Introduction

Heretic, Sufi, countercultural icon, Persian nationalist, brigand, court jester, alcoholic, catamite, sodomite, ritual clown, justified sinner, icon of transgressive sacrality, pleasure junkie—these are just a few of the identities that have been given to Abū ʿAlī l-Ḥasan ibn Hāniʾ al-Ḥakamī, better known as Abū Nuwās, "the man with the dangling curls," arguably the greatest poet of the Arabic language. Some of these identities are anachronistic and probably mistaken; others correspond to prominent strands of his collected poems. But beyond a few shards of biography, we know remarkably little about him. Of course, Abū Nuwās is not unique in this regard (there are plenty of authors, poets, and thinkers from the past about whom almost nothing is known for sure), but he is one of the few who may be responsible for our ignorance—he seems to have been a larger-than-life figure and was probably an architect of his own mythology.

Take the name we tend to use, Abū Nuwās. This name is known in Arabic as a *laqab*, a nickname. This particular nickname is somewhat unusual in that it is a riff on the *kunyah*, the teknonym used to identify an individual by paternity or filiality: in the case of our poet, his *kunyah* is Abū ʿAlī, "the father of ʿAlī." One account maintains that the *laqab* Abū Nuwās was given to the poet as a young man in Basra because his hair was habitually disheveled. A competing etiology positions it as a political act, a declaration of his fervent South Arabian partisanship, since it is patterned on the name Dhū Nuwās (d. AD 525), the celebrated Jewish king of ancient Ḥimyar. A third explanation follows this strain of thinking, but is somewhat more prosaic, identifying Nuwās with a mountain in South Arabia. It is unclear whether any or all of these identities originated with our poet. As improbable as it may seem, we should at least entertain the possibility. After all, should we be surprised that a poet who was so skilled at fashioning the world in his verse may have proved adept at self-fashioning?

Abbasid Self-Fashioning

Abū Nuwās was born in the province of Ahwāz in Khuzistan, on the eastern littoral of the Gulf, ca. 139–40/756–58.[1] His Persian mother, Jullanār, was a

bamboo weaver and his Arab father was a soldier in the army of the last Umayyad caliph, Marwān II (r. 127–32/744–50). His father was the *mawlā*—a bondman, or protected member of the household—of a man of South Arabian descent, al-Jarrāḥ ibn ʿAbdallāh al-Ḥakamī: this is why Abū Nuwās's *nisbah*, tribal name, is al-Ḥakamī. His father's death when Abū Nuwās was very young prompted Jullanār to relocate the family to Basra.

Abū Nuwās attended a *kuttāb*, or elementary Qur'an school, and is said to have memorized the Qur'an at an early age. While working for an aloe cutter, Abū Nuwās made the acquaintance of Wālibah ibn al-Ḥubāb (d. 170/786–87), a poet who took him to Kufa as an apprentice of some sort. Wālibah was a member of a group, possibly a sodality, known as *mujjān al-Kūfah*, literally, "the transgressives of Kufa." Abū Nuwās's membership of such sodalities probably accounts for the descriptions of him dressed as a "brigand" (*shāṭir*), with his hair arranged in bangs, wearing a gown with voluminous sleeves, and clad in covered (that is, not open) leather sandals. Such an individual was known as a *fatā*, a "brave," a "fine young man." These sodalities also provide the context for many of Abū Nuwās's *Khamriyyāt* ("wine poems").[2]

Wālibah instructed Abū Nuwās in the art of poetry and is said to have taken him as his intimate. According to one anecdote, Wālibah beheld the naked Abū Nuwās on the first night they spent in each other's company and was so moved by his physical beauty that he kissed him on the backside, whereupon Abū Nuwās farted in his face, quipping that farts are meet rewards for those who kiss bums. Whatever the truth of the anecdote, it expresses one facet of the Abū Nuwās legend, his razor-sharp wit and ability to win a verbal contest. It is from Wālibah and his cronies that Abū Nuwās is said to have developed his love for boys and his penchant for the more risqué forms of poetry, the *khamriyyah* ("wine poem") and *mujūn* ("transgressive verse"), as well as the starring role Iblīs (Satan) plays in his verse.

