you can break it off

S.S.

Be generous to him who treats you well,

but only the cutting of bonds remains

When affection falters

and its foundation fails.

Polk's translation reminds me of God-like language, represented in his use of the word bountiful in the first line, as in "give bountifully." The use of posture as well is a traditional usage different from the more standard definition of posture as a bodily position but rather posture as attitude. This may be lost to the reader.

Sells again uses a four-line quatrain to render the verses into straightforward idiomatic free interpretation. The best example of this is his usage of "love goes lame," which is extremely conversational and casual, but also shows a particular attention to sound with the use of assonance in the /o/ of "love" and "goes." The use of repetition as a poetic device is known to serve different purposes. Here, Sells repeats the word "give," which hammers down the generous attitude of the poet. The third person use of "you can" feels as if the poet invites the reader into the poem, addressing us.

S. Stetkevych, on the other hand, delivers a more complex rendering with the use of "but only the cutting of bonds remains." It is another way of stating the following advice: be generous so long as affection remains but if it does not then don't fret to cut off the relationship.

Verse 22 (start of the *rahīl,* the journey on horseback*)*:

بِطَلِيحِ أَسْفَـارٍ تَرَكْنَ بَقِيَّـةً   مِنْهَا فَأَحْنَقَ صُلْبُهَا وسَنَامُهَا

Biṭalīḥ is a *nāqa* who has become weakened from travel. *Aḥnaqa* means he lost weight.

Polk: [Forget her] with a travel-hardened riding beast of whom only a bit of flash remains / And her lions and hump are shrunken [from the privations of the trip.]

Sells:

On a journey-worn mare,

worn to a remnant,

with sunken loins,

and a sunken hump

S.S.

And depart on a camel-mare jaded by journeys

that have reduced her to a remnant

'Til she is emaciate

of loins and hump.

In Polk's translation, he uses brackets to elucidate the meaning of the text and to add his own interpretation as derived from a reading of the *qaṣīda* and the previous verses. This is manifest in his bracketed use of "forget her," and "from the privations of the trip."

Sells version, conversely, makes little sense on its own and begs interpretation. Still, he is once again more precise with his diction in the use of “mare” vis-à-vis Polk’s “travel-hardened riding beast.” He also uses repetition for poetic effect, repeating “sunken.”

S. Stetkevych is most clear, descriptive, and literary. She adds context with the words “jaded by journeys” (an alliteration as well, so a clear focus on sound). Now we understand that the camel has been deformed from overuse “emaciated of lions and hump.” The use of the word “emaciate” is also specific describing someone or something sickened because of conditions such as lack of sleep or illness, precisely what the mentioned camel suffers from.

Verse 23:

فَإِذَا تَغَالَى لَحْمُهَا وَتَحَسَّرَتْ وَتَقَطَّعَتْ بَعْدَ الكَلالِ خِدَامُهَا

Taghālā means he went and raised. *Taḥassra* means he [the camel] lost his hair. *Khidām* are belts tightened on the camels’ ankles. Of noteworthiness in these translations are the various renderings of *khidām* by the translators under study: “hobbling tether” (Polk), “ankle thongs” (Sells), and “leathern shoe straps” (Stetkevych). The image evoked by all translators, despite the slight nuance in meaning, remains powerful. The horse, exhausted, is still moving so forcefully that the tethering rope on her forelegs breaks.

Polk: And when her flesh had become scare and she was rubbed bare, Then, after her exhaustion, her hobbling tether was worn off.

Sells

When flesh shrinks back around the joints,

and at the limits of weariness ankle thongs fray

S.S.

Even when her flesh has dwindled

and she is exhausted

And, after great fatigue, her leathern shoe straps

are cut through,

Polk is literal as usual but surprises us with the poetic device of rhyme, manifested in "scare" and "bare."

Sells takes freedom in his translation preferring to convey the image and idea rather than to preserve each word of the original. He uses precise vocabulary with his word choice and phrases such as "limits of weariness" and "ankle thongs fray."

S. Stetkevych attempts to give a more interpretative rendering. This leads her to use a sort of repetition of the idea of the horse's exhaustion. For example, her verse includes "she is exhausted," and "after great fatigue." Yet in the original the only word literally translated as exhaustion is *al-kalāl.* We can thus infer that Stetkevych has translated *fa-taḥassrat* as "she is exhausted" instead of the more literal "she lost her hair."

Verse 24:

فَلَهَا هَبَابٌ فِي الزِّمَامِ كَأَنَّهَا   صَهْبَاءُ خَفَّ مَعَ الجَنُوبِ جَهَامُهَا

Habāb is an activity. *Ṣahbā'* is a cloud with red and black hues. *Jahām* is a cloud devoid of water. This is another example of a metaphor where the poet draws parallels with the nimbleness of the horse and the lightness of clouds.

Polk:

And she is as brisk in the halter as though she were [One of the] reddish [clouds] whose light waterless fringes scurry away with the south wind.

Sells:

She is as fleet in the bridle

as a reddish cloud

emptied of water

skimming along on the south wind.

S.S.

Still she is as nimble in the reins

as if she were a rose-hued cloud,

Rain-emptied, running with the south wind, sprightly.

Brackets can often interrupt a text, as we notice in Polk's usage. The function and effect of brackets have already been commented on ample times above and the translation is typically literal here.

Sells rendering, in the form of his usual quatrain, is poetic in so much as it transforms the stanza into a mellifluous experience, similarly to the reddish cloud skimming along on the south wind Labīd describes. The use of assonance as in "fleet" and "reddish" and alliteration as in "skimming" and "south" create a smooth experience. His verse is literarily best exemplified in the word "fleet," not as in a group of ships sailing together but fleet as in the literary usage, as fast and nimble in movement. The use of "skimming" is also complementary to the idea of nimbleness, moving fast and lightly across something.

S. Stetkevych's translation is verbose and literal while also applying poetic techniques of repetition and alliteration with the prolific use of r's and s's in just one verse ("still, she, south, sprightly and reins, rose-hued, rain-emptied, running").

Verse 25:

أَوْ مُلْمِعٌ وَسَقَتْ لأَحْقَبَ لاَحَهُ   طَرْدُ الفُحُولِ وَضَرْبُهَا وَكِدَامُهَا

Mulmi' is a wild female donkey whose udders are full of milk. *Wasaqa* means she was made pregnant. *Al-aḥqab* is a wild ass with white hips. *Lāḥa* means he changed. *Kidāmuhā* means he bit her. This is another example of the metonymy of Labīd that Sells discusses in his intro and Polk discusses in a footnote. The pictured scene was highly stylized by the

time Labīd wrote that the animals were not even mentioned by name but only by tribute, "glistening white," "girded one," etc.

Polk: Or [as though she were] a glistening white [wild ass] made pregnant by a girdled [stallion]. Vexed by Driving away [rival] stallions with his hooves and teeth.

Sells: Or a sheen-of-udder, mate of a rutted white-belly.
Gnashing and kicking, the driving off of rivals, has turned him sallow.

S.S. - The Poet Compares his Camel-Mare to a Pregnant Wild Ass

Or is she like a she-ass, teats milk-swollen
pregnant by a white-bellied stallion
That is gaunt from repelling rivals,
Biting them and kicking.

Polk uses brackets which is a way of trying to fit in both the original metonym and to extend a cultural bridge for the reader.

Sells, on the other hand, only uses the metonymy. Therefore, the expression a "rutted white-belly" and its original, hidden reference is likely lost on the non-specialist reader.

S. Stetkevych, like Polk, blends both the literal metonym and its reference but she does so without brackets which facilitates the flow of the verse.

Verse 26:

يَعْلُو بِهَا حُدْبَ الإِكَامِ مُسَحَّجٌ   قَدْ رَابَهُ عِصْيَانُهَا وَوِحَامُـهَا

Ḥudab al-ikām are the heaps of the hill. *Musaḥḥaj* is the bitten (in the past participle). *Wiḥām* are the specific type of cravings experienced by a pregnant woman.

Polk:

[The stallion] takes her up the high humpbacked hills, much scarred [by his rival stallions],

Having been wearied by her rebelliousness and her lusts.

Sells:

Bite-scarred, wary,

he takes her high

into the hill curves, pregnant,

recalcitrant, craving.

S.S.

Much scratched and bitten, he leads her up

the hump-backed hills,

Perplexed by his pregnant mate's

recalcitrance and cravings.

Polk's translation is both literal and mindful of sound employing alliteration in the first line "high humpbacked hills." Yet Polk completely neglects the idea of *wiḥām* as cravings that stem from pregnancy and only translates it as lusts.

Sells, as usual, creates a short, concise, clever translation. For example, his rendering of the past participle *musaḥḥaj* as "bite-scarred" rather than the more literal "bitten" is particularly artful.

S. Stetkevych's translation reads very similar to Sells with even some of the same word choices such as "pregnant, recalcitrance and craving." Her translation is longer as usual but also employs alliteration in the line "perplexed by his pregnant mate's."

Verse 27:

بِأَحِزَّةِ الثَّلَبُوتِ يَرْبَأُ فَوْقَـهَا   قَفْرَ المَرَاقِبِ خَوْفَهَا آرَامُهَا

Aḥizza al-thalabūt is a harsh high area that is a wadi or valley. *Raba'a* is he advanced to the edge [to see the dangerous areas]. *Qafra al-mirāqib* is an empty place where enemies attack. *Ārām* are signs of the path.

Polk:

In the draws of ath-Thalabut, he goes up the hillsides [into danger] to keep a lookout over her, A bare and waterless desert of lookout stones, oh, the terror of them!

Sells:

Above the craglands of Thalabút he climbs the vantage points, wind-swept, the way-stones charged with fear.

S.S:

Above the jagged heights of Thalabūt he scouts

the empty lookout posts,

Fearful of hunters hid behind

the piles of stone.

This is an example of how all three translators understand parts of the verse differently. Polk, for example, includes “danger” in brackets to show that the poet is looking out for the horse because he is afraid. Sells has a similar concept except he adds the phrase “wind-swept,” implying the tough weather conditions in an already difficult area, “the crag lands of Thalabut.” Stetkevych adds the implied fear of hunters directly in the translation.

Polk’s translation is literal and archaic. This is clear in his use of the exclamation “oh,” which renders the verse into something akin to old English poetry.

Once again, we see Sells use a sort of accent for “Thalabút” (the equivalent of an accent aigu in French) for the transliteration, transforming the word as even more strange. Sells tends to be more concise, as the last two verses can attest.

S. Stetkevych adds the idea of hunters in her translation, which is what her commentary also suggests in the brief introduction to the verse meaning that I provided above. She also uses a scholarly transliteration for “Thalabūt,” as she has done consistently in her translation. Stetkevych’s translation furthermore pays the most attention to sound in that she employs the most amount of alliteration and assonance in this verse.

Verse 28:

حَتَّى إِذَا سَلَخَا جُمَادَى سِتَّةً   جَزْءًا فَطَالَ صِيَامُهُ وَصِيَامُهَا

Salakha is he spend or passed. *Jumādā sitta* is six months in the winter and then the spring. *Ḥaz’a* is the satisfaction of freshness of water.

Polk:

Until, when the cool, rainy months had drawn to a close, and Living on moist food, their abstinence from water had been long

Sells:

Until they scrape back through

the six dry months of Jumáda,

month on month of thirst,

surviving on dew.

S.S.

Until, when Jumāda passed and winter's six months

of grazing on lush herbage,

While avoid water-holes,

Came to an end,

For the first time, Polk strangely removes the place name "Jumādā," the month directly referenced. He replaces it with the phrase "cool, rainy months." This removes the original particularities from the text and is a surprisingly freer interpretation than his usual literalness.

Sells, on the other hand, provides a translation consistent with what he has presented throughout: short and straightforward. He uses the idiomatic phrase "month on month" to indicate a lengthy period. Yet his brevity is at a cost. Sells completely ignores the part of the verse that mentions the fasting of the beast from the freshness of water.

S. Stetkevych is comprehensive in her translation, and, like Sells, includes the place name "Jumādā" and renders it as "winter's six months." Again, she employs both a foreignization and domestication strategy in the same line!

Verse 29:

رَجَعَا بِأَمْرِهِمَا إِلَىَ ذِي مِرَّةٍ حَصِدٍ وَنُجْحُ صَرِيْمَةٍ إِبْرَامُهَا

Dhī mirra is someone who has a strong opinion. *Ḥaṣid* is solid, stable. *Ṣarīma* means determination. *Ibrām* are rules.

Polk:

The two of them brought their affairs to a firm resolve,

And, truly, success in any matter lies in gathering in the loose ends!

Sells:

They bring their course

to a binding plan—

strength of intent

is in the twist of the strands.

S. Stetkevych:

The two mates made a resolution,

twisted tight—

For the success of resolve lies in firmness

to head for water.

According to Polk's footnotes, the major theme of the poem is epitomized in this line, which is the firmness and resolve of man. Polk's translation is rather literal but also tries to be idiomatic with the final line "gathering in the loose ends." The idea is akin to the idiom "tying up loose ends," meaning to complete the parts of something that have not been completed. The two mates — man and steed – are determined now to find water.

Sells again tries to translate concisely. He uses an em dash to separate lines before trying to translate the idiom, which he does in a way that sounds both familiar, cadenced, and faithful to the original. He employs cadence rhyming "plan" and "strands."

S. Stetkevych's translation is the clearest, rendering the verse in a way that feels modern and poetic. This is perhaps represented using alliteration in "twisted tight." She also adds the phrase "to head for the water," which clarifies the context, helping us understand the resolution of the two (steed and poet-rider) is to find water.

Verse 30:

وَرَمَى دَوَابِرَهَا السَّفَا وَتَهَيَّجَتْ   رِيْحُ المَصَايِفِ سَوْمُهَا وَسِهَامُهَا

Dawābir are hoof pads. *Al-safā* is a thorn of nettle. *Sawmuhā* is the passing. *Wasihāmuha* is extreme wind heat. In this verse, the poet evokes another powerful image. This time he illustrates the horse kicking prickly thorns at fast speed with hot winds blowing in his face while he is still on his journey searching for water.

Polk:

And the nettles thrust themselves into the soft hoof pads, The winds of the summer season, both the gusts and the burning simoons, blow up clouds of dust and sand.

Sells:

Pasterns tear in the briar grass.

Summer winds

flare into dust squalls

and burning winds of Sumúm.

S. Stetkevych:

Then the dry blades of buhma grass

pricked at her pasterns,

And the summer wind picked up

In passing gusts and fiery blasts.

Polk translates *sawm* into the Anglicized version of “simoon,” a hot dry, dust-laden wind in Arabia. The word would probably still be lost on the non-specialist reader. Another example of Polk trying to connect with readers is the use of nettle, which is a herbaceous plant that functions as an equivalent for *al-safā.*

Sells is concise and once again uses poetic license. He keeps the word "Sumum," for example, which is foreign to the non-specialist reader. At the same time, his use of the term "briar grass" is more familiar to a certain audience outside the Arab world since this plant is grown throughout Western Europe. The use of the word "pastern" instead of hoof is another odd, literary choice since this word is ostensibly lost on most readers. Yet it also harmonizes with Sells overall pattern of choosing precise diction. Sells again pays attention to sound with the repetition of winds.

S. Stetkevych's strategy abides by faithfulness. Whereas Polk and Sells both use somewhat familiar words to the non-Arab reader of the translation when rendering *al-safā* into English, Stetkevych uses the esoteric "buhma grass." She also shows the most interest in sound using the traditional technique of alliteration in the second statement, "pricked at her pasterns."

Verse 31:

فَتَنَازَعَا سَبِطَاً يَطِيْرُ ظِلالُـهُ   كَدُخَانِ مُشْعَلَةٍ يُشَبُّ ضِرَامُهَا

S*abiṭ* are long dust particles. *Musha'ala* is fire. *Ḍirām* are firewood crumbs. In this descriptive scene (*waṣf*), racing animals cause dust to rise higher and higher like smoke of a fire ascending to the sky.

