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MADDENING LOVE: ISLAMIC THOUGHT AND THE ETHICS OF DESIRE IN THE
LEGEND OF LAYLA AND MAJNUN

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For my grandmother, Lila Faye Jones

a woman ahead of the times

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Abstract

From the protests of 1968 to the everyday expression of queer desire, love has the potential to be radical. While this radical dimension may be cross-cultural, most theorists work within a Eurocentric framework that universalizes a particular way of understanding love. Conversely, scholarship on love that stems from other traditions is localized as only relevant to those who identify with and/or specialize in that tradition. This project, *Maddening Love: Islamic Thought and the Ethics of Desire in the Legend of Layla and Majnun*, remedies this tendency. I examine the transformation of the most famous love-story of Islamic cultures from its seventh-century Arabic anecdotal beginnings to it becoming a Persian romantic epic, Neẓāmī's (d. 1209) *Layli and Majnun*. I argue that Neẓāmī's text presents love as an ethical commitment that leads to a vision of community not defined by biological kinship or the requirements of premodern citizenry.

I deploy interdisciplinary methods including close reading of Arabic and Persian literary accounts, historicized analysis of discourses on *'ishq* (a term often translated as *érōs*) in premodern Islam, and insights from queer theory and animal studies—two theoretical fields whose language for conceptualizing relationality speaks to my project's focus on kinship. Chapter One reads excerpts from the Qur'an and the biography of the prophet Muhammad as well as from medical discourse on *'ishq*, demonstrating how the madman (*majnūn*, meaning mad or possessed by *jinn*) was a figure proximate to prophets in late antique Islamic contexts. These sources provide the backdrop for analyzing the emergence of Majnun as a literary figure in Ibn Qutayba's (d. 889) *Book of Poetry and Poets* (*Kitāb al-Sh'ir wa al-shu'arā'*), Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī's (d. 967) *Book of Songs* (*Kitāb al-Aghānī*), and the *Dīwan Majnūn Laylā*. Chapter Two transitions between Arabic and Persian literary accounts, analyzing how Majnun's appeals to bondage in the first half of *Layli*

and Majnun reimagine kinship through sacrificial logic. Chapter Three evaluates Majnun's reimagining of kinship by analyzing how Majnun, after creating an alternative society amongst animals, speaks about *'ishq* as an ontological substance that lies beyond all dualities. The text's foregrounding of the animals' function as protectors of Majnun, however, draws Majnun's ontological perspective on unity into question, and suggests that the text's conception of unity can be understood as something obtained through embodied relationships. Chapter Four extends the argument on embodied relationality by examining Layla's role, arguing that as a lover Layla critiques Majnun's perspective by articulating a model of mutual care. I conclude by arguing that *Layli and Majnun* suggests the ethical import of *'ishq* in ways that differ from Islamic ethical texts (*akhlāq*) that conceive of the highest form of love as friendship between men of the polis, following an Aristotelian model. Instead, *Layli and Majnun* participates in the genre of *adab* (a term that weds ethics and aesthetics) as it asks the reader to join a group of potentially mad lovers, and the text serves as a space for thinking through the relationship between ethics and desire for its readers.

Note on Transliteration

I have adopted a slightly modified version of the IJMES transliteration system for Arabic and Persian (see table below). I desire neither to persianize Arabic nor to arabize Persian, and there is no system that adequately covers both languages. The IJMES system has the advantage of being standard for the field of Middle Eastern studies writ large, yet it is based on Arabic pronunciation. In order to approximate the pronunciation of Persian words, I have included what medieval Arabic grammarians referred to as “unknown” (*majhūl*) vowels for Persian words:

Table 1: Transliteration of Arabic and Persian

Ar.	Per.	Ar.	Per.	Ar.	Per.
ء	’	ر	r	ف	f
ب	b	ز	z	ق	q
پ	--	ژ	--	ک	k
ت	t	س	s	گ	g
ث	th	ش	sh	ل	l
ج	j	ص	ṣ	م	m
چ	--	ض	ḍ	ن	n
ح	ḥ	ط	ṭ	ه	h
خ	kh	ظ	ẓ	و	w
د	d	ع	‘	ي	y
ذ	dh	غ	gh	ة	a, at
ا، آ	ā	اَ	a	اَو	aw
و	ū	اُ	u	اَي	ay
ي	ī	اِ	i	اَوِ	ūw
				اَيِ	īy

Many words, however, are shared between Arabic and Persian and I have chosen to adopt Arabic spelling for sake of consistency unless the word is being used in a specifically Persian construct (*‘ishq* instead of *‘eshq*, but Enteshārāt-e Dāneshgāh-e Tehran instead of Intishārāt). I add short vowels to Arabic poetry. I drop the particle al- except when it appears in a genitive construct or

an extended sequence, such as Aḥmad al-Ghazālī. I keep the genitive eẓāfa when it is an established part of a Persian name, e.g. Nāṣer-e Khosrow.