Wālibah's death led to Abū Nuwās's return to Basra, where he studied with the notorious philologist and expert in ancient poetry and its tribal lore, Khalaf al-Aḥmar (d. 180/796). Khalaf, who had a capacious memory, was accused of forging as many poems from the ancient pre-Islamic tradition as he transmitted, especially one of the grandest of all pre-Islamic poems, the *lāmiyyat al-ʿArab* ("the poem of the Bedouin rhyming in *l*") by al-Shanfarā (d. 6th c.).[3] Khalaf instructed Abū Nuwās in the memorization of the pre-Islamic corpus and its battle lore: such instruction would have included a grounding in grammar. Abū Nuwās is said to have sought Khalaf's permission to compose and recite poetry,

which he was granted on the condition that Abū Nuwās memorize and recite one thousand ancient poems. When Abū Nuwās returned and recited these poems over a period of several days, Khalaf ordered him to go away and forget them all. Abū Nuwās betook himself to a monastery for a period of seclusion and unremembered the poems. It was then that he was authorized by Khalaf. And so another facet of the legend was born: the paradoxical freshness and naturalness of Abū Nuwās's poetry, made possible by a large-scale intertextual embedding within, and allusiveness to, the ancient tradition.

Khalaf al-Aḥmar was not Abū Nuwās's only instructor in Basra. He acquired a basic grounding in *fiqh*, religious knowledge and legal jurisprudence, as well as in the Qur'anic disciplines, such as how one Qur'anic verse can be abrogated by a verse revealed later (*al-nāsikh wa-l-mansūkh*), recitation, and the science of variant readings (*qirā'āt*). His expertise in the battle lore of the Arabs was consolidated by studying with Abū ʿUbaydah Maʿmar ibn al-Muthannā (d. 209/824–25). He studied lexicography with Abū Zayd al-Anṣārī (d. 214 or 215/830–31), a specialist in recondite vocabulary, and Hadith with ʿAbd al-Wāḥid ibn Ziyād al-Thaqafī (d. 176–79/792–96). In his final examination with ʿAbd al-Wāḥid, Abū Nuwās is said to have delivered a stinging satire of the Hadith and its exponents. And thus, another facet of the legend is created: irreverence toward the religious sciences.

During these years in Basra, Abū Nuwās is said to have fallen in love with Janān, a slave girl and musician belonging to al-Wahhāb al-Thaqafī, the teacher of the legal experts Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820) and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855). She rejected his advances. When she was given her master's permission to perform the pilgrimage, Abū Nuwās followed her to Mecca and attracted crowds eager to hear the pious verses he had composed for the occasion. He followed Janān as she circumambulated the Kaaba and engineered it such that he kissed the Black Stone at exactly the same time as she did, their cheeks touching in the process. When rebuked by an acquaintance, Abū Nuwās made it clear that this was his sole reason for performing the pilgrimage. Yet another facet of the legend emerges: disregard for the Islamic rites and proprieties.

At some point, perhaps during the accession to the caliphate of Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 170–93/786–809), Abū Nuwās arrived in Baghdad. The leading patrons of poetry were the Barmakids, sponsors also of scientists and philosophers; the Āl Nawbakht, renowned astrologers from the province of Ahwāz; and the al-Rabīʿ family, who effectively controlled access to the caliphal court—al-Rabīʿ ibn Yūnus was the caliph's *ḥājib* (chamberlain).

Abū Nuwās found little success in securing the patronage of the Barmakids, a powerful clan from Balkh in Iran (*barmak* means a priest in a Buddhist temple) that had close ties with the caliph—Yaḥyā ibn Khālid was instrumental in Hārūn's accession to the throne—and that supported a large literary entourage. The principal figure of this entourage was a poet called Abān al-Lāḥiqī (d. ca. 200/815–16). He and Abū Nuwās developed a fierce mutual animosity. Abān denigrated Abū Nuwās's compositions and in return received stinging assaults on both his person and his mother. Abū Nuwās's prediction that Abān's verses would "be scattered in the wind" has come true: virtually none of his poetry has survived.

In 187/803, Hārūn destroyed the Barmakids in a palace coup that effectively annihilated the family and its power base. In the ensuing vacuum, al-Faḍl ibn al-Rabīʿ (d. 207/822–23 or 208/823–24) was appointed by Hārūn as his vizier, and he was more supportive of Abū Nuwās's endeavors to praise the caliph. Some fine panegyrics in the grand mode have survived (see Poem 122 for an example), but it is unclear whether Abū Nuwās ever actually delivered them in person at court in front of Hārūn al-Rashīd, despite the close and fun-loving companionship that exists between them in many tales in *The Thousand and One Nights*. Hārūn imprisoned Abū Nuwās twice, once for heresy and once for a satire composed against the northern Arabs, tantamount to an act of disloyalty to the caliph and the Abbasid elite. Abū Nuwās enjoyed more success in courting the caliph's son al-Amīn (r. 193–98/809–13), and we have a number of less formal eulogies of him in a somewhat intimate mode, presumably from before his accession to the caliphate.

