Arabic Thresholds : Sites of Rhetorical Turn in Contemporary Scholarship, edited by Muhsin J. al-Musawi (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2009), xvii + 339 pp., ISBN: 978-90-04-17689-8, €165.00 / $220.00 (hb)

This is a felicitation volume (*Festschrift*) whose contents originally appeared as articles in two issues of the *Journal of Arabic Literature* (38/3 [2007] and 39/1 [2008]) in honor of Jaroslav Stetkevych, the iconic scholar of Arabic studies and critical thoughts. These contributions by friends, colleagues, and old students, which are underlined by a common subscription to the doctrine of a rhetorical shift in the humanities and dialogue with social science methodologies, cover the wide spectrum of Stetkevych's intellectual interests. These include advocacy for a review of old 'Orientalism,' classical Arabic literary tradition, Andalusian poetry, Francophone literature, translation, the nexus between architecture and poetry, Sufism, and comparative studies. These are the subject matters covered in this volume. Roger Allen (pp. 1-15) identifies some of the principal issues which are involved in the parameters for periodizing the Arabic literary history as applied to the Arabic novel. The confusion over placing the 'crude' or informal antecedents into the category of formal narrative categories is mentioned as a key problem. In his view, the nature of generic change which has come to pass since the 19th century has not been fully digested by the scholarly community in its attitude towards modernity, hence the inability, if not the failure to classify rightly, the fictional writings of the pre-Modern period. Allen therefore calls for a different approach to the fictional writings of that period in light of current trends.

Muhsin al-Musawi (pp. 17-51) discusses the popular narrative in the ʿAbbāsid era in the context of readership and distribution techniques, and analyzes the theoretical and anecdotal values of authors and works such as al-Qāḍī Abū ʿAlī al-Tanūkhī's (d. 384/995) *Nishwār al-muḥāḍara*, Ibn Ṭufayl's (d. 581/1185) *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān*, and Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm ibn ʿAlī al-Ḥuṣrī's (d. 413/1022) *Jamʿ al-jawāhir*, the last being the most analyzed in detail by him. He also categorizes the narrative practice into six on the basis of theoretical and material paradigms and concludes that Arab writers of fiction and realistic narratives worked out a preliminary theoretical framework which is distin-

guished by the complexity of the transgeneric writing. Although he falls into the hackneyed misnomer of designating the twilight of the 'Golden' era of Arabic cultural milieu as 'late ʿAbbāsid and post-classical period' (p. 20), the faultiness of which designation has been robustly established by Thomas Bauer,[1] he is able to show how the restrictions enforced by market inspectors, the *muḥtasibs*, impacted on the rise and eclipse of the narrative tradition in an ever-mutating socio-political landscape in which the "One Thousand and One Nights" model stood as the most illustrious representative, *odium theologicum*, notwithstanding. Due to the emergence of a formidable readership and the discontent with the conservative religious class, some of whom had reservations about the narrative tradition anyway, the genre successfully challenged and brilliantly supplanted other literary types. A key reason for this success, according to the writer, is that "the anecdotal quality targets reading publics and assemblies" (p. 28). This particular contribution by al-Musawi is very insightful, as it reinforces the valid assumption that narratology as a heuristic tool for interpretation is a kit containing a variety of instruments that may be exclusive or universal to different sorts of narrative texts. And this can be established from the nature and contrariety of responses to the various Arabic literary types that held sway from the ʿAbbāsid period downward.[2]

Suzanne P. Stetkevych's contribution (pp. 53-84), which is a contextual and theoretical analysis of ʿAlid legitimacy to suzerainty on the basis of an elegy by al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā for al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī is all but connected to the overarching philosophy and underlying current of the volume. Samer M. Ali's "Early Islam-Monotheism or Henotheism: A View from the Court" (pp. 85-109) discusses the encounter between the sacred and the profane in the ʿAbbāsid court and how the court promoted the latter at the expense of the former. But his argument that the *ʿulamāʾ* as a learned class of professionals with expertise in various disciplines was yet to be formed in the 9th and 10th centuries "before the spread of state madrasas" (p. 88 n. 8), is less than correct. There abound evidences of study circles around experts

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[1] Thomas Bauer, "In Search of 'Post-Classical Literature': A Review Article," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 11/2 (2007), 137-167.

[2] Cf. Genevieve Liveley, "Narratology" (A review of *Narratology and Interpretation: The Content of Narrative Form in Ancient Literature* [ed. by Janos Grethlein and Antonios Rengakos], *The Classical Review* 61/2 (2011), 341-343.

in Islamic sciences from the mid 8th century in the Islamic lands (Mecca-Medina-Iraq-Syria), of courtly preceptors, and advice for teacher and student literature for which Ibn Saḥnūn (d. 256/870) and al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/869) stand out. Moreover, the class of preachers (*wāʿiẓ*s), admonitors (*mudhakkir*s), and edifying, moralistic story-tellers (*qāṣṣ*es), professional dictation makers (*mustamlī*s), and of bibliophiles from before the 9th century clearly indicates the existence of several "professional" classes of ʿulamāʾ, although evidence of an overlap across various specialisms and expertise was not altogether lacking.[3] However, Ali brilliantly illustrates how J. Stetkevych's work exemplifies the 'linguistic turn,' that is, ways in which language performance and rhetoric reflect and constitute individuals and societies.