Overall, my goal is to make the project accessible to both specialists and generalists. As such, I aim for precise transliteration of texts and names, and I copy all Arabic and Persian for translated passages. Dynasties, toponyms, and titles, however, are readily anglicized and are given in their most common form without diacritics: Abbasid, Ghaznavid, Seljuk; sultan, caliph. Books and publications are also rendered in English after first citation, but the original title will always be cited in the bibliography. I also use Merriam-Webster forms of commonly cited words without diacritics: Qur'an, Sura. I have also decided to render characters names without transliteration so as to render the literary figures approachable in English: Majnun, Layla.

Note on Citations and Translations

Footnote citations of *Layli and Majnun* refer to the 2008 Sarvatiyan edition using the shorthand Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, page number / chapter number v. (verse number). I use this edition because it is the most recent and accessible one available, and because it provides both chapter and line numbers for quick reference. It also has the benefit of referencing twelve manuscripts. I have occasionally cited divergent readings included in Zanjani's (1990) edition, which claims access to an older manuscript but which does not thoroughly explain editorial decisions and references only five manuscripts at the University of Tehran, and in Babaev's (1965) edition. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

Introduction

The Kashmiri-American poet Agha Shahid Ali (d. 2001) opens his ghazal “In Arabic” with a citation of the love-story of Layla and Majnun. Majnun—the legendary seventh-century poet-lover whose name means “madman”—serves for Ali as the paradigm of pain. Placing Arabic as the *radif* or end-word of each couplet, Ali creates an arena of ambivalence around the language whose heritage both is and is not his own:

A language of loss? I have some business in Arabic.
Love letters: calligraphy pitiless in Arabic.

At an exhibit of miniatures, what Kashmiri hairs!
Each paisley inked into a golden tress in Arabic.

This much fuss about a language I don't know? So one day
perfume from a dress may let you digress in Arabic.

A "Guide for the Perplexed" was written—believe me—
by Cordoba's Jew—Maimonides—in Arabic.

Majnoon, by stopped caravans, rips his collars, cries "Laila!"
Pain translated is O! much more—not less—in Arabic.¹

Calligraphy and miniatures written in Arabic from the Islamic past haunt Ali's poem as the Kashmiri speaker claims both familiarity with and distance from a language that causes “this much fuss.” Maimonides (d. 1204) appears as a reminder, seemingly to the speaker and his addressee, that the Arabic past itself is a hybrid one, inclusive of non-Muslim figures. Yet the power of an Arabic heritage again reasserts itself as the speaker claims the love-story of Layla and Majnun to be “pain translated.” Not only is the story invoked, but also the speaker takes a moment to place it in a Bedouin setting of passing caravans. Despite the speaker's ambivalence towards the Arabic language, it is nevertheless the thing that provides him with a paradigm of ideal love.

1. Agha Shahid Ali contributed to the establishment the formal constraints of the ghazal in American literature, as can be seen from the anthology he edited, *Ravishing DisUnities: Real Ghazals in English* (Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 2000). This poem is quoted from Ali, *Call Me Ishmael Tonight: A Book of Ghazals* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 2003), 80-81.

Ali's ghazal maintains the form for the next several lines as the speaker continues to evoke hybridity from within Arabic culture through references to Anton Shammas and Federico García Lorca (d. 1936), writers who blend Arabic literary forms with Hebrew and Spanish respectively.² The final line returns to the subject of love as the poet deploys his name *Shahid* as a way of wrestling with its different Persian and Arabic resonances:

They ask me to tell them what *Shahid* means: Listen, listen:
It means "The Beloved" in Persian, "witness" in Arabic.