Polk: And they outstrip one another a loose [dust cloud] whose shadows fly, Like the smoke of a roaring fire where brush and thorn blaze fiercely.

Sells:

They contend in raising dust.
Its shadows soar
like the smoke of a firebrand,
kindling set ablaze

S.S.:

Back and forth the asses tugged a train
of stirred-up dust
Whose shadows rose like smoke
when the tinder is lit,

Polk's translation is rather literal and appears to pay no attention to sound .Thus, the lack of rhythm comes as no surprise. The use of brackets again represents the translator's hesitation to interject, except in an obvious manner.

Sells' stanza, on the other hand, is well-organized displaying roughly the same syllables (four to seven) per line.

S. Stetkevych's stanza is the most specific immediately identifying the subject of the stanza: the wild asses. It also follows a quatrain form and shows an interest in sound through the technique of alliteration, as in "tugged a train."

Verse 32:

مَشْمُولَةٍ غُلِثَتْ بِنَابتِ عَرْفَجٍ   كَدُخَانِ نَارٍ سَاطِعٍ أَسْنَامُـهَا

Mashmuwla means blown by the north wind. *Ghulitha* is he mixed. Labīd continues his metaphor of fire extending it again to the journey of the poet on the mount in this typical *rahīl* section. The wind that fans him is mixed with brush weed like a fire that is mixed with leaping flames.

Polk: Blown by the north wind and mixed with *'Arfaj* branches [that is] like the smoke of a fire whose tips crackle and blaze.

Sells:
Fanned by the north wind,
stoked with brushweed,
the smoke of a blazing,
high-billowing fire.

S.S.

Then fanned by the north wind,

then mixed with the ‘arfaj tree’s green wood,

Like the smoke of a mixed blaze

with leaping flames.

Polk’s translation is literal as usual. Here, he maintains the original name of the *‘arfaj* plant, which is unknown to the non-specialist or the reader outside the cultural milieu. He also emphasizes onomatopoeia that conjures the original sound: fire tips crackling.

Sells focuses on bringing to life the visuals of this *bayt*. For example, we see the image of a smoke blazing. Sound, too, is important. For example, he rhymes the words “stoked” and “smoke.” Sells culturally translates *‘arfaj* as brushweed, which we understand as the small branches typically used in firewood.

S. Stetkevych’s translation appears to strive for the literary, as evidenced in her use of personification. For example, she translates *nār sāṭ‘* as leaping flames, giving flames the human or animal characteristic of leaping. Stetkevych maintains the original term of *‘arfaj* trees but adds green wood as to convey an imagistic association, perhaps a reconciliation of the difficult task of the translator who tries to maintain the distinctive qualities of the original while also translating the poem in a way that appears not too alien so as not to be appreciated.

Verse 33:

فَمَضَى وَقَدَّمَهَا وَكَانَتْ عَادَةً مِنْهُ إِذَا هِيَ عَرَّدَتْ إِقْدَامُـهَا

'Arrada is he strayed or was late on the way to something.

Polk:

And the two of them passed along. The stallion pushed her ahead Of him, for it was his custom, when she strayed from the path, to urge her forward.

Sells:

He pushes on,

keeping her ahead.

She balks.

He drives her forward

S.S.:

Then he kept on and drove her on before him,

for it was his custom,

When she strayed or lagged behind,

to drive her on ahead.

Polk provides a literal rendering and adds in pronouns to elucidate for the reader the role of the stallion and the rider, as in "the stallion pushed her ahead of him."

Sells' translation is punchy, short, and to the point. His verse reads like an action scene in a novel.

S. Stetkevych's translation practices poetic license to a great extent taking the verb *'arrada* and leaving room for both its meanings as to balk "as in stray" and to be late, as in "lag behind."

Verse 34:

فَتَوَسَّطَا عُرْضَ السَّرِيِّ وَصَدَّعَا   مَسْجُـورَةً مُتَجَاوِرًا قُلاَّمُهَا

'Urḍ al-sariyy is the direction of the small river. *Ṣadd'ā* is to sadden or grieve. *Masjūra* is to be full of water. *Qulām* are reeds.

Polk:

And then they found themselves in the midst of a flood ditch and crossed /

A water-swollen [pond] whose reeds were rank

Sells:

Until they break

into the midst of a stream,

split the brimming flow

and clustered reeds

S.S:

He flung her in the direction

of the stream

And they cut through to a brimming spring

grow thick with reeds

Polk's rendering employs specific terms. One example is the use of the more jargon-like word: rank, as in growing too thickly and coarsely. In this example, Polk also employs the poetic technique of alliteration as "reeds were rank."

Sells is, as usual, concise, using no additional descriptive words. *'Urḍ al-sariyy* is merely a stream and *mutajāwir* is clustered.

S. Stetkevych employs male and female pronouns but does not specify. For example, "he flung her." We can assume from following the poem that the implied are the rider and the mount.

Verse 35:

مَحْفُوفَةً وَسْطَ اليَرَاعِ يُظِلُّهَا   مِنْهُ مُصَرَّعُ غَابَـةٍ وَقِيَامُـهَا

Al-yarā' is the reed.

Polk:

[The pond was] hidden by grasses that shade her / From the stallion, both the beaten down canes and the upright ones.

Sells:

An enclosing stand of rushes,

some trampled,

some standing,

hedging them in the shade.

S.S.

Enclosed on all sides

by stands of canes

That shaded it with fallen stalks

and stalks still standing.

Polk makes this literal rendering able to stand on its own. According to Alan Jones, a notable feature is the frequency with which liens are linked to one another.[113] There are more than thirty examples of this, involving two-thirds of the poem. This is an example of a good literal translation that can still be enjoyed read individually without reading what comes before.

[113] Alan Jones, *Early Arabic Poetry,* vol. 2nd ed (The Netherlands: Brill, 2011), 454.

In contrast with the previous line and much that came before, Sells employs more jargon-like words, as exemplified with the use of “rushes.” The switch from simple to specific, informal to sophisticated is like Sells’ cadence which rhythmically changes throughout but always connects to what comes before.

S. Stetkevych’s stanza is a clear play on words with a specific enunciation of the /s/ sound, as employed by alliteration. For example, in a simple quatrain, she uses: “sides, stands, shaded, stalks, stalks, still, standing.”

Verse 36:

أَفَتِلْكَ أَمْ وَحْشِيَّةٌ مَسْبُوعَةٌ   خَذَلَتْ وَهَادِيَةُ الصِّوَارِ قِوَامُهَا

Masbū‘a is the lion who mauled the prey’s calf. *Hādiya al-ṣiwār* is the stallion that leads the wild ass. In the journey, the oryx is referred to be the epithet *al-wahshiyya*, “the wild one,” in a context in which she is being pursued by hunters. *Uns “*human society” is viewed with terror and dread.[114] One cannot read the oryx tableau of the journey section without recalling its parallel and inverse image in the *nasīb.*

Polk:

Is this female then [the one to compare to my camel] or is it a wild cow oryx, wolf -raised,

Abandoned by the herd although its leader had been her sustainer?

---

ff[114] Sells, “The Qasida and the West: Self-Reflective Stereotype and Critical Encounter.”

Sells:

Or was it a wild one,

wolf-struck?

She lagged behind the herd.

Its lead animal had been her stay.

S.S.

Theme III: The Poet Compares his Camel-Mare to an Oryx Cow Bereft of her Calf

Is my camel mare like this or is she like the oryx cow,

her calf the wild beasts' prey,

Who, though the lead cow was her guide,

Had lagged behind the herd,

Polk's translation implies a very different meaning that appears to erroneously understand the wild cow oryx. He describes it as being raised by wolf when Sells and Stetkevych concur in that the wild cow oryx's calf is in fact the prey of wolf, or wild beast.

Sells employs alliteration with a /w/ sound in the line "wild one, wolf-struck."

S. Stetkevych again is very descriptive adding in the context of pronouns and therefore smoothing the comprehension for the reader. For example, she starts her translation with the first-person pronoun and then frames the question.

Verse 37:

خَنْسَاءُ ضَيَّعَتِ الفَرِيرَ فَلَمْ يَرِمْ   عُرْضَ الشَّقَائِقِ طَوْفُهَا وَبُغَامُهَا

Khansā' is flatness at the edge of the nose. *Al-farīr* is the calf of the wild ass. *Lam yarim* means it did not move from its place. *'Urḍa* is the side or surrounding. *Al-shaqā'iq* is a hard area covered in stones.

Polk: A snub-nosed one who has lost her calf but will not abandon/ The area of the stony valleys [or cease] her patrolling and lowing

Sells:

A flat-nosed one who has lost her young,

she does not cease

circling the dune slopes

and lowing,

S.S:

A snub-nosed cow bereft of calf,

who amid the stony tracts

Does not leave off

Her roaming and her lowing

This is a classic example of metonymy employed by the pre-Islamic poet, one of his favorite rhetorical devices. The epithetic cluster “flat-nosed one” refers to the wild ass (onager).

Polk’s translation uses brackets as a form of a more philologically minded interpretation. In short, Polk’s translation displays a hesitation to creative translation adhering a literal approach that translates both meaning and structure. In the following verse, this is true except for translating *lam,* which is a jussive and translates roughly as “did not.” Polk, however, renders it as will not, a negation in the future tense (this translation is different from Sells and S. Stetkevych who I now turn to).

Sells’ translation again displays traces of modern poetry which both tries to consider the cadences of the original while playing with the rhythm of the English. In short, Sells expresses much in a few words. He uses alliteration in this verse in the expression “cease circling.” The phrase “does not cease” appears dramatic in addition to the verb “circling,” which paints an evocative image of cattle going in circles desperately searching for her young.

S. Stetkevych’s translation is akin to Polk in diction and Sells in structure. For example, her translation resembles Polk’s in her use of “a snub-nosed,” “calf,” “stony,” and “lowing” (the latter is used by all three) and Sells in the quatrain structure and short lines.

Verse 38:

لِمُعَفَّرٍ قَهْدٍ تَنَـازَعَ شِلْـوَهُ   غُبْسٌ كَوَاسِبُ لا يُمَنُّ طَعَامُهَا

Mu'affar means in dust. *Qahd* means white. *Tanāza'* means to contend or dispute. *Shilwah* are the remains of a body. *La yumann* means does not cut off. *Ghubs* are ashen-colored wolves. The verse again paints a powerful image of greedy snapping wolves wrestling over the body of a pitiable white calf.

Polk: For a white calf, borne to the dust, whose body is disputed / By greedy, snapping gray [wolves] for whom food is no free gift.

Sells:

For a white fawn,

rolled in the dust

and dismembered

by contending wolves, ashen,

not about to give up their portion.

S.S

For a calf half-weaned and white,

its limbs torn back and forth

By ashen wolves,

Impatient, hungry.

Polk adheres to a literal technique that describes each word in painstaking detail. In this case, the Arabic words cannot be easily rendered in a one-word equivalent. In addition, he utilizes brackets to enclose the word “wolf” which commentary says is already explicit in the word *ghubs.*

Sells’ translation is specific. For example, he uses the word “fawn,” which translates as a young deer in its first year, and “ashen,” a precise adjective for dust-colored.

S. Stetkevych appears to use a rhetorical device not immediately clear in the original. For example, she renders metaphorically the idea of *mu‘affar,* which commentators say means to be born in dust, and translates it as half-weaned. This is a clear example of a non-literal translation where open interpretation is used.

Verse 39:

صَادَفْنَ منهَا غِـرَّةً فَأَصَبْنَهَا إِنَّ الْمَنَايَا لاَ تَطِيشُ سِهَامُهَا

Polk: They chanced upon the calf while she was heedless and struck her down, / Lo, the goddess of Fate! Her arrows do not miss.

Sells:

They chanced upon her

while she was unaware

and struck. The arrows of fate

do not miss their prey.

S.S:

They chanced upon its unawares

and struck—

Fate's arrow never

miss their mark.

Polk's translation employs addition to elucidate the meaning to the reader. For example, he adds the word "the calf," which is not in the original. He interprets *al-manāyā* as the goddess of fate and capitalizes "Fate" to show its power. He uses the archaic *"*Lo*"* as a literal translation of *Inna.*

Sells' translation is also literal. He renders the second part of the *bayt* as a sort of proverb with a similar tone to the Arabic.

S. Stetkevych's translation renders the second part of the *bayt* also like a proverb but with alliteration "miss their mark." She also capitalizes "Fate," alluding to its magisterial power, especially in pre-Islamic times.

Verse 40:

بَاَتتْ وَأَسْبَلَ وَاكِفٌ من دِيـمَةٍ   يُرْوِي الْخَمَائلَ دَائِمَاً تَسْجَامُها

Wākif is rain which drips, or trickles. *Dīma* is rain that continues for at least a day and a half. *Al-khamā'il* is an area with trees.

Polk: [The oryx cow] spent the night [in the valley] while the drops from a steady fine rain poured down / On the thicket, constantly weeping upon her

Sells:

She passes the night

in continuous curtains of rain

washing around the dune tufts

in a steady stream.

S.S

She spent the night beneath a cloud

that shed an unremitting rain

And let a ceaseless downpour fall

upon the dense-grown dunes.

Polk is more precise in his rendering of rain, describing it as "steady fine rain." Brackets dominate his translation, once again.

Sells heeds to sound, employing alliteration twice. For example, he uses the phrase "continuous curtains" and "steady steam" to preserve the rhythmical pattern of the original.

S. Stetkevych uses an addition with the word "a cloud" which is not in Labīd's text although could be inferred from the context of rain.

Verse 41:

يَعْلُو طَرِيقَةَ مَتْنِهَا مُتَوَاتِرٌ فِي لَيْلَةٍ كَفَرَ النُّجُومَ غَمَامُهَا

Ṭarīqa matnihā is a line from the tail to the neck. *Mutawātir* is successive. *Kafara* is he covered.

Polk: The rain advanced by stages along the path of her back/ During a night whose ominous clouds concealed the stars

Sells:

Flowing along the line of her back,

runlet on runlet,

on a night the stars

are veiled in cloud.

S.S

All through the night, whose stars

were veiled by clouds,

Uninterrupted raindrops fell

on her spine's track.

Polk's translation is literal and straightforward. It follows the structure of the original and produces a smooth, albeit literal translation. *Mutawātir* is literally rendered as stages.

Sells' translation is a fine example of free interpretation. This is most clear in his rendering of "runlet on runlet." In the Arabic, there is the phrase "*ya'lū ṭarīqa matnihā mutawātir"* which Polk and Stetkevych both render literally as "raindrops falling on the path of back, or spine." Sells, on the other hand, paints a metaphoric image likening the rain drops to runlets, which is his version of *mutawātir,* or the rain falling successively.

S. Stetkevych's translation changes the order of the verse and decides to start her translation with the second hemistich.

Verse 42:

تَجْتَافُ أَصْلاً قَالِصاً مُتَنَبِّذاً بعُجُوبِ أَنْقَاءٍ يَمِيلُ هُيَامُـهَا

Tajtāfa is he entered the cavity or hollow area. *Qāliṣ* is a gnarled tree. *Mutanabbidha* means isolated or pushed to the side. *Bi-'ujūb* is the tail end or base of something. *Anqā'* is a sand dune. *Huyām* is inconsistent or liquid sand.

Polk:

She sought out a shelter in the root of a gnarled, isolated [tree]/ In the lea of a sandy hillock whose drift bears down [upon it].