The precariousness of Abū Nuwās's position in Baghdad was such that in 190/805–6 he left Baghdad and traveled to Egypt to secure the patronage of al-Khaṣīb ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd, who was in charge of the country's land-tax registry. However, al-Khaṣīb's fall from grace in 191/806–7 brought an end to the poet's Egyptian sojourn.

On his return to Baghdad, Abū Nuwās was imprisoned. The death of Hārūn al-Rashīd in 193/809 and the oath of fealty to al-Amīn allowed the new caliph to free his erstwhile co-convivialist and favored poet. Abū Nuwās enjoyed his most successful, and arguably his most brilliant, years as court companion to al-Amīn, though even then he was never safe from imprisonment. A jeremiad by al-Ma'mūn from the pulpit in Khurasan denouncing the dissolute lifestyle of his brother and the debauched company he kept meant that Abū Nuwās was once again imprisoned. Jail notwithstanding, the three years of al-Amīn's caliphate

were the culmination of Abū Nuwās's career as a successful poet. And tradition has it that their friendship was not purely platonic.

Shortly after the beheading of al-Amīn, Abū Nuwās died in the house of the Nawbakht family, sometime between 198/813 and 200/815. As befits the self-mythologizing poet, there are four accounts of the cause of his death: he was poisoned by the Nawbakhts; he died in a tavern, goblet in hand; he was beaten to death by the Nawbakhts for a vituperative poem he had composed about them; and he died in prison. None of these versions seems to be true: Abū Nuwās probably died from an illness. One powerful story persists, however: the tale of his deathbed repentance and pious return to the fold of Islam, the last installment of the myth.

The Royal Hunt

The royal hunt was an elite enterprise of symbolic, ceremonial, and political significance. It was frequently conducted on a lavish scale, and often in a paradise, a park constructed, managed, and cultivated for hunting. As Thomas T. Allsen notes, the royal hunt portrayed the ability of a ruler to govern through the marshaling of "labor, military manpower, and individuals (both humans and animals) with very special skills." It was central to "interstate relations, military preparations, domestic administration, communications networks, and [. . .] the search for political legitimacy" and it required the "preservation of natural resources."[4]

Many of the *Ṭardiyyāt* of Abū Nuwās describe hunting expeditions in the grounds of Iraqi Christian monasteries, expeditions that were modeled on and sought to replicate the lavish royal hunt. They often depict what Terence Clark has described as "the 'walked-up' hunt":

> The party would walk or ride in a line, with trained eagles or falcons flying overhead ready to stoop on any birds or small mammals that might break cover. If gazelle were spotted, the cheetah handlers would bring forward one of their charges, which would be slipped. The cheetah would run down and kill a buck that had already been pursued by huntsmen on horses until it was tired or stalk the prey by itself or trail a herd upwind until near enough to kill several at once. If a hare were "put up", a pair of saluqi hounds would be slipped. If a houbara bustard took off, a saker falcon would be flown at it. In

> wooded areas along the rivers, where water birds abounded, goshawks would be flown.[5]

Our corpus also contains instances of the hunting typical of the desert Arabs in which raptors are flown from the fist in a largely horizontal chase at quarry that is not flushed but spotted.[6]

Yet, despite the verisimilitude of the corpus, we should remember that Abū Nuwās, for all his familiarity with the hunt, was a poet, not a falconer, and that these poems are representations, rather than documentations, of events—they eloquently demonstrate that "fabulous beasts can only be slain by fabulous humans"[7] and remind us, in the words of Jonathan Bate, that "the language of art is a sign of our distance from nature: poets want to sing like nightingales or skylarks because they know they do not have the freedom of flight and the pure expressive capacity of real birds."[8]

Human Hunters

Do the poems tell us anything about the human animals who carried out the hunting? The answer is connected with which nonhuman hunters were used. In the majority of cases, the poets are the hunters, but this is not always the case. Some poems may describe a falconer or an austringer or a huntsman—say, a master of hounds or a cheetah handler—who accompanies the expedition. The hunter-poet, however, is always in command of the hunt team. In the case of the saluki sight hound, many poems in the *ṭardiyyah* genre concern fairly ordinary people who live off whatever their dogs can catch. But in this corpus we also meet, for example, cheetahs, and we must expect that only the elite could afford to hunt with such a creature.