The poet's own name (*takhallos*) serves as a reminder of multilingual inheritances from the Islamic past as Persian appears to contest any uniformity of Arabic. Indeed, this line indicates saturation in the Persian tradition wherein the divine was typically described as "the Beloved" through mystical poetry that shared a vocabulary with courtly love poetics. Throughout, Ali's poem undermines the unitary significance of the Arabic language as the idiom of Islamic heritage even as it recognizes the power of its recurrence. Within this recurrence, the Arabic love-story of Layla and Majnun appears as the enduring site of ideal love for any speaker informed by Islamic cultures, yet the meaning of love itself changes within the many languages of Islam. Beyond its Arabic beginnings, Majnun's forsaken love for Layla has served as the subject of innumerable retellings in Persian, Turkish, Urdu, Hindi, Malay, Kurdish, French, and English literature and cinema. New citations locate themselves within a mesh of inherited meanings, a process which this project

2. "Writes Shammas: Memory, no longer confused, now is a homeland—his two languages a Hebrew caress in Arabic.

When Lorca died, they left the balconies open and saw:
On the sea his *qasidas* stitched seamless in Arabic."

Anton Shammas is a Palestinian writer known for Hebrew translations of Arabic literature. Federico García Lorca adapted his *casidas* from Spanish renditions of Andalusian-Arabic *qasidas*. For more on Lorca's adaptation, see Federico García Lorca, *Selected Poems* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). See also Ali, *Call Me Ishmael Tonight*, 81.

analyzes by examining the transition from Arabic to Persian of premodern versions of the legend. As with Ali's citation of the story, I am interested not only in exploring the story's roots but also in how its meaning shifts as it encounters languages beyond Arabic.

My project centers on what the most famous lovers of Islamic literature—the madman-poet known as Majnun and his beloved, Layla—can teach us about rationality, embodiment, and the role of love in social life. As an epithet, *majnūn* means one who is possessed (by spirits known as *jinn*), mad, or insane, yet this Majnun's madness pushes him beyond the boundaries of the human. The overarching plot of the legend's many versions is that Qays (Majnun's birth name) and Layla fall in love as children of related kin living sometime shortly after the arrival of Islam, Layla's father marries her to another man, Qays loses his mind and becomes known by his epithet, Majnun, and finally Majnun lives amongst the animals in the wilderness reciting poetry about Layla until his death. In Neẓāmī Ganjavī's (d. 1209) *Layli and Majnun*, a Persian romantic epic that rewrites its Arabic predecessors, Majnun is described as creating an alternative kingdom amongst animals in the wilderness. In this kingdom, Majnun exists in a liminal state of being wild like the beasts and an ambiguously gendered human, and the animals offer themselves to him in service, which leads to the establishment of an ideal society. Unlike previous scholarship that focuses on classifying Neẓāmī's text, my project is driven by questions about the legend's meaning: why is the ideal lover a madman who lives amongst the animals? What does his archetypal life tell us about love, its entanglements with defining the human, and its implications in social life?

I will focus on the moment of translation from early Arabic poetry to Neẓāmī's (d. 1209) Persian romantic epic, *Layli and Majnun*, which is regarded as the canonical version and is one of Neẓāmī's five long narrative poems that set a standard imitated by authors up to the colonial

period.³ In addition to Neẓāmī’s text, I examine Ibn Qutayba’s (d. 889) *Book of Poetry and Poets* (*Kitāb al-Sh‘ir wa al-shu‘arā’*), Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī’s (d. 967) *Book of Songs* (*Kitāb al-Aghānī*), and an anonymous *Dīwan* that is the longest version of the tale in premodern Arabic.⁴ I argue that Neẓāmī’s *Layli and Majnun* presents a novel theory of love with respect to premodern Islamic intellectual debates on ‘*ishq*—a term often translated as radical love, *érōs*, mystical love, or romantic love.⁵ It is against the accretion of debates on ‘*ishq* in the early medieval period that I will analyze seventh to twelfth century Arabic and Persian renditions to bring forth the conceptual work of ‘*ishq* in *Layli and Majnun*. Unlike its Arabic literary predecessors that use various terms for love and desire, Neẓāmī’s text explicitly thematizes ‘*ishq* as a force that leads to corporeal transformation, and it uses inherited motifs of the legend to illustrate how the embodied effects of ‘*ishq* can be lived in and beyond social life through the divergent ways in which Layla, Majnun, and other characters are affected by ‘*ishq*’s force. The text places these characters and their various perspectives into dialogic encounter, which allows the reader to filter through different approaches to ‘*ishq* and which is a process that simultaneously cultivates the reader’s subjectivity. Overall, Neẓāmī’s text presents love primarily as an ethical commitment that extends beyond romantic