Sells:

She enters a gnarled tangle of roots,

casting about with her horns,

at the base of the dune

as it drifts and falls away

S.S

She took shelter beneath the branches

of a contorted tree

Set apart upon the edges of the dunes

whose drift-sands slope

Polk's translation employs brackets and most closely resembles Stetkevych's in meaning. Yet his translation of *Anqā'* as a "sandy hillock" is a strange rendering compared to the more known and simpler "dune," used by both Sells and Stetkevych.

Sells' translation begins literally but then makes an extreme turn towards poetic license. He renders *tajtāf* as enters when both Polk and Stetkevych translated it as the more idiomatic

"seeking shelter." In both Polk and Stetkevych, the oryx cow enters a tangle of roots, but in Sells' version, the horns are described.

S. Stetkevych's translation also practices open interpretation. For example, in *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual*, she translated *tajtāfu* as "she took shelter in the hollow," with a literal rendering of the source text.[115] The root of *tajtāfu* is ja-wa-f which implies hollow, cavity, interior. Yet in the newer version she translated it as she "took shelter beneath the branches," relaying the insinuated meaning of the verse.

Verse 43:

وَتُضِيءُ فِي وَجْهِ الظَّلامِ مُنِيرَةً   كَجُمَانَةِ الْبَحْرِيِّ سُلَّ نِظَامُهَا

Jumāna is a pearl. *Al-baḥriyy* is the seaman, or fisherman. The verse once again draws on the beloved. Here, the poet likens the radiance of Nawār to that of a seaman's pearl whose string has been pulled.

Polk:

Yet she shines into the face of the gloom, gleaming/

Like the seaman's pearls whose string has been pulled

[115] A worthy and interesting case study would be to also analyze the difference in S. Stetkevych's translations between *The Mute Immortals Speak* and the translations in *The Muʿallaqāt for Millennials* project.

Sells:

Glowing in the face

of the dark, luminous,

like a seaman's pearl

come unstrung.

S.S

And in the first watch of the night

her lustrous face

Gleamed like the diver's

its strings drawn forth

Polk's translation is quite literal. He translates, for instance, *fī wajh al-ẓalām* as "into the face of the gloom."

Sells is also quite literal in this verse but pays attention to the stress of words in a typical quatrain form.

S. Stetkevych's translation applies a free interpretation technique and translates translating *fi wajh al-ẓalām* as "the first watch of night," inferring that the poet means that the face of gloom is, in fact, a metaphor for night.

Verse 44:

حَتَّى إِذَا انْحَسَرَ الظَّلامُ وَأَسْفَرَتْ   بَكَرَتْ تَزِلُّ عَنِ الثَّرَى أَزْلاَمُهَا

Asfara in this context is he illuminated. *Bakara* is he emerged at dawn. *Azlām* are people.

Polk: Until, when the gloom wears thin and dawn shines through / She rises into the morning with her arrow-like legs slipping over the rain-hardened sands

Sells: As night parts from dawn
she appears in the early light,
leg shafts slipping
on the hard, wet sand.

S.S.
Until, when the dark dispelled
and dawn shone forth,
Her hoofs slipped on the early morning's
rain-soaked earth.

Polk's translation is literal but focuses on transferring the powerful images with some additions. For example, he renders the word *tazillu* as "her arrow-like legs slipping."

Sells' translation, as usual, is concise and employs the quatrain verse. His lines are short and punchy. He uses alliteration in the example of "shafts slipping."

S. Stetkevych's translation is also concise. She uses the expression "rain-soaked" which paints an evocative image of the rain permeating the ground in its entirety.

Verse 45:

عَلِهَتْ تَرَدَّدُ في نِهَاءِ صَعَائِدٍ   سَبْعاً تُؤَاماً كَامِلاً أَيَّامُهَا

'Aliha is he became anxious. *Ṣa'ā'id* is a placename which is rendered in Stetkevych's edition is *'Ālij*, a powerful desert.[116] *Sab'an tu'āman* are seven nights and days.

Polk:

She ran to and fro, echoing [her own calls] in the ponds of Su'aid, Sevenly [for a week], both the nights and the days were completely spent.

Sells:

Splashing, confused,

through the polls of Su'á'id,

back and forth,

seven pairs of nights and days

S.S:

---

[116] In Iḥsān 'Abbās' edition on page 310, 'Ālij is also mentioned as a more precise rendering of *Ṣa'ā'id.*

Bewildered, she wandered to and fro

Among the sandy tracts of ‘Ālij

For seven full nights coupled

with their days

Polk’s translation opts for archaic use and misses a key idea. This is manifest in the fact that he does not translate *‘alihat* as she was confused or anxious but leaves it untranslated. His usage of “to and fro” is antiquated.

Sells’ translation is short and straightforward. He uses “back and forth” rather than “two and fro.” He also uses parallelism, creating a sense of linguistic balance and repetition with “and” in “back and forth” followed by “nights and days.” This reflects a greater interest in the musicality of the translation.

S. Stetkevych also opts for an archaic use in her translation but adheres to her general quatrain form with short lines. The archaic use is the expression “to and fro.” She considers sound using assonance as in the /a/ sound in “sandy tracts of ‘Alij.” It should be noted that the use of ‘Alij rather than Ṣu‘ā’id is left unexplained. Stetkevych’s translation simultaneously maintains a scholarly register with a proper transliteration that universally pleases scholars in general and Arabists in particular.

Verse 46:

حَتَّى إِذَا يَئِسَتْ وَأَسْحَقَ حالِقٌ   لَمْ يُبْلِـهِ إِرْضَاعُهَا وَفِطَامُـهَا

Ḥāliq is an udder full of milk.

Polk:

Until when she despaired and her udder rang dry–

Neither the sucking nor the weaning had spoiled it—

Sells:

Until, hope gone,

her once-full udder dries,

though suckling and weaning

are not what withered it down

S.S:

Until, hope's stores exhausted,

and udder, once milk-swollen,

Neither from suckling nor weaning

now gone dry,

Polk's translation is literal and therefore pays little attention to structure, making it perplexing to the reader. In addition, he inserts an em dash for the first time. This dash makes the thoughts seem interconnected when the original *lam* between lines serves as a

sort of continuation. It could be interpreted or rendered as “she grew hopeless because her udder grew dry *but* it did not grow dry from suckling or weaning.” Polk has no footnotes here, as though he grew tired of footnotes as he went along!

Sells’ translation attempts to maintain both meaning and cadence, taking the form of short main clauses, as in “hope gone, her once-full udder dries,” and a subordinate clause, “though suckling and weaning are not what withered it down.” This breakup shows a clear understanding of the original while also following the used technique of brevity.

S. Stetkevych’s translation reads like a literary rendering because of diction. For example, she uses “hope’s stores exhausted,” to say that there is no more hope. “Milk swollen,” is another example.

Verse 47:

وَتَوَجَّسَتْ رِزَّ الأَنِيسِ فَرَاعَهَا عَنْ ظَهْرِ غَيْبٍ وَالأَنِيسُ سَقَامُهَا

Rizz is a subtle noise. *Al-anīs* is a human.

Polk:

She heard with dread the sounds of humans from afar, and they startled her / From behind a hidden [rock], for Man is her bane.

Sells:

She makes out the sound of men,

muffled, striking fear

from the hidden side,

human presence, her affliction.

S.S

She heard the buzz of human voices

She could not tell from where—

That filled her with alarm—

for men to her meant death.

Polk's translation is straightforward and literal. The result is an altogether clunky translation with numerous additions that are not intuitive even to the Arabist. Where, for example, is the idea of men hiding behind a hidden rock in the original? Polk does not adhere to the structure literally but tries to extrapolate the meaning. For instance, he renders the line w*a-tawajjasit rizz Al-Anīs* as "she heard with dread the sounds of humans from afar and they startled here." However, we do not get the idea of the humans being from away until the second line in the original, which starts *'an ẓahir ghayib*. Therefore, Polk changes the structure of the original to produce a meaning that he believes will make the most sense. There is no attention to rhythm.

Sells's technique is more abstract and concise. He uses alliteration as in "men muffled."

S. Stetkevych's translation appears to follow a rhythmic pattern. For example, she uses repetition as in "she/she" and "her/her." Additionally, she uses a range of six to nine syllables for line, making for a short verse with simple wording and straightforward understanding.

Verse 48:

فَغَدَتْ كِلاَ الْفَرْجَيْنِ تَحْسِبُ أَنَّهُ   مَوْلَى الْمَخَافَةِ خَلْفُهَا وَأَمَامُهَا

Kilā al-farjayn is the part of the body between the hands and the feet. *Mawlā al-makhāfa* is a place of fear and the source of danger.

Polk: And both of the two openings [in rocks around her] became such that she imagined that/ Both before and behind were places of dread.

Sells:

Dawn finds her turning,

front and rear,

placing behind her

and ahead the source of fear.

S.S:

So she rushed forth,

fearing for head and tail

Dangers from in front

and from behind

Polk's translation is archaic and does not read like poetry but like clunky verse. This is best epitomized in the line that reads "became such that."

Sells' translation utilizes rhythm *par excellence*, rhyming "rear" and "fear."

S. Stetkevych's translation is smooth. Her lines are short, with less than six syllables per line. She also uses repetition, repeating the word "from" twice, which makes for a sort of parallelism.

Verse 49:

حَتَّى إِذَا يَئِسَ الرُّمَاةُ وَأَرْسَلُوا　　　غُضْفَاً دَوَاجِنَ قَافِلاً أَعْصَامُهَا

Ghuḍf means lop-eared. *Dawājin* is a well-trained hunting dog deriving from the root *d-j-n* from which the word domesticated or tame stems. *Qāfilan A'ṣāmuhā* is a dry collar of the dog.

Polk:

Until, when the archers despaired, they loosed / Lop-eared hunting hounds whose collars were yet dry.

Sells:

Until the archers give up

and send in their well-trained,

lop-eared hunting hounds

whose collars were yet dry.

S.S:

Until, when the hunters, despairing

of their bow and arrow,

Set on her their rawhide-collared,

flop-eared hounds.

Polk's translation is stilted. This is most perceptible because it lacks a transition and so the lines read as two separate ideas when they are connected. The archers give up and so they send their hunting dogs.

Sells' translation employs parallelism. This is evidenced in the use of a hyphen, joining together words such as "well-trained," and "lop-earned." The rendering of *ya'is* as "give up," rather than the typical despaired is more casual.

S. Stetkevych's translation plays with the structure of the original. She does this to provide a coherent, smooth translation. For instance, she renders the last line as "flop-eared hounds." She also includes the very precise jocular word "rawhide" as a translation of *qāfil* which could have been rendered more straightforwardly as "dry," as Polk and Sells did.

Verse 50:

فَلَحِقْنَ وَاعْتَكَرَتْ لَهَا مَدْرِيَّـةٌ   كَالسَّمْهَرِيَّةِ حَدُّهَا وَتَمَامُـهَا

A'takara is he bent or turned. *Madriyya* is a side of a horn. *Al-samhariyya* is a lancer that traces back to a man called Samhar who lived in what is now contemporary Bahrain. The cow's horn is compared to this spear which was also well known in Arabic battle poetry.[117]

Polk:

And they overtook her, but she wheeled at bay, with her pointed horns, like a *samhari* spear in their sharpness and length.

Sells:

They run her down.

She wheels upon them

with a horn, point and shaft,

like a Samhariyya spear.

---

[117] Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak*, 32.

S.S:

The hounds overtook her

and she returned their charge

With a horn like a Samharī spear

in point and shaft

Polk's translation is in the past tense. For example, he uses phrases such as "overtook her," and "wheeled." Furthermore, Polk italicizes the word "samhari" making it protrude. All three translators use alliteration in the expression "Samhariyya spear."

Sells' translation is in the present tense, making it feel more immediate. It is interesting to note his use of the verb wheel, like Polk, which appears quite literary and formal.

S. Stetkevych's translation is contextual, academic, straightforward, and rhythmic. She often provides context for the reader For example, she adds "the hounds" at the beginning rather than the mere pronoun "they." This allows the reader to follow along more easily, or even to enjoy the poetry line by line without having read earlier lines to situate the verse. Secondly, the translation is academic in that it transliterates "Samharī." It is straightforward because she uses a simpler lexicon with few syllables in each line. Instead of the verb "wheels," she translates "returned their charge."

Verse 51:

لِتَذُودَهُنَّ وَأَيْقَنَتْ إِنْ لَمْ تَذُدْ　　　　أَنْ قَدْ أُحِمَّ مِنَ الحُتُوفِ حِمَامُهَا

Aḥamma is he approached. *Ḥimām* is death.

Polk: In order to drive them away–and she knew full well that if she did not drive them away / Her fate would be completed with a speedy death.

Sells: Driving them off, sensing death upon her, if she fails, certain, fated, near.

S.S:

To ward them off—

for she knew

If she did not repel them

she would die.

Polk's translation employs an em dash to connect different ideas. The effect, however, creates an awkward, incoherent translation. It is difficult to connect the two lines.

Sells' translation is abstract and poetic. He uses strong single adjectives that create a dramatic effect, as in "certain, fated, near." All three translations use pronouns rather than reminding readers of the verse's subject, the oryx cow, who is running from death from the hounds and hunters.

S. Stetkevych's translation is straightforward. This is most visible in the lines, "If she did not repel them she would die."

Verse 52:

فَتَقَصَّدَتْ مِنْهَا كَسَابِ فَضُرِّجَتْ   بِدَمٍ وَغُودِرَ في الْمَكَرِّ سُخَامُهَا

Taqaṣṣada means he killed. Kasāb is the name of a hound. *Al-makarr* is the position of stars. Sukhām is the name of another hound.

Polk:

And she singled out from the pack the hound Kasab and she was splattered / With blood while the hound Sukham was also left to molder on the battleground.

Sells:

Kasábi bears down on her.

He is smeared in blood,

and Sukhám, in his place of attack,

is left to die.

S.S:

'Fetch' was first to fall,

smeared all in blood,

Then 'Blackie' was left for dead

where he had charged.

Polk's translation is again rigid and difficult to follow. This is clear in the break between verses. Rather than provide a clear line that reads on its own, Polk interrupts the verse making it only comprehensive if read in its entirety.

Sells' translation maintains the place names of the hounds "Kasabi and Sukham." His lines are short.

S. Stetkevych's translation adheres to simplicity and rhyme. This is manifest in the word's "blood" and "charged." She also translates in a way accessible to the target culture, transforming the names of the pre-Islamic hounds Kasāb and Sukhām to two common contemporary dog names "Fetch" and "Blackie."

Verse 53 (start of *fakhr,* the final section, the time for praise and boast of the tribe):

فَبِتِلْكَ إِذْ رَقَصَ اللَّوَامِعُ بِالضُّحَى   وَاجْتَابَ أَرْدِيَةَ السَّرَابِ إِكَامُهَا

Al-llawāmi' is a mirage. *Ājtāb* are clothing.

Polk:

Then is it with such a [camel] when the flickering mirages dance at high noon / And the hills deck themselves in the gown of enveloping heat waves?

Sells:

On one like that,

when shimmering dance

in the forenoon

and hills are gowned in mirage

Part III: The Poet's Boast (*fakhr)*

Theme 1: The Poet Buys Wine for the Drinking Party

S.S:

On such a she-camel when the sun's shimmerings

dance in full forenoon light,

And the hillocks don the cloaks

of the mirage

Polk offers a long translation with brackets and poetic language. For example, he adds the word "camel" in brackets. His uses of "flickering mirages" and "hills deck themselves in the gown of enveloping heat waves" are very poetic, like the source text.

Sells' translation is more condensed but also a bit archaic. This is evident in his use of "forenoon" instead of morning.

S. Stetkevych's translation also conveys the poetic imagery of the original text. She employs alliteration in the expression "sun's shimmerings."

Verse 54:

أَقْضِي اللُّبَانَةَ لا أُفَرِّطُ رِيبَـةً   أَوْ أَنْ يَلُومَ بِحَاجَةٍ لَوَّامُـهَا

Al-lubāna is a desire. *La Ufarriṭ* is to not get lost.