Much of the language of the hunt and many of the adjectives used to describe raptors[9] and to convey falconry practices in particular reveal a Persian origin. And many of the practices, techniques, traditions, and iconography of the hunt were inflections of the royal hunt.[10]

Nonhuman Hunters

The poets of the *ṭardiyyāt* rarely name the nonhuman hunters. Rather than saying, for example, "I went on an expedition with a saluki," they prefer to use metonymy and say, "I went on an expedition with a lean, drop-eared," leaving

the corresponding noun unsaid. That is, they take it for granted that the audience knows exactly which type of nonhuman they intend. My suspicion is that they also expect their audience to know exactly which individual bird or dog they intend. I suspect further that the nonhuman was present to hear and somehow to understand the poem. Yet, no matter how cherished or beloved the nonhuman, these nonhuman animals are rarely given names in the poems: they seem to resist humanizing, even when (or especially when?) they are circumscribed by terms deriving from human-made, domestic culture.[11] They are not enclosed in the anthropocentric orbit of the pet but retain a non-anthropocentric specificity and a particularity that, for all the interspecies blurring in depictions of the hunt, set them apart from the human hunter. At the same time, despite this particularity, they exist on a mythic plane of hyperbole and perfection almost as archetypes or universals and they often hunt in an idealized landscape, which could be any landscape. This mythologizing of the real is also the reason why the kill tallies are so excessive—these raptors are both real, particular birds and unreal, supreme death engines.

The Hunted

The quarry hunted depended on the terrain on which the hunting expedition took place and the kind of nonhuman hunter that formed part of the hunting team. In the *Ṭardiyyāt* of Abū Nuwās, we encounter highly generalized mentions of desert plains, rivers, and water holes, including wetlands, woodlands, shrublands, mountain ravines, wadis, lakes, and ponds. I presume that many of these hunting expeditions took place on the grounds of Iraq's Christian monasteries, where the hunting party could have easy access to wine and its associated pleasures.[12]

The quarry is not mentioned or described in every poem, so sometimes we don't know exactly what, for example, the saker falcon hunted and caught. And there are additional challenges in identifying the quarry even when it is named or referred to in the corpus. The first challenge—the metonymic riddle that sometimes besets our attempts to identify the nonhuman hunter—holds doubly true for the hunted nonhuman. In other words, the riddling metonyms are even more demanding and baffling when we seek to know exactly which hunted nonhumans are meant. The second challenge is that these nonhumans are rarely the primary focus of the poet's attention. So even when the poet mentions, say, a goose, we still do not know precisely which type of goose is meant.

This problem of identification looms large in the pellet-bow poems (poems in which a group of bowmen ambush birds in a wetland). In many instances, I have been reduced simply to transliterating the Arabic names.

The Inhuman Circuit of the *Ṭardiyyah*

As an enterprise, hunting is paradoxical. It is a costly, dangerous, and very unreliable method of providing sustenance. Despite the assertions of the poems, not all hunting expeditions would have been successful, and the expense of maintaining a hunting team, be it of raptors, dogs, horses, or cheetahs, would have been possible only for the wealthiest. There must also have been considerable danger involved. Given the cost and the peril, why was hunting so popular with the Abbasid elites? Hunting owed its elite popularity largely to its symbolism. It functioned as the theater in which culture heroes[13] could put themselves on display and embody the values that society and its regnal dynasty prized in its rulers: capability, prowess, decision-making, bravery, skill, and fortitude. It was the task of the culture hero to protect, disseminate, and at times enforce these values.

The feast of meat at the end of a hunting expedition also enjoyed significant symbolic capital. It was not only a testimony to the culture hero's investment and display of labor and skill but was also an occasion for a display of altruism and largesse of leadership. Hunting was thus a symbolic representation and enactment of fitness to rule, and its violence, inflicted on nonhuman animals, was thereby asserted over the enemies of the polity. Thus, the hunting poems of Ibn al-Muʿtazz (d. 296/908) celebrate and immortalize his royal status and prestige and communicate his status as embodiment of heroic masculinity.[14] The poems in this volume are a further attestation to the dominance of these values among the Abbasid elite.