3. There are approximately eighty versions based on Neẓāmī’s Ganjavi’s (d. 1209) canonical Persian poem alone. Hasan Ḍulfaqāri cites fifty-nine ‘imitations’ in Persian, while S. Asadollayev lists eighty versions in Persian, Ottoman Turkish, Chagatay Turkish, Azeri, and Kurdish. It is, then, the most popular love-story of the premodern Islamic world. For a description of prominent imitations and adaptations in the premodern period, see Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, “Leylī o Majnūn.” *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, last modified July 15, 2009. <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/leyli-o-Majnun-narrative-poem>

4. The earliest manuscript of this source dates to 1245, but it likely includes sedimented layers of material. The cataloguer Ibn al-Nadīm (d. c. 995) includes an independent work entitled *Majnūn Laylā* in his famous *Book Catalogue* (*Kitāb al-Fihrist*), which likely points to this work. For a longer discussion, see chapter 1.

5. Omid Safi has translated ‘*ishq* as radical love, claiming that mystics such as Hallāj (d. 922), ‘Ayn al-Qoẓat (d. 1131), and Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār (d. 1221) fell within a way of thinking best rendered as radical love. Despite careful philological analysis, Joseph Normet Bell refers to the concept as “eros-‘*ishq*,” and his introductory remarks point to similarities with platonic and neoplatonic discourse. Throughout this project, I have gestured to historical similarities between the deployment of these two terms in philosophical and medical discourse, yet I additionally resist equating ‘*ishq* with *érōs* given the meanings now associated with the latter in English. See Omid Safi, *Radical Love* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), xxi and *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979), 25.

attachment to address issues of communal belonging. Locating how the text's ethical preoccupations differ from systems of religious ethics, I maintain that its conception of love envisions a community beyond normative kinship, and that it serves as a place for its readers to think through the relationship between desire and ethics within the constraints of social life.

I choose to leave *'ishq* untranslated throughout this project to locate its significance both in *Layli and Majnun* and in contemporaneous Islamic intellectual discourse. While I translate terms such *ḥubb/maḥabba* or *hawā/shahwat* as love or lust specifically, *'ishq* is a more ambiguous term. I historicize its deployment alongside the specific demands placed on the body by premodern Muslim thinkers who considered the relationship between divine and romantic love to be mutually informative. This is not to say that from the perspective of modern, English-language scholarship I have unmediated access to a temporally and linguistically distant concept.⁶ Instead, my intention is to analyze the deployment of the concept in medieval versions of the legend, a concept which enhanced the philosophical import of the story. By emphasizing *'ishq*, Neẓāmī's *Layli and Majnun* weaves together philosophical and mundane registers as it probes and illustrates the corporeal effects of desire and of what it means to love.

I. Literature review

Previous scholarship has interpreted *Layli and Majnun* as either a fictional romance or as a mystical allegory. Instead of reinforcing this divide, this dissertation thinks with both registers

6. This project's usage of *'ishq* limits the critical language through which the comparative study of religion and literature occurs by pointing to a specific context. It is not intended, however, to be an accurate representation of an "emic" concept. Alexander Beecroft has outlined how using the emic as "a critical methodology as an outside observer (or even as an 'inside' observer speaking to a scholarly, therefore always already partially 'outside' audience) is already to begin the transition from emic to etic." Indeed, as Beecroft points out, "one of the dangers of a scholarly methodology that overemphasizes the emic is that it runs the risk of reifying as meaningful and structuring indigenous concepts or terms whose meanings were or are in fact contested within the culture itself." Leaving *'ishq* untranslated allows us to see how it appears in different historical discourses in different ways, which offer a backdrop for understanding its specific deployment in *Layli and Majnun*. See Alexander Beecroft, *An Ecology of World Literature: From Antiquity to the Present Day* (New York: Verso, 2015), 31.

to show how *Layli and Majnun* illustrates similarities in approach to romantic and mystical love and reflects on the place of excessive love in everyday life. This section outlines previous scholarship on the legend, first in the narrow sense of scholarship direction on its medieval Persian and Arabic versions, and then in a wider sense of how this scholarship fits into a larger paradigm of western views on premodern Islamic sexualities.