Polk:

[It is in these circumstances that] I achieve my desire, not thrown off my course by any inner doubt/ Lest backbiters find some reason to cast blame

Sells:

I bring the issue to a close,

not held back by doubt

or by some critic's rummaging around

for something there to blame.

S.S:

I attend my own heart's needs,

not neglecting them for fear

That others will think ill of me

or rebukers blame me.

Polk’s translation is formal and literal. This is clear in several ways. First, he begins with brackets that add a stiffness to the poet’s voice. The second example of formality is his use of the conjunction “lest,” which requires the subjunctive mood. The overall diction is turgid, exemplified in “backbiters” and the phrase “cast blame.” This contrasts with Sells’ and Stetkevych’s translation who use “critics” and “rebukers” respectively and then merely “blame.”

Sells’ translation carries a slightly different meaning in its interpretation than the others. In the first line, he renders the verse as “I bring the issue to a close.” This seems to indicate drawing the end of the issue, which is slightly vaguer and less specified than Polk and Stetkevych who both translate it as the poet attending to his desires or needs. Sells employs repetition as a poetic technique that smoothens the sound.

S. Stetkevych’s translation employs assonance. This is clear in the use of “heart” and then “fear,” which both have an /ear/ sound. She also adds the word “heart” in her translation, as in “I attend my heart’s needs” which is not explicitly present in the original (*Aqḍī al-lubāna*).

Verse 55:

أَوَ لَمْ تَكُنْ تَدْرِي نَوَارُ بِأَنْنِي   وَصَّالُ عَقْدِ حَبَائِلٍ جَذَّامُهَا

Jadhdhām is to cut. The change of tense, a return to the first person and of self-affirmation coinciding with the *fakhr* section, is noteworthy.

Polk:

Or did not Nawar [his beloved of yesteryear] know that I, yes I, The Strongest binder of the knots of affection, am good at breaking them too?

Sells:

Or didn't you know, Nawár,

that I

am one who ties a love knot

and cuts it free?

S.S:

For did Nawār not know

that I am both

He who ties the knits in ropes

and he who cuts them?

Polk's translation is a clear interjection; he reminds us who Nawār was, although in parenthesis. His verse is long and clunky. This is best demonstrated in his literary and archaic use of "yesteryear."

Sells' translation, on the other hand, is short and sweet. He changes the tense from third person to first person, as if the poet himself is directly addressing Nawār, manifested in the pronoun "you." Sells makes use of alliteration in his rendering of "love knot."

S. Stetkevych's translation uses addition as a technique, manifest in the sentence, "that I am both." The addition makes the verse sound more fluent in the target language.

Verse 56:

تَرَّاكُ أَمْكِنَةٍ إِذَا لَمْ أَرْضَـهَا   أَوْ يَعْتَلِقْ بَعْضَ النُّفُوسِ حِمَامُهَا

'Alaqa is he linked, attached or to bonded. *Ḥimām* is demise or death.

Polk:

One ever-ready to quit places that do not please me/ Unless fate chooses to attach a certain soul there.

Sells:

Who abandons a place

that no longer pleases,

unless ill fate cleave

to that some certain self of mine.

S.S:

He who leaves a place

that does not please him,

Unless his own soul's fate

overtakes him there?

Polk's translation switches from third to first person in the same line, from "*one* ever-ready" to "do not please *me.*" This change does not appear to be based on the source language and may puzzle the reader. There is no focus on musicality.

Sells' translation pays attention to the Arabic verse's sound. He rhymes "please" and "cleave." Sells decides to render *al-nufūs* as "self of mine" rather than the more conventional translation of soul, which usually takes on a spiritual element, perhaps remaining consciousness of the largely paganistic environment of the Jāhiliyya.

S. Stetkevych's translation maintains the tense: third person. Her lines are short and roughly the same number of syllables, five to six. She is interested in sound, employing assonance in her use of "own, soul and overtake."

Verse 57:

بَلْ أَنْتِ لا تَدْرِينَ كَمْ مِن لَيْلَةٍ   طَلْقٍ لَذِيذٍ لَهْوُهَا وَنِدَامُـهَا

Ṭalq is mild.

Polk:

Nay! You [silly woman] do not know how many a night, Whose diversions and companionship were bountiful and delightful

Sells:

You don't know, no,

how many nights,

bright-faced with drinking company

and delicious entertainment

S.S:

And don't you know how many a night

mild in its weather,

Delightful in its sport

and in its revelry,

The Arabic word *ṭalq* divides all three translators under review. Polk translates it as "bountiful," Sells as "bright-faced," and Stetkevych "as mild in its weather."

Polk's translation employs archaic in the first word, rendering the Arabic *bal* to the Middle English "Nay." He places the phrase "silly woman" in brackets, taking a free interpretation at the tone of the original, which he assumes is condescending, or at least belittles the intelligence of Nawār.

Sells' translation is a play on words, notably "know" and "no," so perhaps more aptly put, a sound play. His quatrain verse is typically terse.

S. Stetkevych's translation is the most confusing to follow, or perhaps more aptly, the freest in its interpretation. It is difficult to imagine for the non-Arabist how a word such as *ṭalq* can mean the entire phrase "mild in its weather." Yet the fact that one word can convey an entire sentence comes as no surprise.

Verse 58:

قَدْ بِتُّ سَامِرَهَا وَغَايَةَ تَاجِرٍ وَافَيْتُ إِذْ رُفِعَتْ وَعَزَّ مُدَامُهَا

Sāmir is the one who spends a night talking to drinking companions. *Ghāya* is a banner. *Mudām* is wine.

Polk: Have I spent in night-long conversation at the sign of the merchant / [Yea] I have visited when the wine was proclaimed to be rare and dear,

Sells:

I have spent in talk! Showing up

at the innkeeper's banner

at the moment it is raised

when the wine is choice

S.S:

I spent as its convivial, and rushed

to many a merchant's banner

When it was raised

and the price of wine was high?

Polk's translation is framed as a question but does not include the correction punctuation: a question mark! *Qad* can be translated as a question, in that I may have or could have, but the verb following it would have to be in the present tense, the *muḍār'a.* When *qad* is followed by a past tense verb, as in this instance where it is followed by *bitt,* then it acts as an equivalent to the perfect "have/has." As in, "I have spent." The translation is a literal rendering of the original with a focus on wordplay and sound, as in the English "rare and dear."

In Sells' translation, he emphasizes the completed action with the use of an exclamation point. His use of "innkeeper" is both literary and archaic, as opposed to Polk and Stetkevych's typical translation of *tājir* as "merchant." The line "when the wine is choice," also reads unconventionally, awkwardly even. A smoother translation would simply have been "When the wine is selected or chosen," but Sells opts for a rendering that tries to maintain the idiosyncrasies of the original and the language of the time.

S. Stetkevych's translation also employs a question mark, this time in the last verse, as in "the price of wine was high?" Why she asks a question that is not immediately clear in the source language is perplexing. But her translation strives to reflect the original language, opting for an unconventional usage of convivial as a noun, when it is more often used as an adjective in contemporary language to describe an atmosphere, event, or person. Her interpretation of merchant is one that suggests the poet Labīd visited many merchants, even if the use in the original is just in the singular *tājir* and not the plural, *tujjār.*

Verse 59:

أُغْلِي السِّبَاءَ بكُلِّ أَدْكَنَ عَاتِقٍ   أَوْ جَوْنَةٍ قُدِحَتْ وَفُضَّ خِتَامُهَا

Al-sibā' are the wine buyers. *Adkan* is sand-colored, dusty, ashen. *'Ātiq* is pure. *Jawna* is a blackened jar with tar-stains. *Qudiḥa* is he scooped out of. *Fuḍḍa* is he broke. *Khitām* is clay that stays closed.

Polk:

I bid up the price of the wine in every blackened aging skin / Or tar-smeared pot whose seal had been roached and deflowered

Sells:

Paying any price for every vintage

aged in blackened skins

and tar-smeared jugs,

seals broken.

S.S:

I paid a dear price for a well-aged wine,

in a darkened wineskin

Or in a pitch-lined jug, ladled into cups,

its seal broken.

Polk's translation is so foreign that it is nearly incomprehensible to the non-specialist who cannot help but ask, even after following along the entire poem, what is now happening? The most jarring pairing of words comes in the line "whose seal has been roached and deflowered." The word "deflowering" evokes the dated literary usage of a woman who has been deprived of her virginity. Perhaps Polk is using personification for rhetorical impact, but the intention is unclear since he has seldom done so above.

Sells' translation takes the form of a verbal noun, the gerund, in his use of "paying." The original Arabic verb *ughli* is a passive, as indicated by the domma, the short vowel *u* sound.

S. Stetkevych's translation, on the other hand, is in the past tense. It reads similarly to Sells but slightly more literal and direct translating, for example, rendering "'*Ātiq*" as well-aged wine and not just as vintage.

Verse 60:

بِصَبُوحِ صَافِيَةٍ وَجَذْبِ كَرِينَةٍ   بِمُوَتَّرٍ تَأْتَالُهُ إِبْهَامُهَا

Ṣabuḥ is wine drank in the morning. *Karīna* is a lute-playing slave girl. *Tā'tā'la* is to he treated or adjusted.

Polk:

With many a morning, limpid [draught] and the plucking of the singing girl/ On a lute as her thumb adjusts the string.

Sells:

For a pure morning draught

and the play of a singing girl

upon her lute, fingers slipping

softly across the strings.

S.S:

And many a morning draught of a pure wine

and a slave girl with a lute,

Plucking with her thumb

On its taut strings

Polk's translation is literal while also making room for some interpretation. He also employs some British vocabulary with the noun "draught," albeit in parenthesis. This means the amount swallowed in a single act of drinking. He does not translate *karīnat* as its

literal definition of the “slave-girl playing a lute” but merely as a singing girl. He also changes the order from the original verse, placing plucking [of the singing girl] which corresponds to the verb *tā’tā’lu,* or to treat, before the noun singing girl. Sells also follows this order.

However, Sells’ translation employs typical poetic techniques such as alliteration. This is clear in the line “fingers slipping softly across the string.”

S. Stetkevych’s translation uses sophisticated vocabulary in her translation of *muwattar*, which she renders as “taut.”

Verse 61:

بَادَرْتُ حَاجَتَها الدَّجَاجَ بِسُحْرَةٍ   لأَعُلَّ مِنْهَا حِينَ هَبَّ نِيَامُهَا

Bādara is he took the initiative before the sun rose. *Al-‘ilal* is drinking one after another.

Polk:

I hasten to satisfy the need of her while the cock crows at first light, / In order that I might drink a second round while the night’s sleepers rouse themselves.

Sells:

Rising early to outstrip

the rooster’s morning call

for a second round that quenches

when sleepers just begin to stir.

S.S:

Theme II: The Poet's Battle-Mare

My first cup I downed before the cock

could crow in daybreak,

To take a second when

its sleepers woke.

Polk's translation is, at times, literal but also strives for a contemporary rendering. He uses the typical poetic technique of alliteration in the line, "cock crows." Polk also employs assonance in the phrasing "second round." Yet he is literal in that he even mimics the pronouns of the original instead of striving for an interpretation that would make more sense to modern readers. For example, he translates *bādartu ḥājatahā* as "I hasten to satisfy the need of her." The clearer interpretation—which Sells and Stetkevych both account for in their respective translations—is that the poet, speaking in the first person, wakes up early to drink before the crowing of the rooster. I might have translated it as "I arose before dawn to drink before the cock's crow."

Sells uses a poetic technique that pays attention to sound: assonance. This is clear in “rooster’s morning,” and “second round.” The use of “sleepers,” as a noun rather than the more common “people sleeping,” is an interesting choice reflecting a desire to adhere to the original and to render the translation both foreign and literary.

S. Stetkevych’s translation is akin to Sells in its contemporary language, alliteration, and the brevity of lines. Stetkevych employs colloquial language in the use of “downing,” referring to swallowing a drink. She also employs alliteration creatively in the line “cock could crow,” by using cock instead of a rooster.

Verse 62:

وَغَدَاةَ رِيحٍ قَدْ وَزَعْتُ وَقَرَّةٍ قَدْ أَصْبَحَتْ بِيَدِ الشَّمَالِ زِمَامُهَا

Ghadāa is what is between dawn and the rising of the sun. *Waza’a* means he restrained, curbed, kept in check. *Al-shamāl* is the coldest wind but literally the north wind.

Poem:

And how many a morning of wind and cold have I withstood

As I entered upon the dawn with its reins in the hand of

The Norther!

Sells:

On how many a cold and windy morning

have I held steady

as the reins fall

into the hands of the north wind

Stetkevych:

And many a bitter morn of wind and cold

I curbed,

When its reins were in the hand

of the north wind

Polk mysteriously reverses the translation of lines 61 and 63, perhaps erroneously. In any case, in the above, we read his rendering of the line (which is line 61 in the original *qaṣīda*).

Regarding Polk's translation, he employs a free interpretation. For example, in English, there appears no easy equivalent of *ghadāa,* the period between dawn and the rising of the sun. Instead of writing out this lengthy expression, Polk, just as Sells, opts for the simpler "morning." Surely, some of the nuance in the original text is lost, but the meaning is smoothly conveyed.

S. Stetkevych's translation tries to follow the same structure as the original poem. This is evident in the line "And many a bitter morn of wind and cold" where cold, or *waqarra,* is

the last word in the line. She opts for some colloquialism in the rendering of the morning as "morn."

Verse 63:

وَلَقَدْ حَمَيْتُ الحَيَّ تَحْمِلُ شِكَّتِي   فُرُطٌ وِشَاحِي إِذْ غَدَوْتُ لِجَامُهَا

Al-shikka is a weapon. *Furuṭ* is a fast mare.

Polk:

[But, while I thus enjoyed myself, know you that] I had already
protected the clan, my weapons being carried by
A fleet mare whose bridle was my girdle as I entered upon the
morning.

Sells:

Tribe-defender,
sword on a fiery steed,
my cross-sash her bridle,
riding out at dawn

S.S:

I defended the tribe, my battle gear borne
by a winning courser,

Her reins my sash when I

went forth at down.

Polk's translation is verbose, introduced by brackets that make up more than ten syllables. Polk's diction is also literary. This is evident in the rendering of "fleet" as in fast and nimble. This verb was used prior by Sells but not for the same word (see line 24). Polk opts for bridle instead of sash.

Sells' translation strives for simplicity. We see this in his choice to render the verbal structure of the Arabic *wa-laqad ḥamayt al-ḥayy* into the noun "tribe-defender" instead of the more literal "I defended the tribe."

S. Stetkevych's translation strives for the formal or literal. This is most obvious in her use of "borne," the past participle of bore, as in displaying a mark or feature. She could simply have opted for "wore" which seems to correspond to the Arabic word ḥamīt most simply. This specific choice reflects a conscious attitude of the author.

Verse 64:

فَعَلَوْتُ مُرْتَقَباً عَلَى ذِي هَبْوَةٍ   حَرِجٍ إِلَى أَعْلاَمِهِنَّ قَتَامُهَا

Murtaqab is a high place, a vantage point. *Ḥarij* means narrow. *A'lām* are way marks. *Qatām* is dust.

Polk:

Then I went up to a vantage point [where I could look out over]

the scene of the sandstorm

Whose dust lay thick over the waymarkers.

Sells:

To climb to a vantage point

over a close-walled gorge

hidden in dust,

dust covering the way-marks.

Stetkevych:

Then I mounted a lookout post

on a narrow, wind-blown peak

Whose dust rose to the banners

of the foe.

This is an example where the three translators render three entirely different images of the original Arabic.