The contribution by James Monroe (pp. 111-141) discusses the phylogeny of the Andalusian strophic verse types, the *muwashshaḥ* and the *zajal*, using a sample from Ibn Quzmān (d. 535/1145) as a template to prove his hybridization theory in architecture and aesthetic model. In the case of *zajal*, the structure, that is, its strophic form, is from the Western European tradition, while the material, is Eastern, that is, the archetypical Arabic *qaṣīda*. Using this template to formulate a theory on correspondence between poetry and architecture, especially where a binary of dominant and dominated cultures is involved, Monroe argues that where the *structure* of a work is borrowed from the *dominant* culture but the materials are from the *dominated* cultures (for which mosques and *mudéjar* churches are cited), a classical medium of expression is adopted to *uphold* official values. Conversely, the colloquial is adopted to subvert official values when the reverse process is the case (p. 137). Al-Nābulusī's (d. 1050/1641) explication of a *jīmiyya* poem by the mystic Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 632/1235) was more of an exegesis of an assumedly divinely inspired text than an interpretation, and this marks off al-Nābulusī's *Kashf al-sirr al-ghāmiḍ* from al-Būrīnī's (d. 1024/1615) literary and rhetorical interpretation of the same work. This is the subject matter of the contribution by Th. Emil Homerin (pp. 143-206).

Michael Sells (pp. 207-218) gives a translation and commentary of two poems from *Turjumān al-ashwāq* [*The Interpreter of Desires*], a collection of sixty-one self-standing *nasīb*s by the famous Sufi theo-

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3   See the various essays in Claude Gilliot (ed.), *Education and Learning in the Early Islamic World* (Surrey-Burlington, VT: Ashgate Variorum, 2012).

logian Ibn ʿArabī (d. 637/1240). Aḥmad Shawqī's (1868-1932) *sīniyya* poem on the Great Mosque of Cordova, a sort of contrafaction (*muʿāraḍa*) to al-Buḥturī's (d. 284/897) composition on the Sasanian Palace (Īwān Kisrā) is the subject matter of Akiko M. Sumi's contribution in this volume (pp. 219-272). Shawqī's poem is analyzed in the context of his thematic borrowings from his model and the architectural peculiarities of the mosque and the palace as reflected in the two poems. This perspective is a further deployment of Sumi's 2004 thesis on *ekphrasis* (*waṣf*),[4] and in this particular case, she examines the relationship between poetry and architecture through the prism of modern architectural theories. Sumi characterizes Shawqī's reused rhyme-word from al-Buḥturī as *spolia*, an architectural reference term for Roman marble ornaments. She also shows how al-Buḥturī's sense of loss of a past glory, the Persian palace, influenced Shawqī's description of the Andalusian historical monuments in order to show how architectural techniques as manifested in theories and monuments can be replicated in poetry (p. 268).

Aida O. Azouqa in "Metapoetry between East and West: ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī and the Western Composers of Metapoetry – A Study in Analogies" (pp. 273-309) indicates that metapoetry refers to such poems that make poetry and literary criticism the subject of a poem. The Iraqi al-Bayātī (1926-1999) is known for his bold poetic experimentations which make his "work departs from Classical Arabic poetry in substance as well as in structure" (p. 274). The poet's priority derives largely from his being the pioneer of metapoetry in contemporary Arabic literary tradition, due to his strong fascination with ancient and classical mythologies as expressed in his poetry.

The concluding contribution by Elizabeth M. Holt (pp. 311-329) is an examination of the Algerian Aḥlām Mustaghānamī's award-winning bestseller novel, *Dhākirat al-jasad* vis-a-vis its French translation in the context of the conflict between the Algerian Arabic literary background and *francophonie*, the legacy of French colonial hegemony.

On the whole, the essays in the volume unearth the unfamiliar undercurrents in the pre-Modern Arabic literary tradition in respect of its

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[4]   See Amidu Olalekan Sanni, "A Review of *Description in Classical Arabic Poetry: Waṣf, Ekphrasis, and Interarts Theory*, by Akiko M. Sumi," *Die Welt des Islams* 45/2 (2005), 304-306.

various modes of manifestation; poetry, artistic prose, fictional narratology, hybridized models, and comparative texts and contexts. More importantly, the contributions challenge received canons and perspectives and offer alternative perspectives which truly justify its claim to being a foray into the rhetorical turn, a perspective which has been popularized by the seminal exertion of Herbert Simon, from which this *Festschrift* derived its methodological framework in the first place.[5] This is a welcome addition to the emerging literature on redefining the Arabic aesthetic cultural heritage by rooting it in the mainstream of criticism and cultural studies.

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[5]   See Herbert W. Simon (ed.), *The Rhetorical Turn: Invention and Persuasion in the Conduct of Inquiry* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1990).