Scholarship on *Layli and Majnun* in English begins with James Atkinson's nineteenth century translation, which is loose adaptation of the original that makes generalizations in its introduction, declaring, for example, that "human nature is everywhere the same."⁷ After Rudolf Gelpke's more scholarly translation of *Layli and Majnun* into German in 1963, scholarship on the legend in the eighties and early nineties focused on archetypal attributes of Majnun.⁸ As'ad Khairallah, in his comparative study of Ibn Qutayba (d. 889), al-Wālibī (f. c. 9th century), and 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī's (d. 1492) Persian version of the story, pointed to the universal appeal of what he calls "the Majnūn figure" who he states archetypally "expresses a collective need for rebellion against the rationalist claims of society."⁹ Michael Dols wrote a comprehensive study on madness in medieval Islamic society titled *Majnūn: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society*, and when focusing on Majnun as a literary character stipulated various ways in which he could be coded as one who stands outside the normative limits of the human at the time.¹⁰

7. It is not clear to me which critical edition Atkinson uses, and his translation reads as an adaptation. See James Atkinson, *Laili and Majnun: A Poem* (London: A.J. Valpy., 1836), vi-xiii.

8. Rudolf Gelpke's translation is based on the Dastgerdi critical edition, although it is a prose summation. The English edition was published by Bruno Cassirer in 1966, and later republished by Shambhala Publications in 1978. See Rudolf Gelpke, *The Story of Layla and Majnun* (New York: Omega Publications, 2011), ix.

9. See As'ad Khairallah, *Love, Madness, and Poetry: An interpretation of the Mağnūn Legend* (Beirut: Beirutur Texte und Studien, 1980), 1-5.

10. Michael Dols specifically delineates forms of "socially recognized madness," or madness that does not need to be treated, such as "the excessive love in the otherwise sane, the wisdom of the fool, or the divine love of the mystic," of which Majnun could fit in any of these categories. See Michael W. Dols, *Majnūn: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 4.

On the Arabic material more specifically, Ruqayya Khan's dissertation and recent monograph on the Majnun section of Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī's (d. 967) *Book of Songs (Kitāb al-Aghānī)* is the most comprehensive study to date.¹¹ In her 2020 monograph, *Bedouin and 'Abbasid Cultural Identities: The Arabic Majnūn Laylā Story*, Khan reads Majnun as a construct of what she terms the "bedouin cosmos" whose "cultural primitivism" fascinated and aided Abbasid elites in their processes of self-definition through difference.¹² Khan builds on Jaroslav Stetkeyvch's understanding of the mytho-poetic function of the Najd region as the site of homeland in early Arabic literature and puts forth a historically grounded reading of Majnun's popularity in the early Abbasid period, although she negates potential mystical associations in the Arabic material and does not address the continued popularity of the story beyond its Arabic beginnings.¹³ Renate Jacobi's work on the 'udhrī ghazal—the earliest poetic form attributed to Majnun—compares the sense of time in pre-Islamic poetry to the early ghazal and demonstrates how the latter represents a new concept of love through a heightened, subjectively experienced present.¹⁴ I cite Jacobi's understanding alongside Suzanne Stetkeyvch's work on gender in pre-Islamic poetry in order to

11. Ruqayya Khan, "Sexuality and Secrecy in the Medieval Arabic Romance of 'Majnūn Laylā,'" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1997).

12. Ruqayya Khan, *Bedouin and 'Abbasid Cultural Identities: The Arabic Majnun Layla Story* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 13-19.

13. Khan states that a mystical or allegorizing tendency belongs to the Persian tradition. Jaroslav Stetkeyvch, in discussing the central role of the Najd in classical Arabic literature, claims that for both geopolitical and mythopoetic reasons the Najd "historically and legendarily enjoyed an undisputed claim to autochthony as regards purity of lineage and correctness of the Arabic language." On these mythopoetic reasons, Stetkeyvch claims that Majnun as a character was invented to accommodate feelings of a regional nostalgic spirit that sentimentalized the memory of a pristine Bedouin homeland. The Arabic material, while it does develop out of poetic traditions associated with Bedouinity, nevertheless cannot be reduced to a juxtaposition with a Persian mystical approach as it likewise contains motifs of awe and wonder that resonate with mystical poetics. See Khan, *Bedouin and 'Abbasid Cultural Identities*, 2 and Jaroslav Stetkeyvch, *The Zephyrs of Najd: The Poetics of Nostalgia in the Classical Arabic Nasīb* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 122.