Polk's translation is simple to follow. He uses brackets to interpolate his understanding that the poet has climbed up to the vantage point to look out. There he sees a scene of a sandstorm, which he translates from *dhi habwa* into "where the dust covers the posts."

Sells' translation is more specific. Instead of rendering *dhi habwa* as sandstorm, he renders it as "a close-walled gorge."

S. Stetkevych's translation is just as specific to Sells, but she translates *dhi habwa* as a "narrow, wind-blown peak." It seems clear from these translations that the cultural equivalent cannot be found in one word, hence the translators' attempts with descriptions. What sticks out in this translation is the use of "foe," as in enemy, employed in literary language tracing back to Shakespeare. From where in the original does Stetkevych find foe? This is not clear, not even in the *Muʿallaqāt for Millennials'* commentary.

Verse 65:

حَتَّى إِذَا أَلْقَتْ يَدَاً في كَافِرٍ   وَأَجَنَّ عَوْرَاتِ الثُّغُورِ ظَلامُهَا

Kāfir is night. *Ājann* is to cover.

Polk:

Until, when [the sun] casts her hand into the dimness,

And the dark shadows conceal the gaps in the surrounding hills,

Sells:

The sun's hand dropped

into thickening darkness,

the mouths of the ridge passage

concealed in veils of shadow.

S.S:

Until when daylight dipped its hand into

the all-concealing night

And darkness veiled the crotches of

each mountain pass,

Polk's translation is literal with his usual hesitance to interpret without brackets. Thus, Polk inserts "sun" in brackets which is not explicit in the original.

Sells' translation employs free interpretation that is highly evocative. As such, he translates *kāfir* as "thickening darkness," when it could simply be translated as night.

S. Stetkevych employs poetic language through alliteration in the example "daylight dipped."

Verse 66:

أَسْهَلْتُ وَانْتَصَبَت كَجِذْعِ مُنِيفَةٍ جَرْدَاءَ يَحْصَرُ دُونَهَا جُرَّامُهَا

Munīfa is high. *Jardā'* are a scarcity of fronds. *Ḥaṣara* means he grew tired, short of breath. *Jurrām* are date-pickers.

Polk:

I come down onto the plain [where my mare] stood as erect as the trunk of a high-soaring [palm tree]

Stripped smooth of its fronds, daunting the would-be climbers

Sells:

I descended to the plain,

mare standing like a palm ,

smooth, towering trunk

thwarting the date cutters

S.S

To the plain I descended and my mare

held erect her neck

Like the date palm's stripped

the picker's courage fails.

Polk's translation, this time, is not literal but a form of free interpretation. This clearly manifests in the word *yaḥṣaru* which can translate literally as he becomes short of breath. The real meaning, however, is that the pickers of dates, the climbers, are unwilling to climb a tree with few fronds. This is how Polk interprets the text, which makes sense in the context.

Sells’ translation is like Polk’s but makes more use of the poetic device of alliteration, such as in “plain palm” and “trunk thwarting.”

S. Stetkevych’s translation interpolates but arrives at a similar meaning to Polk and Sells. For example, the verb *antṣabat* is translated as “held erect her neck.” The verb traditionally means to hold erect, but Stetkevych goes a step further providing an additional interpretation, albeit a logical one. There is one more point worthy of discussion. Does *yaḥṣaru* reflect the date-pickers state or rather the state of the trees which hold the dates? In other words, are the date-pickers daunted, fearful, lacking courage because of the few fruits, or are these emotional terms not attached to the verb, and can be rendered with the more neutral thwarted (as Sells interprets)?

Verse 67:

رَفَّعْتُهَا طَرَدَ النَّعَامِ وَشَلَّهُ حَتَّى إِذَا سَخِنَتْ وَخَفَّ عِظَامُهَا

Raff‘a is he charged, ordered. *Shallhu* is [hunting] game or catch.

Polk:

I drove [my mare] into a run like the dash of the ostrich

and [the race] made [the sweat] pour forth

Until, when she was screaming hot, and her very bones were light

and nimble,

Sells:

I drove her on to the pace of an ostrich

and faster,

until she grew hot

and her bones softened

S.S:

I spurred her to a speed

fit for the ostrich chase,

Until when she was heated through

and her bones were nimble,

Polk's translation is verbose because of the many uses of brackets. It appears that he also repeats an idea that is only found once in the original Arabic text. For example, the word *sakhinat* means she grew hot but Polk renders it as she "made [the sweat] pour forth" and then again, in the next line, as "until, when she was screaming hot."

Sells' translation is marked by its brevity and the repetition of prepositions that mark each line. Notably, he starts lines two, three and four with "and, until, and." This is akin to Polk (and to the original Arabic) but Sells' translation reads smoother as a result of the few

amount of syllables used per line. He also has a free interpretation adding, “and faster,” which is how he likely interpreted the word *shallhu.*

S. Stetkevych’s translation is also marked by brevity and the use of the poetic technique of alliteration. This manifests in the use of “spurred and speed.” She translates *shallhu* as chase, as in the ostrich’s chase.

Verse 68:

قَلِقَتْ رِحَالَتُها وَأَسْبَلَ نَحْرُهَا وَابْتَلَّ مِن زَبَدِ الحَمِيمِ حِزَامُهَا

Qaliqa means he moved, stirred. *Riḥāla* is a light saddle composed of sheep’s skin. *Asbala naḥruhā* means is it rained or poured on her chest area. *Al-ḥamīm* is sweat.

Polk:

Her light riding pad slipped to and fro and her throat foamed

and her girth was drenched from the froth of her sweat

Sells:

Saddle sliding

as her neck poured sweat,

girth strap drenched

in hot foam.

S.S:

Her light leathern saddle slipped

sweat flowed from her neck

And her saddle girth

Was soaked with froth

Polk's translation is literal, descriptive, and lengthy with nuanced differences from other translations. He translates *naḥr,* which Sells and Stetkevych translate as neck, as "throat" and *al-ḥamīm* as "foam," which is a strange rendering, as opposed to sweat, which is how Sells and Stetkevych translate the word.

Sells' concise translation employs a musical cadence through alliteration and assonance. For example, he translates "saddle slipping," and "hot foam," with the /o/ sound resonating. He translates rather literally. For example, instead of describing the saddle, *riḥāla*, by its physical qualities as a light riding saddle or light leathern as Polk and Stetkevych do he merely translates it as a saddle which coincides with his previous ethos of brevity, but which lacks the descriptive features that sometimes characterize his treatment.

S. Stetkevych's translation is also concise albeit more descriptive than Sells. In the first line, she heavily employs alliteration as in "light leathern" and "saddle slipped." Her translation has a heavy /s/ sound throughout with words such as "sweat," "saddle" and

“soaked" in each line. She translates *asbala* as flowed which adds poetic imagery of sweat flowing almost like a river.

Verse 69:

تَرْقَى وَتَطْعَنُ في الْعِنَانِ وَتَنْتَحِي   وِرْدَ الْحَمَامَةِ إِذْ أَجَدَّ حَمَامُهَا

Tarqā means she raised her head. *Taṭʻana fī al-ʻinān* means to stretched in the reins attached to a horse. *Antaḥā* means he leaned on.

Polk:

[Then] she roused herself [still further] and lanced forth,

throwing herself against the reins,

Like the flying to water of a [stray] dove when the flock

doubles its pace

Sells:

Head raised, she stretched

in the bridle, and veered

like a water-bound pigeon

when the flock surges

S.S:

She coursed, head held high and thrusting

in the bridle, racing headlong

Like a thirsting dove to water when

her flock beats urgent wings.

Polk's translation abounds with brackets and literalism. He translates *tarqā* as "roused" which corresponds to a literal translation as opposed to a free interpretation that might interpret the poet is describing the horse's head movement as Sells and Stetkevych interpret below. It is interesting to note how Polk prefers reins for *al-ʻinān* rather than the more common bridle.

Sells' translation has a similar number of syllables per line (5-7). He also employs some alliteration as in "she stretched" and assonance with the /ed/ sound as in "stretched" and "veered."

S. Stetkevych's translation employs literary archaic words, as well as alliteration, and is slightly longer than Sells. For example, she uses "thirsting" for *wirida* which is also literal. In addition, she employs significant alliteration with "head held high" and the play on words with "thrusting" and later "thirsting."

Verse 70:

وَكَثِيرَةٍ غُرَبَاؤُهَا مَجْهُولَةٍ   تُرْجَى نَوَافِلُهَا وَيُخْشَى ذَامُهَا

Nawāfil are gifts. *Dhām* are defects, faults.

Polk:

And in many an [assembly at the court of a prince], the foreigners of which are unknown,

Whose bountiful gifts are coveted and whose blame is feared

Sells:

How many strangers

In how many an unruly mob

where gains are sought,

blame feared

S.S: Theme III: The Poet's Authority and Generosity among the Tribes

And in many a chief's domed tent,

where unknown strangers sojourn

In hope of favor

and of displeasure fear,

Polk's translation interjects to the point of providing commentary within the translation. For example, in the first line, brackets are used to add the following idea of an assembly at the court of a prince. Of note is also how Polk translates *ghurbā'* as "foreigners" and not strangers. His translation is literal. For example, he translates *nawāfil* as "gifts" when it

could be rendered more as favors and not as literal gifts. His use of the word “coveted” is also quite literary since it is not a prevalent word.

Sells’ translation makes use of repetition for poetic effect. For example, his short stanza repeats twice “how many.” This seems to play with the sound of the original Arabic which twice employs a *tanwín* or nunation of a double *kasra* as in *kathiratin* and *majhūlatin.*

S. Stetkevych’s translation is descriptive and literary in its use of alliteration. She also provides a sort of additional commentary (without the use of brackets) in her first line which reads “in many a chief’s domed tent,” painting an evocative image. It is noteworthy how all translators interpret the last line *yukhshā dhāmuhā* as “fear blamed.”

Verse 71:

غُلْبٌ تَشَذَّرُ بِالذُّخُولِ كَأَنَّهَا   جِنُّ الْبَدِيّ رَوَاسِيَاً أَقْدَامُـهَا

Ghulb is rough necked. *Tashadhhara* means he threatened. *Dhukhuwil* are resentments, grudges. *Al-badiyy* is a valley near the land of the poets.

Polk:

A rough and rowdy crowd, as quick to spring in anger to

Vengeance as though they were

Jinn of the desert, whose feet stride forth proudly.

Sells:

Lion-necked, threat-spewing,

Demanding blood,

as if they were desert jinn,

feet anchored in stone

S.S:

There were men, burly-necked, lionlike,

braced for revenge,

Planting their feet in the ground

Like the Jinn of Badi.

Polk's translation employs additions and alliterations. The addition is evident in the first line where he renders *ghulb* as rough and rowdy (both an addition since the commentary says this word is to describe a burly neck and an alliteration). Polk's translation renders *al-badiyy* as a "desert" when it is described in the commentary as a wadi, two quite different topographical settings. He also translates *rawāsī* as to "stride forth" whereas the two other translators rendered it as "planted" or "anchored," a quite different interpretation as well. Here, we once again see how the slightest nuance in interpretation makes all the difference.

Sells' translation is punchy, with four to seven syllables for each line. He makes heavy use of the hyphen to link words that have a combined meaning. Take, for example, "lion-necked," and "threat-spewing" in the first line. The second line, "demanding blood," also follows a sort of punchy ring. The translation is a bit redundant but perhaps so is the original Arabic, with the words *tashadhhar* and *dhukhuwil* both conveying feelings of anger, grudge, threat, resentment. It is in this context that Sells' rendering "threat-spewing, demanding blood," makes sense, evoking blood vengeance tradition[118] that is part of the pre-Islam Sitz em Leben (literally: seat in life, location in life). Sells' also translates *al-badiyy* as desert.

S. Stetkevych's translation is concise and punchy but also aimed at the specialist. She uses alliteration with the word "lionlike." She changes the order from the original Arabic, switching the English order of lines three and four that would correspond to Labīd's poem. For example, *jinn al-badiyy* comes before *rawāsīan aqdāmuhā* in the original, but not in Stetkevych's rendering. Here she does not bother to culturally translate the text into the target language of the reader but merely leaves it as "Jinn of Badi." The Arabic commentary explains, but the non-Arabic reader does not access this.

Verse 72:

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[118] Many scholars have written about the topic of blood vengeance in pre-Islam including on the most famous poem on the topic the semi-anonymous Rithā' of Ta'bbaṭa Sharran. See Chapter 2, Eating the Dead/ The Dead Eating: Blood Vengeance as Sacrifice and Chapter 5, The Obligations and Poetics of Gender: Women's Elegy and Blood Vengeance in Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak*; Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, "Ritual and Sacrificial Elements in the Poetry of Blood-Vengeance: Two Poems by Durayd Ibn al-Simmah and Muhalhil Ibn Rabīʿah," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 1986;William Robertson Smith, *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia* (A. & C. Black, 1903).

أَنْكَرْتُ بَاطِلَهَا وَبُؤْتُ بِحَقِّهَا   عِنْدِي وَلَمْ يَفْخَرْ عَلَيَّ كِرَامُهَا

Bu'a means he turned towards.

Polk:

I, Labid, denied their boastful vanity and affirmed the right,

According to my opinions. Nor did their nobles best me in

artistic boasting.

Sells:

Have I given the lie

in what they claimed,

affirming my share of right,

lorded over by no prince of theirs.

S.S:

Their false claims I denied,

their due rights recognized

And no nobleman among them could vaunt

his glory over me.

Polk's literal translation carries a stilted tone and injects Labīd literally in the verse. The line begins "I, Labid." Nor, a conjunction, typically cannot be used to start a sentence as it

does in Polk's rendering, e.g. "Nor did…" If it does begin a sentence, it is usually more conversational in nature, as in responding to a statement. It also sounds more formal. The use is meant to express the *wa lam* of the Arabic, a sort of connection to what came before. "Best me" strikes me as uncommon but is an informal usage. Sound does not appear to be considered.

Sells' quatrain translation reads as archaic. This is evidenced by the first line "Have I given the line." We are left befuddled about the punctuation. Is the tone not in the interrogative? In any case, the translation consists of relatively short syllables until the last line, which is nine syllables. He takes three lines to translate the hemistich (*shaṭar*) instead of evenly dividing the *bayt* two lines by two lines as typically did. The verb "lorded over" is a rendering of *wa-lam yafkhar 'alayya* and is a rather literary rendering since "lorded over" is not common.

S. Stetkevych's translation employs repetition and is perhaps the most literal but also the most readable. She follows the original Arabic almost word for word with some slight additions that all translators use, such as "nobleman," which Polk renders as nobles, and Sells as prince. She repeats "their" twice and uses alliteration as in "rights recognized." This is an interpretation of the Arabic *bu't,* which does not mean literally to turn but accompanies the noun of *bi-ḥaqqahā* or their rights. Sells turns this into the first person, "my share of right," and Stetkevych keeps it in the original third person and pluralizes it.

Verse 73:

وَجَزُورِ أَيْسَارٍ دَعَوْتُ لِحَتْفِهَا   بِمَغَالِقٍ مُتَشَابِـهٍ أَجْسَامُـهَا

Jazuwir are the parts of the camel that are considered proper for slaughter. *Āysār* are the gamblers. *Liḥataf* is destruction or damnation. *Maghāliq* are the arrows for gambling.

Polk:

And how many a she-camel, the prize of the arrow-gamblers,

have I called to her death

By means of arrows, the shafts of which are indistinguishable

Sells:

How many times have I called

for a *máysir* slaughter

and the gaming lots

of notched arrow shafts.

S.S:

And many a gambling-camel,

its death I called for

By the fate-sealing arrows whose shafts

Look all alike,

Polk's translation is verbose, literal, and precise. For example, he translates *jazuwiri* as "she-camel," instead of merely a camel. *Āysār* is rendered as arrow-gamblers. The use of the six-syllable word "indistinguishable" for *mutashābihin ajsāmuhā* is a concise way of conveying the meaning.