Hunting scenes occur in a liminal zone: they take place at dawn and are set in a paradise—a secluded enclosure or garden, often inviolate, such as the grounds of a monastery or a game reserve. The hunt, however, does not function as a rite of initiation, for the skilled hunter takes center stage and he is already an initiate. The hunt is an arena in which the hunter's heroic masculinity is put to the test. In this liminal space, the heroic hunter must not only exercise all his skills of decision-making, coordinating the hunt team and controlling the nonhuman hunters, but in order to vanquish the quarry must penetrate the phenomenology of the nonhuman world, of both nonhuman hunter and prey. To do this, the

hero must merge his consciousness with that of the nonhumans involved in the chase—in a sense, he must efface himself but also be able at the end of the hunt to recover his self. Short of combat and warfare, this was the ultimate crucible for heroic masculinity.

In his article "Medieval Blood Sport," William Marvin discusses with great insight the "depths of experience with animal consciousness among medieval hunters," noting the delicate balance that is required for a successful hunt in which "the ferocity of the hunting instinct" must be spurred in "the animal team" until it reaches a critical point and results in a kill, at which point the discipline of training is required in order to halt the "destruction of the prey."[15] In order to achieve and maintain this balance, and in order to catch the quarry, the hunter must enter into a deep and instinctual familiarity with the prey as well as with the hunting team. All three—human hunter, nonhuman hunter, and nonhuman prey—enter, in Marvin's words,

> the same phenomenology by having to (a) register sudden stimuli, (b) assess the level of threat, (c) process the immediate time-distance-ground problems, and (d) execute the run with maximum potential for speed and stratagem.[16]

Marvin refers to the attendant "powers of hyper-focus" and notes that the hunt endows "lesser-seeming creatures" with superpowers.[17]

The hunting poems in this volume provide numerous examples of a microscale conceptualization of relationality and a blurring, at the phenomenological level, of human and nonhuman animal, mediated by the poet, who is simultaneously participant, observer, and creator. In the meticulous attention paid by the poets to the stages of the hunt, the chase, and the kill, these poems blur distinctions between the perceptions of the poet as hunter and the perceptions of the nonhuman hunters.

As a genre, the *ṭardiyyah* eschews generalization and thrives in the particular, in the moment, in the detail, in the "little flickers of consciousness coaxed by memory."[18] The microscale conceptualization of relationality, which is typical of Abbasid poetics, becomes, in the context of the *ṭardiyyah*, another index of Marvin's "hyper-focus." And the attendant power of hyper-focus, a feature that might have seemed unique to the pointillism of the Arabic poetic aesthetic, turns out, in essence, also to belong to a widespread phenomenology of the hunt.

The phenomenological blurring so typical of the *ṭardiyyah* is an indication that what is at play in these poems is the phenomenon designated by the

theorists Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari as "agencement"—that is, an "assemblage" or a "circuit."[19] The human hunter, the nonhuman hunter, the paraphernalia of hunting (be it the raptor's jesses and bell, or the dog's collar and leash), and the quarry form ephemeral nodes of being in which

> no single object or body has meaning [. . .] without reference to other forces, intensities, affects, and directions to which it is conjoined and within which it is always in the process of becoming something other, something new.[20]

In the resultant (evanescent) circuit, or assemblage, it becomes difficult to isolate an individual falcon or saluki as distinct from the falconer or saluki handler or even as distinct from the hunting gear or the quarry. The species line is dissolved into "a dispersive network of identity that admixes the inanimate and the inhuman," which disregards bodily boundaries and creates "an amalgam of force, materiality, and motion." [21] Furthermore, the art of hunting requires a rigorous regimen of training on the part of both human and nonhuman hunter—it depends on "an intersubjective discipline"; that is, one that seeks to transcend or erase or dematerialize interspecies boundaries in a reconfigured embodiment.[22]

Jeffrey J. Cohen, in his discussion of what he labels "the chivalric circuit," notes that steed and warrior and accoutrements become simultaneously active and receptive points within a transformative assemblage. Agency, potentiality, and identity are mobile, the product of relations of movement rather than a static residuum contained in discrete bodies (horse, man) and inanimate objects (saddle, stirrups, spurs, armor, sword).[23] In its translation into verse of this phenomenological blurring, of this inhuman circuit or assemblage, the *ṭardiyyah* expresses the dismantling and transformation of material form into a blended species whose coherence and movements are no longer exclusively human, no matter how hegemonic the role occupied in the circuit by the poet-as-hunter.[24] The *ṭardiyyah* becomes, in Deleuze's terms, a site of "combat-between," "a center of metamorphosis."[25]