14. Through a detailed comparison between a poem of Abū Dhu 'ayb al-Hudhalī (d. 649) and the poetry of 'udhrī poet Jamīl (d. c. 701), Jacobi concludes that "time exists and can be experienced in the present only, the past and the future being an 'extension of the mind.' Both the poet of the nasīb and the poet of the ghazal speak within the present, but their experience of time is different, for the first 'extends his mind' towards the past, whereas the second is turned to the future." See Jacobi, "Time and Reality in the 'Nasīb' and 'Ghazal'," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, Vol. 16 (1985), 15-17.

think toward what kind of masculinity is put forth by the ‘*udhrī*’ ghazal specifically, as well as build on Ruqayya Khan’s work by additionally examining the *Dīwān*.¹⁵

Scholars of Persian literature in the late eighties and early nineties read Neẓāmī’s *Layli and Majnun* primarily as a romance. J. C. Bürgel and Julie Scott Meisami read Neẓāmī’s corpus as a whole through a humanist lens that promotes values such as justice, non-violence, and the magnified presence of women.¹⁶ Both of these scholars read Neẓāmī’s work laterally, yielding insights on the overall emphasis placed on humanity, the depth of psychological insight, and the power of poetry that can be found across Neẓāmī’s works. Meisami’s interest in romance as a genre led her to compare depictions of love in Fakhr al-Dīn Gorgānī (c. 11th century) and Neẓāmī, which she read comparatively with the philosophical-ethical approach of Naṣir al-Dīn Ṭūsī that emphasizes the perfectibility of the self.¹⁷ While Neẓāmī’s other protagonists such as Bahram of the *Haft Peykar* or Khosrow of *Khosrow and Shīrīn* fit neatly into her overall approach, Majnun’s arc does not lend itself to Meisami’s emphasis on love as a way toward perfectibility of the self, and as such she claimed that Majnun represents a “negative exemplum” whose perfection is “perverse.”¹⁸ For Meisami, *Layli and Majnun* should primarily be understood in negative terms; it

15. Specifically, I engage Stetkeyvch’s approach to *ṣa’ālīk* (brigand) poets as an inversion of a rite-of-passage that is similar to Majnun’s being cast out of his kinship group. See Suzanne Stetkeyvch, *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 119-159.

16. Although both scholars take a “secular” approach to the text, Bürgel following Gelpke highlights the tragic undertones of Majnun’s character whereas Meisami focuses on Majnun as a kind of “negative exemplum” to models of justice present in Neẓāmī’s other romances. For a larger discussion see J.C. Bürgel, “The Idea of Non-Violence in the Epic Poetry of Neẓāmī,” *Edebiyat: The Journal of Middle Eastern Literatures NS*, vol. 9, no. 1 (1998): 61-84 and Julie Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 18.

17. In comparing Western and Persian romances, Meisami suggests that a main difference lies in the Persian romance’s protagonist being typically characterized as a lover first, as opposed to a warrior. In her view, love in Persian romance becomes the primary vehicle through which protagonists reach the “higher” aims of justice. While her reading emphasizes the kind of moral seriousness that is easily discernible in Neẓāmī, the constant comparison to philosophical ethics undermines the primary vehicle of storytelling and the fact that literature can constructively respond to philosophy. See Julie Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 131-137 and 230-236.

18. “Majnun’s madness causes his poetry to provide... not guidance toward right conduct (the proper function of poetry) but misguidance - it is, in short, a negative exemplum.” “Majnun’s ultimate goal is to feed and enhance this

offers the reader a way of seeing love gone wrong, and the moral passivity of its protagonist should be contrasted to the ennobling quests undertaken by the protagonists of Neẓāmī's other works.