Sells' translation is an expression of cultural rigidity in that he confronts the reader with the difference of *maysirin,* a very common and much written about term in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry.[119] He is the only translator not to translate this word, which reflects a conscious decision.

S. Stetkevych's translator is formal and archaic. She starts with the fixed expression "many a" which is used to indicate a large number of something. It is more formal than the single word many, and much less common. The translation reflects the nuances of its original milieu with words such as "fate-sealing arrows" and "shafts" that accurately describe Labīd's diction. Indeed, the game of *maysir* has been likened to a game of fate, another major topos of pre-Islam, and Stetkevych manages to squeeze this in, rendered as "fate-sealing." She also uses alliteration, with her usual attention to sound, in the phrase "all alike."

Verse 74:

[119] Many articles have been written on *maysir.* See, for example, Nadia Jamil, "Playing for Time: Maysir-Gambling in Early Arabic Poetry," in *Islamic Reflections, Arabic Musings: Studies in Honour of Alan Jones*, Gibb Memorial Trust, 2004, 48-90.

أَدْعُو بِهِنَّ لِعَاقِرٍ أَوْ مُطْفِلٍ   بُذِلَتْ لِجِيرَانِ الجَمِيعِ لِحَامُهَا

'Āqir is a sterile she-camel. *Mutfil* is a she-camel with children.

Polk:

I call them forth [without caring whether they be] barren or

pregnant.

Their meat is given freely to the clients of the group,

Sells:

Calling the throw

For a calfless or nursing mate

The portions parceled out

To all the client clans

S.S:

Summoning the arrows to gamble for a she-camel,

barren or with foal,

Whose meat we will bestow on all whom we

have granted refuge.

Polk's translation is direct and straightforward. It sounds almost colloquial in the line "I call them forth [without caring whether they be] barren or pregnant." Barren is a translation of *'āqir,* which Stetkevych mirrors. Of course, brackets are used to show a clear difference in his interpretation versus the literalness of the verse.

Sells' translation is a boastful display of alliteration. Alliteration marks the entire translation with displays in each line, e.g., "calling calfless," "portions parceled," "client clans." The choice is not arbitrary (nothing is arbitrary for the translator) but exhibits careful attention to the sound of the original, which is marked in this *bayt* by its vowel (*kasra)* sounds, in addition to its nunation of a double *kasra* as in *'āqir* and *muṭfil.* The word calf less is typically two words but Sells, in his typical jocular style, brings them together.

S. Stetkevych's translation is characterized by its precision and the symmetric breakup of poetic units. By employing her typical quatrain form, she first renders a long line, followed by a short line, followed by a long line, concluding with a short line. She uses the extremely precise word foal, which refers to a young horse or related animal, in this case, the young she-camel. The verb *budhilat* is rendered as "bestow," which is another precise rendering, since bestow is used typically for honors or gifts, and that is precisely what the camel meat serves as in this context. There is a sort of assonance in the third line with the /e/ sound as in "meat we will bestow" and alliteration with "whom we."

Verse 75:

فَالضَّيْفُ وَالجَارُ الَجَنِيبُ كَأَنَّمَا   هَبَطَا تَبَالَةَ مُخْصِباً أَهْضَامُهَا

Tabāla is a wadi known for its lusciousness. *Ahḍām* is what came down from the earth.

Polk:

And the guest and the neighbor from afar [are treated] as though

Descending to the lush meadows of Tabalah

Sells:

Distant clients and guests

as if they'd come down

to Tabála

where valleys are green

S.S:

Then for the guest and for the foreign refugee

it is as if

They had descended to the Tablāh Valley

Polk's translation is short and straightforward like the Arabic verse. He is literal and uses brackets to add his own interpretation as in "treated." For Tabāla*,* he adds the adjective "lush" and the noun meadows to describe Tabāla just as described in the source text, as *mukhṣiba,* or fertile.

Sells' translation is an act of open translation while still adhering to the source's meaning. He renders *jār* as clients rather than the literal neighbors (such as Polk) and *ḍayif* as the literal guest.

S. Stetkevych's translation is a twist on contemporary times, a not-so-subtle demonstration of the poem's resonance today. This is expressed in her use of "foreign refugee," a modern term birthed out of the 1951 Refugee Convention. It is interesting as well how Stetkevych displays a rarer playfulness, leaving "it is as if" as a sort of one line suspender—it is a simple translation of the metaphoric conjunction *ka-annahā.* At the same time, we see a return to the academic convention with the proper transliteration of Tablāh, as in Tablāh Valley. It is interesting how this term is also rendered as a proper noun (which it obviously is) but with the correct English grammar in its capitalization, which surely grabs the reader's eye. In addition, she does not add that this valley is fertile, *mukhṣiba,* which is included in the original text! Instead, Stetkevych keeps it as is, as though it should already be assumed to the reader, or gained from reading the Arabic commentary, that this is luscious. Therefore, we see a free interpretation, the omission of an original word in the source text, which is the opposite of Polk's literal approach.

Verse 76:

تأوِي إِلى الأَطْنَابِ كُلُّ رَذِيَّـةٍ   مِثْلُ الْبَلِيَّةِ قَالِـصٌ أَهْدَامُـهَا

Aṭnāb are tent ropes. *Radhiyya* is an emaciated she-camel with a default used by the poor and widows. *Al-baliyya* is the she-camel who drags the grave of its owner until it also dies. *Qāliṣ* is short. *Ahdām* are shabby clothes.

Polk:

Every diseased, exhausted, and famished woman came seeking

asylum at the tent ropes,

Like the camel, tethered to starve over the grave of her

master, shrunken inside the folds of its skin

Sells:

Seeking refuge among the tent ropes,

weary as a stumbling camel,

weary as a ghost mare,

white-humped, left to die

S.S:

Every indigent woman, emaciated, rag-clad

like a starved she-camel hobbled at her

Seeks the refuge

of my tents.

Polk's translation is verbose corresponding to the source text which abounds with meanings. It follows the structure of the source text and uses sophisticated, sometimes literary words to render the meaning. For example, Polk uses "tethered to starve" for the inferred meaning *al-baliyya.* However, he interprets *radhiyya* as an adjective describing the women seeking asylum.

Sells' translation makes use of repetition for poetic effect. For example, he repeats "weary" twice, and uses alliteration with the choice "white." It is also an extremely rich rendering of a text already so abundant with meaning. He interprets *qāliṣ* presumably as "white-humped," very differently from Stetkevych and Polk who both render it as a sort of shortness. Sells' translation is a very free interpretation. For example, he uses "mare" to describe the she-camel and describes it as a ghost, along the lines of whiteness. This goes back to the idea of *radhiyya and al-baliyya,* adjectives that describe different she-camels.

S. Stetkevych's translation plays with the order of the source text flipping the first three words of the first line to the end of her translation. Thus, *tāwīyy al-aṭnāb* is rendered in the end as "seeks the refuge of my tents." It is interesting how Stetkevych personalizes the tents and returns the voice to the first-person (as if the poet is speaking).

Verse 77:

وَيُكَلِّلُونَ إِذَا الرِّيَاحُ تَنَاوَحَتْ   خُلُجاً تُمَدُّ شَوَارِعاً أَيْتَامُـهَا

Tanāwaḥa means he faced or met someone. *Khuluja* means he collapsed, sunk.

Polk:

And they fill to overflowing, when the winds howl from all sides,

[Bowls like] ditches to which the orphans descend to drink.

Sells:

They show up when the winds wail,

The weak of kin,

the broken kin, the orphaned,

to be given an equal's share

S.S:

When winter's winds wail back and forth

her orphans plunge

Into streams of flowing gravy which

my clan crowns with meat.

It is hard to analyze each translator's fidelity of this line because of the divergence of interpretations. Since we relied on Stetkevych's commentary for interpretation, it would be impartial to assume *a priori* that her translation is most correct. This is perhaps the starkest example of this challenge in the entire poem.

Polk's translation is literal. For example, he interprets *aytām* literally as orphans. He also interprets the *bayt* as an Arab feast so rich in gravy that it resembles a "ditch to which the orphans descend to drink."

Sells' translation employs alliteration and repetition. For example, he repeats "kin" (a reference to his fellow tribesman and an addition from the Arabic). He uses alliteration in the sentence "winds wail," just like Stetkevych.

S. Stetkevych's translation relies heavily on alliteration. We see this in the line "winter's winds wail" and "clan crowns." The expression *tumaddu shawāri'an* is obscure and Stetkevych fails to provide commentary. We can infer that it has been translated as the long two lines "into streams of flowing gravy which my clan crowns with meat." This translation is very different from Sells in meaning and more closely resembles Polk in its description of the gravy as very rich.

Verse 78:

إِنَّا إِذَا الْتَقَتِ الْمَجَامِعُ لَمْ يَزَلْ   مِنَّا لِزَازُ عَظِيمَـةٍ جَشَّامُـهَا

Al-majāmi' are gatherings of a tribe. *Lizāz 'aẓīma* is the person who gets involved in grave matters to conquer them. *Jashām* is the one who takes on a burden.[120]

[120] In this verse, the poet speaks of us and one of us in the objectivizing rhetoric of the third person plural, e.g., *innā* and *minnā* (indeed we … one of us). See: Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak*, 40.

Polk:

Ah! *We,* when the tribal hosts gather, there is never lacking

Among us a champion, contentious in great affairs, one ever

ready to follow through in painful matters,

Sells:

There is yet among us

When the council meets,

one who seizes the moment,

who takes on the burden.

Stetkevych: Theme IV: The Poet's Tribe: Its Authority, Might, Generosity, and Loyalty

When tribal councils gather

There is always one of us

Who contends in grave affairs

and shoulders them,

Polk's translation is verbose. In terms of meaning, it says something equivalent to Sells but with more words. Here Polk tries to be creative by employing both an exclamation mark

and italics. His translation of *lam yazal* as “never lacking” is literal. We clearly understand the tribal virtues subject to Labīd’s boasts.

Sells’ translation is brief, literal and employs repetition. For example, he repeats “who” twice, which seems to reflect the Arabic *lam yazal*. There is a consistency of syllables in each line (between five and seven).

S. Stetkevych’s translation is also concise and playful. She changes the order of the original verse, switching the structure of the first hemistich (*shaṭar*) which, if rendered with strict adherence to the literal would read: “There is always one of us when tribal councils gather.”

Verse 79:

وَمُقَسِّمٌ يُعْطِي الْعَشِيرَةَ حَقَّهَا   وَمُغَذْمِرٌ لِحُقُوقِهَا هَضَّامُهَا

Mughadhmir is to bump into one another. *Haḍḍām* is unjust.

Polk:

And an arbitrator who gives each clan its due,

And one who jungles up the [contending] rights and scales

them down [so that all can be satisfied].

Sells:

Who divides and assigns,

Who raises high the rights of some,

others,

driving into the ground,

Stetkevych

A divider of spoils who gives

each clan its due,

Demanding their rights for the worthy,

the rights of the worthless refusing

Polk's translation is characteristically literal and full of brackets. For example, he translates *muqasim* as an arbitrator. The most literal example is his translation of *mughadhmir* as "who jungles up the [contending] rights and scales them down." Yet this idea misses *haḍḍām* as the unjust. Therefore, the arbitrator of the tribe is not only "satisfying all" as Polk claims but demanding rights for the worthy and refusing the rights of the unjust, or the *haḍḍām*.

Sells' translation brings in sound, continuing the repetition of the previous *bayt* with "who" twice. It is short and punchy. Instead of rendering *muqasim* as a noun as it is in Arabic, he describes it as a verb, the one "who divides and assigns."

S. Stetkevych's verse is contemporary and employs repetition for poetic effect. The contemporary aspect is evident in the first line, "divider of spoils." The word "spoils" is often used in a war context as the goods stolen or taken from a person or place.

Verse 80:

فَضْلاً وَذُو كَرَمٍ يُعِينُ عَلَى النَّدَى   سَمْحٌ كَسُوبُ رَغَائِبٍ غَنَّامُهَا

Al-nadā is generosity. *Raghā'ib* are the natural traits of honor that one desires.

Polk:

Superior, noble, one who aids others to be generous,

Munificent, a seeker of petitions, taking the claims of

others as another might seek the spoils of battle

Sells:

As he deems fit, magnanimous,

munificent,

gracious,

seeking plunder and gaining it.

S.S:

Out of superior virtue, he is munificent

and with his bounty succors;

Openhanded, and yet, a winner and plunderer of all,

that he desires

Polk's translation is, as usual, verbose and follows a literal structure. The line begins by describing the adjectives, which Polk translates: *faḍlan, wad dhu karamin*, etc. This is rendered literally as "superior, noble."

Sells' translation employs alliteration as a poetic strategy. This is manifested here with "magnanimous, munificent." He also employs a sort of stylistic repetition of adjectives. The fact that he places words on one line adds another poetic effect. For example, gracious is a line by itself.

S. Stetkevych's translation is concise like Sells, yet more precise with its diction. For example, she combines the first two adjectives into one "*faḍlan, wad dhu karamin"* which is translated as "out of superior virtue." She uses the word "succor," meaning helping someone in times of hardship, which is only one word to render the three words of Arabic *yu'aynu 'alā al-nadā.*

Verse 81:

مِنْ مَعْشَرٍ سَنَّتْ لَهُمْ آبَاؤُهُمْ وَلِكُلِّ قَوْمٍ سُنَّـةٌ وَإِمَامُـهَا

Polk:

[We are] of a clan whose forefathers have laid down for them a way.

And, of course, each folk has its way and its leaders.

Sells:

From a clan whose fathers

have shown the way.

For every warrior band

there is a guide and a way.

S.S:

From a clan whose fathers set for them

their law —

For each tribe has its leader

and its law.

Polk's translation strives to mimic the tone of the original. This is clear in the interjection "And, of course," which corresponds to the Arabic line "*wa-li-kull.*" The use of forefathers instead of fathers, rendered from the word *ābāwuhum,* reflects more poignantly the idea of past generations of one's family.

Sells' translation uses rhyme. For example, he rhymes "clan" with "band."

S. Stetkevych's translation employs the em dash to show the break in lines or separation of ideas. It also uses repetition, repeating the word *law* twice and follows a sort of parallelism with a long line, followed by a short line, followed by a long line, and then a short line.

Verse 82:

لاَ يَطْبَعُونَ وَلاَ يَبُورُ فِعَالُهُمْ إِذْ لا يَمِيلُ مَعَ الْهَوَى أَحْلامُهَا

La yaṭab'ūn means "their honor is not desecrated." *La yabuwar* is "they are not corrupt."

Polk:

They do not follow [the lead of lesser men], nor will their deeds prove sterile.

Their guarded reserve does not incline with mere caprice.

Sells:

Their honor untarnished,

their action never fallow,

their judgement does not lean

With the winds of desire

S.S:

Their honor is not sullied, their deeds

not without issue,

For their judgement is not swayed

by passion's flights.

Polk's translation employs brackets and is literal to an extent where meaning is jeopardized. For example, he translates *la yaṭab'ūn* as "they do not follow [the lead of lesser men.]" What this means, according to Sells and Stetkevych, is that their honor is not tarnished. Polk decided to translate *aḥlām*, the plural of *ḥilm*, as "guarded reserve," whereas Sells and Stetkevych translate it in a more straightforward matter as judgement. Polk translates *hawah* literally as mere caprice.

Sells' translation is short and maintains six to seven syllables per line. He uses the word fallow to translate "*la yabuwaru,"* an English word more described for farmlands but also can meaning that their action is never untended. This is similar but slightly different than Stetkevych who translates it as a double negative "not without issue." Here, she uses "issue" in the less known sense, where it means that they have a result or outcome. Sells' "Winds of desire" is a poetic way of translating *hawa;* Stetkevych's "passion's flights," is also another poetic, metaphoric way.