Interspecies Encounter

In two of the most striking English poems of the twentieth century, D. H. Lawrence's "Snake" (1921) and Elizabeth Bishop's "Moose" (1972), the nonhuman animals emerge in all their unhuman mystery and majesty, and "the loss of creatureliness [. . .] that comes from living apart from the natural, both within and

outside our bodies,"[26] is lamented. The poets confront two distinct zones of being: that of human animals, on the one hand, and nonhuman animals, on the other—what Jacques Derrida identifies as the "abyssal limit," "an existence that refuses to be conceptualized."[27] In "His Heart Whispered Caution" (Poem 30), Abū Nuwās describes a situation in which a concealed hunter watches a sparrow standing just out of reach of his trap net. The bird's world is miniaturized, and it is a world that demands of its audience the keenest attentiveness in order to adequately respond to it.[28] The hunter's tense yet powerless attentiveness to the bird exudes an air of mystery, and the poet anthropomorphizes the bird's indecision, with its heart whispering caution and its exemplary trust in God's protection. The poet turns the failure of the trap into a lesson on the inscrutability of God's decree, the mutability of Fate, and the need to accept life's uncertainties.

For all its humanizing strategies and its apparent inability to avoid being interested in the nonhuman only insofar as it is a reflection of what is significant to the human, the poem suggests a different way of conceiving relationality. It recognizes that humans are not the only selves in the world and attends to "living thoughts in the world," highlighting not only the centrality of God's decree in all living creatures, but also how confusion and uncertainty can become a mechanism for appreciating that relationality might operate across the species divide, that nonhumans might interpret the world every bit as much as humans do.[29] The poem suggests that we do not need certain knowledge in order to know how the sparrow is interpreting its reality, that the poet's provisional explanation of the sparrow's interpretation of what it was thinking might suggest a different form of interspecies attentiveness, one less grim that Derrida's "abyssal limit." In this poem, Abū Nuwās, like William Wordsworth, sees "into the life of things."[30]

Abū Nuwās's Oeuvre

Abū Nuwās's poetry is sheer joy: it never fails to delight, surprise, and excite. His diwan, his collected poems, encompasses the principal early Abbasid poetic genres: panegyrics (*madīḥ*), renunciant poems (*zuhdiyyāt*), lampoons (*hijā'*), hunting poems (*ṭardiyyāt*), wine poems (*khamriyyāt*), love poems (*ghazaliyyāt*) to males (*mudhakkarāt*) and females (*mu'annathāt*), and transgressive verse (*mujūn*). What is most striking in his poetry is its apparent effortlessness and the naturalness of its Arabic, despite the deployment of the full panoply of the new rhetorical style known as the *badī'*. Abū Nuwās represented the poetic trend the critics termed *muḥdath*, which means both "modern" and "modernist." The ease

with which he celebrates the accepted features of the pre-Islamic and Umayyad corpus, often inverting and subverting them, and innovates at both the level of the individual verse and of the macro structure of the poem is virtually unparalleled. Such simplicity is deceptive, for it is usually the result of deep artifice.

Ṭardiyyāt

This edition and translation of the *Ṭardiyyāt* of Abū Nuwās are based principally upon the recension of the poet's diwan by Ḥamzah al-Iṣfahānī (d. 360/971). Ḥamzah devoted considerable attention to his presentation of this hunting corpus. He divided the corpus into poems that his authorities averred were authentic (Poems 1–30) and poems attributed to Abū Nuwās without sufficient testimony to corroborate their authenticity (Poems 36–106). He also added an in-between category of two kinds of poems: those that were genuine compositions by Abū Nuwās but were not, in the strictest sense, on the subject of the hunt (Poems 31 and 32), and poems that were of indeterminate authenticity and also were not, in the strictest sense, on the subject of the hunt (Poems 33–35). He further subdivided the authentic poems into *urjūzah*s, which are pieces composed in *rajaz* meter (Poems 1–26), and qasidas (Poems 27–30).