Verse 83:

فَبَنَى لَنَا بَيْتَاً رَفِيعَاً سَمْكُـهُ   فَسَمَا إِلَيْهِ كَهْلُهَا وَغُلامُهَا

Polk:

And they built for us a house with a lofty roof,

and both the aged and the young have aspired to it.

Sells (this verse is verse 84 for Sells):

He built for us a house

with lofty roof.

Boys and full-aged men

ascend to it.

S.S:

He built for us a high-roofed

edifice,

To which the tribesmen mount,

both youths and full-grown men.

Polk's translation is the most literal. He translates almost word for word and in the same order. For example, he translates *bayt* literally as a house vis-à-vis Stetkevych who translates it as edifice. Of note is also how he translates *samā* as aspire to.

Sells' translation preserves a syllabic scheme that follows 4-6-4-6. Therefore, he purposefully jettisons the "a" that is supposed to come after "with," e.g. "with a lofty roof" at the expense of the sound.

S. Stetkevych's translation employs addition and is free interpretation. For example, she adds "to which the tribesmen mount." This idea is taken from one word in the original verse: *samā,* which Polk translates as aspire and Sells as ascend.

Verse 84:

فَاقْنَعْ بِمَا قَسَمَ الْمَلِيكُ فَإِنَّمَا   قَسَمَ الْخَلائِقَ بَيْنَنَا عَلاَّمُـهَا

Polk:

So be content with that which the Sovereign has divided.

A most Wise One it is who has divided the things of Creation among us.

Sells:

Be content with what the sire

has given.

He who portioned merit out among us

is most knowing.

S.S:

Be then content, O enemy, with what the sovereign

allotted you,

For virtues were allotted us

by him who knows them.

Polk capitalizes “the Sovereign” as well as “Wise One” and “Creation” suggesting a god-like status, which came to accompany the Judeo-Christian-Muslim god, the monotheistic god, the “one God.” He translates *al-khalā’iq* vaguely as “the things of Creation.” This proto-monotheistic or Islamic language differs from Sells and Stetkevych’s more neutral language, although the same message is implied of Labīd apostrophizing his rival tribes and admonishing them to be satisfied with their subordinate status because the power and dominance of his clan have been divinely ordained.

Sells’ translation uses archaic literary language and the superlative. For example, Sells translates *al-malīk* with the very precise, archaic term “sire,” a respectful form of address for a king. He translates *al-khalā’iq* as “merits.” He also renders *‘alām* as “most knowing.”

S. Stetkevych’s translation is addressed also in the imperative as a command, except she adds the recipient of the address, a supposed “enemy.” She adds” Be then content, O enemy…” because commentators have said that the poem was addressed to enemies.[121] She translates *al-khalā’iq* similarly to Sells as “virtues.”

Verse 85:

وَإِذَا الأَمَانَةُ قُسّمَتْ في مَعْشَرٍ   أَوْفَى بِأَوْفَرِ حَظِّنَا قَسَّامُـهَا

Awfā is to complete and provide.

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[121] King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture and King Fahad National Library, *The Mu'allaqāat for Millennials: Pre-Islamic Arabic Golden Odes*, 2020. On page 250, the following commentary is attributed to this line: يذكر الشرّاح أنّ خطابه موجهٌ لعدو.

Polk:

And when security was apportioned among a certain folk,

Its divider fulfilled [for us] more than our rightful portion.

Sells:

When trust was portioned out

Among the tribe,

The divider bestowed on us

The greater share

S.S:

When trusts were apportioned

to the tribes,

The apportioner allotted us

the greatest share

Polk's translation is literal. It is interesting to note how he translates *fī maʿashar* as "among a certain folk," and not as among the tribe, which seems to follow the logical flow of the poem's earlier discussion on tribe's folk and matches the translations of Sells and Stetkevych. The biggest translation difference perhaps comes with his translation of *al-amāna* as security vis-à-vis trust employed by the other translations under study.

Sells' translation is also literal and straightforward. Sells' uses portion, to divide into amounts for a specific purpose, instead of apportioning, which is to divide and distribute portions of a whole.

S. Stetkevych's translation is also like Sells with the rhetorical device of alliteration used in "apportioner/allotted." In addition, she pluralizes tribes whereas the source text Arabic verse *ma'ashar* is single.

Verse 86:

وَهُمُ السُّعَاةُ إِذَا الْعَشِيرَةُ أُفْظِعَتْ   وَهُمُ فَوَارِسُهَا وَهُمْ حُكَّامُهَا

Ufẓi'a means he was struck by a terrible event (passive).

Polk:

And they are the swift when the clan finds itself in tight straights,

And they are its knights and its arbitrators.

Sells:

They are the protectors

when the tribe is pressed,

they are the riders,

they are the rulers.

S.S:

They are first to act

when the tribe is stricken;

In war, its horsemen;

In disputes, its arbiters.

Polk's translation again sticks out for its literalness. He translates *al-su'āt* as "swift" and *fawāris* as "knights." The only arguably non-literal translation is that *āfẓi'at* is rendered as "tight straights", e.g. a tough situation. Thus, the meaning is the same, but Polk uses a playful literary wording, Later, *al-'ashīra* is rendered to clan and not tribe, although even here the meaning is indistinguishable.

Sells' translation is very flexible, playing with structure and meaning. For example, the first part of the verse could be translated literally as "They are swift to act when the tribe finds itself struck by a tough event." He reverses the order and wording of the first phrase as "They are the protectors when the tribe is pressed." He also deliberately translates *fawāris* as riders for the musical affect, as he uses alliteration with rulers below (another free interpretation).

S. Stetkevych's translation is quite literal in that it mimics the structure and repetition of the poem while still displaying free interpretation of specific words. In Labīd's verse, we read "*wa hum…wa hum*" which she renders as "in…its; in…its." Stetkevych translates *al-su'āt*,

which could mean to act swiftly, as the first to act, a free interpretation. *Fawāris* is not rendered as the traditional knights but as horsemen.

Verse 87:

وَهُمُ رَبِيعٌ لِلْمُجَـاوِرِ فِيهِمُ   وَالْمُرْمِلاتِ إِذَا تَطَاوَلَ عَامُهَا

Al-murimlāt are women whose provisions are depleted.

Polk:

And they are a spring meadow to those who seek protection among them,

And to the widows when their year [of mourning] grows long.

Sells:

They are to life-spring

to dependents among them,

to those without provider,

when the year grows long.

S.S

They are a springtime

to those that seek refuge

And to indigent women, their food stores exhausted

When the year stretches long.

Polk's translation characteristically uses brackets and is literal while also relying heavily on commentary, for the verse alone is not enough to understand meaning. For example, the second part of the verse *idha taṭāwal* means literally when or if their year grows long. Polk uses brackets to interpret this as "their year of mourning." He translates *al-murimlāt* literally as "widows" whereas the other translators play with this word differently. This idea of widow's mourning is obvious, but Polk feels the need to add it. However, he translates *rabi'* poetically as "spring meadow."

Sells' translation employs repetition and parallelism for poetic effect. For example, he uses "to" three times. He renders *rabi'* as "life-spring," which encapsulates the spirit of this poetic unit, the *fakhr,* or boastful part of the poem, whereas the poet sings the praises of his tribe. He renders *al-murimlāt* also creatively as "to those without provider," which we understand as widows but in a more subtle way.

S. Stetkevych's translation is straightforward and uses fixed expressions. For example, she translates *lil-mujāwir fīhim* as "seek refuge." She adds the precise word indigent to describe the widows without directly describing them, writing "indigent women, their food stores exhausted." This latter phrase is also a subtle poetic way that could be interpreted as she is no longer able to breastfeed and/or that she is physically depleted. The last line "when the year stretches long" is an example of personification, for the human act of stretching is being attributed to a year, the inanimate object.

Verse 88:

وَهُمُ الْعَشِيرَةُ أَنْ يُبَطِّىءْ حَاسِدٌ   أَوْ أَنْ يَمِيلَ مَعَ الْعَدُوِّ لِئَامُهَا

Polk:

And they are such a folk as no envious rival can hold back,

Nor have they base members who sway with the enemy, traitorously.

Sells:

They are the tribe

when the envier drags his foot

and the vile one

leans to the enemy

S.S:

They form a band so tight that none of them

Impedes it out of envy,

Nor, out of treachery,

Leans toward the foe.

Polk's translation is literal and follows the same structure. This is most clear in the second part of the stanza which renders in English word-for-word the source text.

Sells creatively maintains *ḥāsid* in its noun form rendering it into English as envier. He also plays with the meaning of the phrase *an yubṭa'* rendering it as "drags his foot," which is an idiom in English that means someone is being deliberately slow or reluctant to act. The meaning is a bit nebulous, for it is not understood literally from Sells in this line, if read isolated, that this tribe who does not cause envy and diverts vile character that may cause internal dissent and create enemies.

S. Stetkevych's translation is less literal and more open to interpretation while adhering to the meaning. For example, instead of translating the first part as the literal "they are the tribe," she renders it as the more colloquial "they form a band so tight."

2. Statistical Table:

This section includes a statistical table showing the number of times that each respective translator used alliteration, assonance, rhyme, and repetition. One point was counted for every rhymed pair; one point for every repetition of a vowel sound or diphthong in nonrhyming stressed syllables where the echo is discernible; and lastly, one point was counted for every word or phrase that repeats in the stanza, no matter how many times. However, we cannot assume that rhyme or repetition is a positive trait in the absolute and assign merit to translators for merely using them just as we cannot assume a text is rendered as poetry because it rhymes, or contains alliteration or repetition. The existence of devices, in and of itself, means nothing. We have many example in all languages, including Arabic, of highly rhetorical verse that is not poetry. The way they are

used and the way in which the contribute to “poetic meaning” is the criterion by which they will be judged.

Translator	Alliteration	Assonance	Rhyme	Repetition
Polk	18	6	2	8
Sells	36	19	9	26
S. Stetkevych	36	18	1	20

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In my conclusion, I shall outline what I regard to be the essential results of this study. In taking each *bayt* of Labīd's *Mu'allaqa* individually and examining side-by-side how three translators rendered them we can understand the different styles governing each translation. The chart categorizing the use of rhetorical devices provided us with some empirical findings which must be taken into consideration with each entire translation. To a large extent, this thesis is about inspiration, the power of poems to inspire poetic moments or spaces across languages, the power of great poetry to inspire poets to react creatively and generatively to poems by their dead forefathers. Thus, as already stated, the three translations were selected because of their stated goals in their preludes and introductions to render the poetry as poetry, that is to try and bring the vibrant poetry to *inspire* a wide-reaching Anglophone audience while holding onto its aesthetic value, a challenge initially posed by Jaroslav Stetkevych to a room of Arabists at Oxford in the 1960s. The challenges at hand are innumerable, as they always are in translating, and especially translating Arabic into English,[122] but these texts were moved, directly or indirectly, by J. Stetkevych's call to

[122] Alan Jones discusses the challenges of pre-modern Arabic translation in his introduction to his book on early Arabic poetry. See: Alan Jones, *Early Arabic Poetry: Select Odes* (Ithaca Press Reading, 1996). In addition, Huda Fakhreddine and Jason Iwen discuss the challenges of translating Arabic poetry in the introduction to their translation of Jawdat Fakhreddine's collection of translated poems. They discuss the fact that there is no direct correspondence in meaning between any two words, the challenge of translating culture, and more. See: Jayson Iwen and Huda Fakhreddine, *Lighthouse for the Drowning by Jawdat Fakhreddine* (BOA Editions Ltd, 2017). James Montgomery also discusses the challenges of translating the Mu'allaqāt in an article written in homage to Pierre Larcher, see: James E. Montgomery, "LISTENING FOR THE POEM: HOMAGE TO PIERRE LARCHER," *Quaderni Di Studi Arabi* 8 (2013): 11–40.

produce inspiring verse.[123] Considering the success of their poetic potential begs our attention.

Upon recalling Antoine Berman's point that the "critic must read the translation based on its project" we shall examine if each author was faithful to their project as stated in their introductions or preludes.[124] Polk's translation, as he correctly states, offers a "fairly literal translation of the Arabic verse," and sound is not a real consideration. For this reason, we find so few uses of assonance and rhyme, with a total of 24. Alliteration is perhaps the simplest poetic device, which is why he has a high number of alliterations (especially compared to his lack of other rhetorical devices). One oddity that ought to be mentioned again is the brackets. There are 56 uses in the eighty-eight lines of the poem, reflecting a reticence to interpolate directly. As if to justify their usage, he writes in the introduction that he has not "attempted, however, to interpose my words between the reader and the poet." However, Polk's translation is the most verbose. Therefore, he interposes a lot more words in his rendering than any other translation, a seeming contradiction to his claims. Yet the most visible part of Polk's entire text is the paratextual details, which are much louder than the translation themselves. Although my study has been primarily concerned with textual analysis, I must discuss the paratextual details just because of how important they

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[123] It is likely to assume that all three translations I selected were all familiar with J. Stetkevych's intervention. Polk thanks him directly in the prelude for his help on his translation and they were part of the same institution, University of Chicago. Sells was also a colleague and references a study of his in his introduction. J. Stetkevych, in turn, wrote a review that appears on the back cover of *Desert Tracings* calling the translation "strikingly contemporary in form." Stetkevych is the wife of the late scholar, and they were influenced and nourished by each other's love and research for pre and early Islamic poetry.
[124] Massardier-Kennedy, *Toward a Translation Criticism: John Donne / Antoine Berman, Translated and Edited by Francoise Massardier-Kenney*.

are to judge the project's success. Indeed, it could be argued that the footnotes and photographs are the core of Polk's book, which is anomalous compared to the other two translations under study.

To set the context, in 1971, William Polk embarked on a month-long arduous 1,300-mile excursion trekking across the Arabian desert by camel to better understand the context of Labīd's poem. The expedition resulted in his travelogue *Passing Brave* (1971) and his translation and commentary of Labīd's poem *The Golden Ode* (1974) under discussion. Both works feature photographs by William J. Mares, who had accompanied him. We cannot help but wonder why the author undertook a risky and expensive desert safari to translate a pre-Islamic poem and we can only guess at the motivations that prompted Dr. Polk to do so.

When opening the massive, coffee-house-style book we find an introductory note in Arabic followed by a prelude and a longer introduction, also in Arabic, before strangely arriving at the last page of the book, Lābid's final verse. In short, the layout is utterly confusing. It is as if the Arabic introductory text is relegated to the back, of minor importance, but at the same time, the book's cover begins with it, adding to the reader's perplexity. Immediately after flipping over the book, we are drawn to the "fairly literal" Arabic verses which are handsomely etched in gold letters by Arabic calligrapher Shaikh Mohammad Ali Mekkawic. Contrasted on the left side of each page of verse is a black and white photograph, meant to convey the mood of each verse. Often, the choice for such photographs is logical, setting the passages in the context of the desert milieu. For example,

verses referring to visuals as diverse as dung, traces, campsites, a gnarled tree, a camel mare, a house with a lofty roof, and more are accompanied, as if in conversation, by a corresponding photograph. On page 32, a Bedouin woman enveloped in a black veil appears in a small frame, her hand covered to her mouth, as the twentieth-century version of Nawār, Labīd's beloved, alongside verses that mention his inamorata for the first time.[125] This choice, though easily subject to gendered criticism, makes sense. But some choices demand better justification. On page 73, an African gazelle is shown accompanying verses of a wild cow oryx. One could applaud the attempt of trying to show fauna of the same environment. But for the specialist, where nuance matters, this is a tremendous error. This example is not the only place where the image's choice is puzzling,[126] to say the least. On Page 29, the verse reads:

> Calling out as though they were the oryxes of Tudih hovering over [their young]
> Or the gazelles of Wajrah with their fawns clinging close.

The verse is juxtaposed with a photo of a camel driver on top of a howdah covered in black cloth. The photograph ostensibly has nothing to do with the image conjured in the text of the frantic lowing of the "wild cow," the oryx. According to the footnote, the line refers to the "Howdah-borne woman" from earlier who is now the subject of comparison to that

[125] Irfan, Shahid, "Labid Ibn Rabiah, The Golden Ode. Translated with an Introduction and Commentary by William R. Polk. Photographs by William J. Mares."

[126] Orientalism, the role of arts and literature in creating and perpetuating an epistemic and ontological racist myth of an Orient *in opposition* to the West, is a central force influencing the translation. Marilyn Booth has coined the term "Orientalist Ethnographicsm" to describe a notion of experience as transparently rendered through a text that is fiction, akin to Guareschi's book the *Little World of Don Camillo.* To present this "truth effect" of what *that* society in the Orient is really like, the avowedly fiction in the piece is displayed as memoir and the author's creative work is displayed as ethnography. See: Marilyn Booth, "'The Muslim Woman' as Celebrity Author and the Politics of Translating Arabic: Girls of Riyadh Go on the Road," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 6, no. 3 (2010): 149. And: Lawrence Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (Routledge, 2002), 160.

"quintessential mark of Oriental feminine beauty, large and liquid eyes."[127] Only through the footnote, we can now begin to piece together the abstract photo of the howdah, but even then, why is a photograph of a howdah used in a scene where the author compares the beauty of women to animals? We are led to the obvious conclusion: the abstract photographs selected by the author are sometimes not intuitive and are even puzzling.

The overall reason why photographs accompany the translation in the book can be found in the prelude. There, Polk states that photographs are one of four avenues he used for his readers to appreciate the poems, an attempt to "capture the mood presented in each verse."[128] Implicit in this statement is the belief that the poems alone will not suffice on their own, that the translator must try to convince the reader of their worthiness through all means possible, such as through a visual aid, i.e., photography. The inclination amongst some translators and publishing houses to convince readers of the text's relevance and worth is a common trend in Arabic literature in English translation [129] but speaks to the ethos of Polk's project, which is perhaps most aptly understood by his use of footnotes, or commentary.

As mentioned above, Polk's text is interrupted by curious footnotes. As is usually the case, footnotes are meant to provide more explication of the verse to the reader's presumed lack of knowledge. This method has been criticized in Arabic literature in translation for many

[127] Ibid.
[128] William R. Polk, *Labid Ibn Rabiah, The Golden Ode* (The University of Chicago Press, 1974).
[129] In an interview with Huda Fakreddine, Fakhreddine said: "The very little that gets translated from Arabic to English always needs prefacing; it needs somebody to convince the English readers that this is worth their time; that there is something to learn from it." See: "Huda Fakhreddine: A Translator Must Have Something To Say About the Text – ARABLIT & ARABLIT QUARTERLY."

reasons .[130] Besides their apparent distracting effect (interrupting a reader's flow), footnotes can make a translation appear as a foreign, exotic, and distant place, undermining the very notion that a translated text can be enjoyed for its artistry.[131] In Polk's notes, there is a real attempt to connect the Western reader with the verses, usually by describing anthropological details or sometimes even using Western literature. In one verse, the author evokes Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* to connect the tribal feuds to family hostilities between Capulet and Montague familiar to readers or viewers of the play.[132] The risks become more apparent in Polk's very anthropological leaning, drawing heavily on the travel writings of Wilfred Thesiger (*Arabian Sands*), Charles Doughty (*Arabia Deserta*) as well as Czech explorer and traveler Alois Musil (*Manners and Customs of the Rwalla* Bedouin) to understand the distinctiveness of the poetry. For example, in describing the line "the renewing of a tattoo by the sprinkling and rubbing of soot in circles above which the tattoo appears," Polk, as usual, refers to footnotes. Here, he quotes from Musil's account *The Manners and Customs of the Rwalla Bedouins* again to show that the custom of tattooing among Bedouin women is still present today. It is as if he is also providing the readers with a sociological study teaching the audience something about the foreign Other. The implication is that these poems are relevant today not because of the glowing poetic, artistic

[130] In a 2017 lecture at the American University of Beirut, Roger Allen says "I think footnotes are not a good idea. My policy is to have a glossary in the back and put an asterisk, if you want to find out the details you can go to the back." See: "CAMES Lecture - Arabic and Translation - YouTube," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GFo_Ss2eRSw.
[131] Michelle Hartman, *Teaching modern Arabic literature in translation*, vol. 42., Book, Whole (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2018).
[132] Polk, *Labid Ibn Rabiah, The Golden Ode*.

core of the poem, but because the subjects, such as Bedouin women, are still present, albeit a dying species.[133]

Besides the footnote's implicit harm, Polk's footnotes contain an explicit stereotypical example of a way by confirming fantasies of prospective European or American readers of the oppressed Muslim women. This is epitomized in the following verse and accompanying footnote.

> With many a morning, limpid [draught] and the plucking of the singing girl/ On a lute as her thumb adjusts the string.

In Polk's footnote, he clarifies an innuendo, writing, "Hinting at sex and reeking of liquor, this verse was anathema to Islam. Among the later Arabian Wahhabis, even song was anathema. Men were flogged for singing too loudly in their own houses in Riyadh. No, the old free ways of Arabia were gradually choked. But this spirit of pagan Arabia—where women were freer than in the settled lands—has left its marks in the paintings on the walls of the hunting lodges of Jordan in the century after Islam." The footnote is an example of a grotesque, sweeping judgment that all pagan Arabian women were freer than in the settled lands. What settled lands? Freerer in what sense? We can only imagine what a non-specialist may infer about the coming of Islam upon hearing such a claim. In the above, we have explained how some photographic decisions are unjustified and how the footnotes leans to

[133] With a tone of unmitigated certitude, Polk claims in the Prelude (or Intro): "Soon, certainly within a generation, the Arabian Bedouin will have vanished from the face of the earth. Their sons will resemble them as little as do contemporary American Indians their grandfathers on the Great Plains. We shall probably never be able to recapture the poetry of the American Indian, but here we have the essence of one of the great civilizations of the antique world, *The Golden Ode* of the sixth-century poet, Labid." See: Polk.

the anthropological, working against J. Stetkevych's creative call for an inspiring translation.[134]

Polk's project is emblematic of the many Arabic translators who have taken a foreignizing approach arguing that paratextual devices—the use of footnotes, introductions, afterwords, glossaries, and other locations adjacent to the text itself—can be a way to challenge the translator's invisibility.[135] Lawrence Venuti, the well-known scholar of translation, points out that a less than desirable aspect of current trends in economic "globalization" is that, within the world of language usage, there is an increasing tendency towards monolingualism in a number of social and cultural sectors and that, in the world of translation, leads to what he terms a "domesticating" approach, most especially in the anglophone publication world. One of the boldest criticisms of English-language hegemony, Venuti exposed how the global translation paradigm at the end of the century created hostility towards the foreign. The best way to fight this, he writes, is to "resist through foreignization." Yet translators working with non-Western texts should be wary that employing a foreignizing translation strategy like Polk can be akin to Othering. The paratextual details analyzed briefly in addition to the in-depth textual study reveal that even though Polk's translation is interesting and might be used in certain situations, such as in the classroom, as a case study, it ultimately does not inspire, can be problematic, and leads to a dead end for the contemporary reader since the book appears more akin to a sociological document than a work of art.

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[134] Strangely J. Stetkevych appears to have supported the project since he is thanked in the introduction. It reads: "Thanks, as well, counsel of colleagues who insisted in this translation including Sir Hamilton Gibb and Professor Jaroslav Stetkevych."
[135] Hartman, *Teaching modern Arabic literature in translation*.

Moving onto the concluding remarks of our second text—Michael Sells' *Desert Tracing*—we find that this translation marks an important shift in English translations of the *Mu'allaqāt*, a first that outwardly strived for "a natural, idiomatic, and contemporary American verse."[136] Operating out of the school of James Monroe and Michael Zwettler who believe that the poet composed his ode during the act of performance, Sells introduces each translated ode with a brief biography of the poet in addition to a short essay to help situate it and acquaint readers with its themes and literariness. In addition to its creative spirit, *Desert Tracings* is characterized by its attention to detail and accuracy, resulting from ten years of scholarly and creative labor. In a praiseworthy review, Adel Gamal writes "The translation is remarkably contemporary, the poetic discourse is fluid; yet the rhythm structure, the complexity of imagery and epithets, the nicety of ideas, the intricate denotation and connotation of the words are preserved."[137] Although the poems do not adhere to the "complex meter and rhyme of the original,[138]" Sells employs cadence, as modulated through the line breaks, to re-create the original rhythmic texture formed by the play of syntax across the meter. In this light, he is the first since Lyall to pay much attention to prosody. The result is occasionally stilted words but the "parataxis is generally left intact," [139] creating, in Gamal's words, an important contribution to a range of fields in the profession. This explains why there are more usages of assonance and rhyme in Labīd's translation than the other two translators and the most combined points. The ample use of

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[136] Michael Anthony Sells and 'Alqamah ibn 'Abadah, eds., *Desert Tracings: Six Classic Arabian Odes*, 1st ed, Wesleyan Poetry in Translation (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 1989).
[137] Adel S. Gamal, review of *Review of Desert Tracings: Six Classic Arabian Odes by 'Alqama, Shánfara, Labíd, 'Antara, Al-A'sha and Dhu al-Rúmma*, by Michael A. Sells, *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 29, no. 1 (1995): 123.
[138] Sells and 'Alqamah ibn 'Abadah, *Desert Tracings*.
[139] Gamal, "Review of Desert Tracings."

rhyme (nine times) and repetition (26 times) stand out, perhaps to carry the power of the monorhyme from the source text. Sells, in addition, was truthful to the project's ethos, paying special attention to language and sound —an important element in the poetry's inception which was oral after all[140] —as well as syntax across meter to "re-create the original rhythmic texture."[141] Gamal concludes her review with a line that may appear contradictory: "it is fascinating to read and deserves a wide audience."[142] Is the translation meant for a scholarly audience of those working in a "range of fields in the profession" or aimed at "a wide audience?" Is this what it looks like to target both? Indeed, on the back page of the book, Jaroslav Stetkevych writes that this translation "enters the [poems into the] world of modern English poetry," with a direct reference to his call two decades earlier. Unfortunately, it appears that a wide audience encompassing Western litterateurs never embraced these early Arabic odes.[143]

The third text, S. Stetkevych's rendering in *The Muʻallaqat for Millennials* project, also is unique because it is part of a book that marks the first effort to include all ten of the

[140] In Adūnīs' *An Introduction to Arab Poetics,* he writes: "Pre-Islamic poetry was born as a song, it developed as something heard and not read, sung and not written." And: "Poetry was judged according to how far it could arouse *Ṭarab*, a state of musical delight or ecstasy, and the poetics was founded on what could be called an aesthetics of listening and delight." See: Catherine Cobham, *An Introduction to Arab Poetics, Adūnīs* (London: Saqi Books, 2003), 13–27.
[141] Michael Anthony Sells, ed., *Desert Tracings: Six Classic Arabian Odes*, 1st ed, Wesleyan Poetry in Translation (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 8.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Perhaps it is naïve to think that a work of literature has ever emerged on the world stage in a pure and uncontaminated way, that literature can and should be separated from economic factors is not only unpragmatic, but somehow debases it. Kareem James Abu Zeid is among the most vocal to state his economic aims in translation: he wants to make money; he wants his translations to reach wide audiences.[143] The way for a translation to reach large audiences is not to treat it as a rarified art object and publish it in a largely unknown academic press as epitomized in *Desert Tracings*, but rather to send it to a prominent, non-specialized press and/or engage in the circuits of bookfairs. If a translation does well, it should not automatically detract from its aesthetic value.

Muʿallaqāt in English. As we noted, tracing back to Sir. William Jones through to Desmond O'Grady, no translator ever dealt exclusively with all ten odes. Therefore, this is the most comprehensive translation, a landmark in the field. Moreover, S. Stetkevych's self-stated project goals are the most ambitious. The project aims to produce a translation of pre-modern Arabic poetry that appeals and is accessible to both academics and a general readership. The tautological title, *The Muʿallaqāt for Millennials*, epitomizes this goal.[144] As such, we see many instances in her translation where both foreignization and domestication styles are used, an approach that reflects a desire to target or please multiple audiences. Much of the translation was taken from her prior 1993 publication *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual,* which had already been lauded for its balance of both scholarly and poetic renderings.[145] We can assume this version focused more on a broad audience in the sole fact that she relied on her millennial son, Khaled, a non-Arabist long-time heavy metal musician, who read over and edited the translations for the *Muʿallaqat for Millennials Project,* something that was not used in the previous more scholarly rendering of the *qaṣīda*.[146] In our analysis, we noted she regularly employs some rhetorical devices such as alliteration, assonance and repetition but seldom uses rhyme, demonstrating that sound was important, but rhyme is not a real consideration. The one example of rhyme leads us to wonder if it was not fortuitous. On a positive note, there is the most attention to structure, what holds the *qaṣīda* together and gives it the movement or trajectory that makes it whole. In her translation, she is the only translator to

[144] I want to thank my colleague Anna Galietti for sharing me her unpublished paper on *The Muʿallaqāt for Millennials* where she makes a similar point on the title's multifaceted reach.
[145]van Gelder, "An Experiment with Beeston, Labīd, and Baššār."
[146] Interview with S. Stetkevych conducted on August 17, 2022.

mark important transitions in the poem, which should certainly be applauded and can also inspire.

Returning to the point of judging translations, it might seem absurd to claim which translation is better because of the varying usages and purposes but also because of the varying tastes of a reader. For instance, a reader with an inclination for Modernist English poetry may appreciate Michael Sell's rendering of Labīd's *Mu'allaqa* in *Desert Selling* the most, as we find the paratactic nature of the translation mimics that of Modernist poetry. Yet S. Stetkevych's renderings of Labīd may be best for understanding the structure of the original and may be helpful for a student of Arabic who may come to appreciate the wholeness and coherency of the poem. In sum, taste is certainly not monolithic and a reader's aesthetic sensibilities as well affect judgement.

On the other hand, it is safe to say that judging translations and commenting on them is not so absurd when "best" is qualified. As amply stated, we have looked at translations to examine which ones were interested in translating the poems as poetry. While we have been acutely aware of our limitations and have worked within them in this project by focusing on a textual comparison of translations, we have used the space of this conclusion to intervene. We conclude our discussion with the unsurprising assessment that Michael Sell's rendering of *Labīd's Mu'allaqa* in *Desert Tracing* is the most inspiring in terms of passing the poetry as poetry in English, followed by S. Stetkevych, with William Polk coming in last place. Preserving the soul of any of the *Mu'allaqāt* while rendering it not only legible but moving to English readers is a serious undertaking and Michael Sell's

translation, for all the reasons stated, deserves the most applause. Now in response to J. Stetkevych's initial queries, more translations are not the *only* solution for helping these masterpieces reach the world stage, if translations are likes of the project led by William Polk. Rather, what we need are more thoughtful, careful, creative, and honest translations.[147] As daunting as the road ahead may appear, some scholar-translators have already begun the heavy work and we will all be the better for it.

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[147] Umbreto Eco writes that "so many translation theories stress that the impact a translation has upon its own cultural milieu is more important than an impossible equivalence with the original. But the concept of faithfulness depends on the belief that translation is a form of interpretation and that translators must aim at rendering not necessarily the intention of the author but the intention of the text." See: Umberto Eco, *Mouse Or Rat?: Translation as Negotiation* (Phoenix, 2004).

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