Much uncertainty has surrounded the number of genuine poems by Abū Nuwās. This is how al-Iṣfahānī describes the situation:

> Ibn Abī Ṭāhir quotes Ibn Ḥarb, citing ʿAlī ibn Abī Khalṣah who had it from Abū Diʿāmah, as stating that Abū Nuwās composed twenty-nine *urjūzah*s on hunting, while the remainder were attributions. Abū l-ʿAbbās al-ʿUmmārī, however, quotes Ibn Mahrawayh as citing al-Ḥasan ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Sukkarī's comment that Ibrāhīm ibn Maḥbūb showed him a jotter that Ibrāhīm said contained more than seventy *rajaz* poems on hunting dictated and signed by Abū Nuwās himself. Abū Nuwās's transmitters Muḥammad ibn Ḥarb ibn Khalaf, Sulaymān ibn Sakhṭah, al-Yuʾyuʾ, al-Jammāz from Basra, Ibn al-Dāyah the Baghdadi Slave Trader, and ʿAlī ibn Abī Khalṣah told Abū Hiffān that Abū Nuwās composed no more than twenty-nine *rajaz* pieces and four qasidas on the subject, while the remainder are attributions.[31]

It is immediately apparent that there is some discrepancy between the numbers of this statement (twenty-nine *urjūzah*s and four qasidas) and the version of

al-Iṣfahānī's recension in the extant manuscripts, which preserve thirty poems (*urjūzah*s and qasidas) in total. Somewhere along the chain of transmission, three *urjūzah*s have fallen by the wayside. The discrepancy is further evident in the list of twenty-six opening lines given by al-Iṣfahānī, one of which has no corresponding poem in the collection and another of which is in fact one of the attributions (Poem 60). No matter the fluctuations in the tradition, we must thank al-Iṣfahānī for his scrupulosity in preserving so maximally the *Ṭardiyyāt*, because we have many examples of the genre that would otherwise have been lost.

Al-Iṣfahānī's attention to detail did not stop at the level of determining authenticity and attribution; it extended also to the arrangement of compositions within his chosen categories. He elected to organize them not alphabetically, as was often the case, but by animal.

What I find most striking about Abū Nuwās's *Ṭardiyyāt* is their fertile inventiveness; the smoothness of the diction, in which the demands of the meter (admittedly, *rajaz* is one of the most accommodating of the Arabic meters) and the naturalness of the Arabic are in harmony; and the poet's powers of observation.[32] The narrative economy of the corpus is also notable. Some of the poet's images are unforgettable, as, for example, in Poem 22, where Abū Nuwās describes a lark, killed by a merlin: "Its beak flopped / on top of a cairn."[33] Few poets can match the skill of Poem 14, remarkable for the way in which the poet's description follows the bird's anatomy from head to foot.

There are few extant *ṭardiyyāt* that predate Abū Nuwās's *Ṭardiyyāt*.[34] As a genre, it seems to emerge fully formed, like Athena from Zeus's head. Like almost all classical Arabic poetry, the *ṭardiyyah* was occasional—that is, it was composed for a specific occasion or purpose. It was, in fact, doubly occasional, in that its structure and contents were largely determined by the occasion it was composed for—the format and structure of the hunting expedition. Invariably, the hunting expedition began in the dead of night, proceeded to an early-morning hunt before the sun was high in the sky, and ended with a feast in which the game was cooked and shared, accompanied by a drinking session. Many of the poems included here would have been composed or declaimed during these festivities at the conclusion of the hunt. The structure of the hunting expedition, then, by and large determined the structure of the poem.

The standard opening of the *ṭardiyyah* was inspired by what is probably the earliest extant hunting scene in Arabic, the one in the *Muʿallaqah*, or "Suspended Ode," of Imruʾ al-Qays (d. AD 544), which begins with the formula *waqad aghtadī*, literally, "often I depart early in the morning."[35] Three of the earliest

extant *ṭardiyyāt* begin with this formula.[36] Abū Nuwās's inventiveness is conspicuous in the opening lines of his authentic corpus: eleven of his poems begin with the *qad aghtadī* formula (or a variant thereof).[37] The "dawn motif," but without the *qad aghtadī* formula, familiar from an early *ṭardiyyah* by Ghaylān ibn Ḥurayth,[38] is also used (Poem 13), but Abū Nuwās is equally ready to dispense with both the *qad aghtadī* formula and the "dawn motif" in four poems (Poems 4, 6, 8, and 9). He begins four further poems with the pre-Islamic device of introducing a new sequence in a qasida with the particle *wa-* with or without *rubba*, meaning "many's the . . ." or "there was a . . . ," employed for a *ṭardiyyah* by Abū l-Najm al-ʿIjlī.[39] To the best of my knowledge, Abū Nuwās is the first poet to deploy the *lā ṣayda illā* (literally, "there can be no hunting unless . . .") introduction and, in terms of the *ṭardiyyah* genre, the *anʿatu* ("I describe") opening.[40]

The poet's subversive wit is in evidence in the phallus description (Poem 31), which begins with the *qad aghtadī* formula, and in the dirham description (Poem 32), which begins with the poet's hallmark rejection of the pre-Islamic topos in which the poet describes how he chances upon a now-abandoned encampment where once he lived in the company of his beloved and is moved to tears by the memories.[41] Ibn al-Muʿtazz, the tradition's second great *ṭardiyyah* poet, may have crafted the genre into a miniaturist's art, with his startling and vivid portraits and his keen, bold images,[42] but who can match Abū Nuwās's brilliance, bravura, and panache?

Panache, wit, and inventiveness are most acute in a hunting poem that is not classified as a *ṭardiyyah* but is categorized among the *khamriyyāt* (wine poems), though a strong case could also be made for classifying it among the *ghazal* (love poems): the line between *khamriyyah* and *ghazal* was very porous, as was the line between *ṭardiyyah* and *ghazal*.[43]

> No heart can keep its secrets safe
> from the spell of your gazelle eyes.
> They ask what I'm hiding and whisper
> all my feelings in your ear. One look
> and all is revealed—you seem to control
> my thoughts. How have you been able
> to break me yet stay free of how Time
> has ravaged me? I watch you kill me
> with no fear of reprisal, as if my murder
> were a sacrifice offered up to God.

So hand me my morning cup of wine—
yes, it's forbidden, but God forgives our sins—
a pale wine that builds bubbles in the mix,
like pearls chased by gold, Noah's prize
on board the ark when the earth was flooded,
as light as a soul incarnated in the body
of an amphora sealed with pitch
then wrapped with linen and palm leaves.
A Persian lord chose to conceal it
from its life in the world, hidden in a cavern
for eons in a land where neither Kalb,
ʿAbs, nor Dhubyān pitched their tents,
where neither Dhuhl nor Shaybān dwelled,
in the home of the elect where Khusro built
his palaces, never sullied by a Basran, free
of that smell of *ʿarfaj* and taste of acacia
the Bedouin love so much, where pomegranate
grows surrounded by myrtle in a garland
of roses and lilies. One sniff, and your nose
is filled with the aroma of sweet basil.
What a night of auspicious stars,
as drunkard ambushed drunkard
and we worshipped Iblīs, in his thrall
until the monks tolled the death of night.
You got up, dragging your sumptuous clothes
soiled by my wicked hand, wailing, in tears,
"Oh no! You have robbed me of my virtue!"
"A lion spotted a gazelle and jumped on it,"
I replied. "Sic transit gloria mundi!"

Abū Nuwās's poem is an elaboration of the topos of the deadly gaze of the love object who is figured as a gazelle—the vulnerable doe, hunted by the leonine poet, turns her eyes on him and is metamorphosed from hunted to hunter.[44] The poet is transformed into the quarry and, unable to resist, dies the death of love. With his customary wit and ebullience, Abū Nuwās begins with his sanctioned death under the bewitching gaze of his love-object-cum-gazelle. In the next move of the poem, the bacchanal, he calls for wine, and thus subverts another

topos of the pre-Islamic tradition, the motif in which the poet consoles himself for the loss of the love object, either in a desert journey, a feat of arms, or inebriation. The wine description leads to the third move in the poem, the drunken, carnal orgy at the end of the debauch. But once again the hunted becomes the hunter as Abū Nuwās, no longer the victim, becomes the victimizer and exacts his revenge by violating the love object.

Of the Arabic poetic genres, the *ṭardiyyah* is semiotically closest in spirit to the love lyric (*ghazal*), and in particular those compositions in which the poet-lover is hunted and ensnared by the love object, male or female. The epic hunter, vanquisher of the nonhuman world, abjectly and voluntarily surrenders himself to the snares and charms of a young boy or girl. The love object hunts down and destroys the hunter, who is then wounded by the very object of his heart's desire. Unlike the *ṭardiyyah*, which culminates in a successful kill, the *ghazal* usually terminates in failure: the love object is always out of reach and unattainable, and should that object be attained, it is quickly replaced by another unattainable object. The epic hunter of the *ṭardiyyah* is always a victim in the *ghazal*, his masculinity ever undone. However, the true hunter in the *ghazal* is not the pursued love object; rather, it is the poet's own desire, which desire is powerless and without choice, invariably indulging in the chase and thus becoming a victim, enthusiastically embracing perpetual failure.[45]

In Abū Nuwās's wine poem, the customary power dynamic is restored: the once vanquished lion kills the erstwhile victorious gazelle. Only Abū Nuwās could have turned this whole dynamic on its head.