Criticizing such an approach, Asghar Seyed-Gohrab in the early 2000s interpreted *Layli and Majnun* as informed by contemporary mystical discourse after the infusion of erotic terminology into Persian works on transcendental love initiated by Aḥmad Ghazālī (d. 1126).¹⁹ Through this lens, Seyed-Gohrab offers a more positive reading of Majnun by demonstrating certain thematic affinities between representations of the feats of asceticism and the suffering of a lover. Significantly, Seyed-Gohrab differs from Meisami's approach by asserting that Majnun does not represent a morally passive figure, and instead characterizes Majnun's isolation as a willful choice that shows one's devotion to love.²⁰ Although Seyed-Gohrab at times alludes to the fact *Layli and Majnun* should be read on multiple levels, his monograph demonstrates a view that a nuanced understanding of the work "demands a profound knowledge of the mystical tradition" through its constant reference to contemporary mystical theories.²¹ Moreover, Seyed-Gohrab classifies *Layli and Majnun* as an "udhrīte romance" due to its emphasis on separation, suffering, and death, and he does not attempt a lateral reading with Neẓāmī's other works or with the formal characteristics of the Persian *masnavī* tradition.²² On the other hand, Kamran Talattof has recently

image (of the beloved); while the quest may lead to the image's perfection, such perfection is perverse, since it is accomplished at the cost of his own humanity." See Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 165-172.

19. Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnūn: Love, Madness, and Mystic Longing in Neẓāmī's Epic Romance* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 14.

20. Seyed-Gohrab criticized Meisami, Sirjani, and Dols for refusing to recognize any ascetic or mystical interpretation of the character of Majnun given the fact that contemporary love theory so frequently overlapped the physical traits of a lover and an ascetic. This criticism becomes especially apparent in his discussion of isolation, wherein he offers readings from Ghazālī and Hujwīrī to situate self-isolation in a mystical context as well as alludes to the fact that Neẓāmī himself chose a secluded life. See Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnūn*, 90-110.

21. Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnūn*, 337.

22. Seyed-Gohrab devoted a chapter to Neẓāmī's rhetorical use of language, as well as offered some structural commentary on how through his introductions Neẓāmī "creates a semi-mystical arena and places the actual story inside of it." The majority of his analysis centered on reading Majnun as a mystical lover, and Seyed-Gohrab did not go into further depth on the significance of formal narrative techniques. See Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnūn*, 58-61.

read the work laterally against Neẓāmī’s other works to assert that a “literary” reading casts doubt on any associations of Neẓāmī with religious or mystical intent.²³

As such, there is no current scholarly consensus on how to interpret *Layli and Majnun*, or how Neẓāmī’s retelling relates to the earlier Arabic material. On the former question, Meisami and Seyed-Gohrab represent divergent tendencies of classifying the work primarily as a secular romance or as a mystical work with allegorizing tendencies, respectively. Dick Davis, in his 2020 translation of *Layli and Majnun*, largely follows Seyed-Gohrab by drawing attention to the presence of references to Sufism or Sufi beliefs within a love story that, in his view, should be thought of as spiritual. His reading, however, relies on imposing a dichotomy of carnal and spiritual love that results in his characterization of Neẓāmī as a prim, proper, and Victorian-esque poet.²⁴ This relies on a notably Christian formulation of a dichotomy between carnal and spiritual love, as well as overlooks the sensual aspects of the work and of Neẓāmī’s other works. Asceticism varies across religious traditions and there is no reason that Neẓāmī’s appeals to spirituality need to be read as a denial of human sexuality. On the latter question of how Neẓāmī’s poem relates to the Arabic material, both Khairallah and Seyed-Gohrab have addressed certain archetypal traits that are associated with Majnun’s character—Khairallah more confident in mystical dimensions of the Arabic material than Seyed-Gohrab—without attention to shifts in literary form from a multiplicity of quasi-biographical accounts to a unified narrative written in verse.

23. Kamran Talattof, *Nezami Ganjavi and Classical Persian Literature: Demystifying the Mystic* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), vii and 175-203.

24. Davis primarily contrasts Neẓāmī to the poet Fakhr al-Dīn Gorgānī (f. 11th century), who he claims is primarily concerned with carnal rather than spiritual love whereas Neẓāmī, “in introducing a didactic, spiritual, and implicitly Islamic or at least Sufi dimension into the romance narrative... redefines the genre.” Davis’ later characterization of Neẓāmī as a “‘how to live, what to do’ sort of poet” seems to me apt to the extent that this invokes a kind of pragmatism and complicates his own claim that Neẓāmī is concerned with spiritual instead of carnal love. The translation, moreover, does not include Neẓāmī’s lengthy introduction. See Dick Davis, *Layli and Majnun: Nezami Ganjavi* (Fredricksburg: Mage Publishers, 2020), xxiii-xxiv.

Rather than classifying Neẓāmī’s work as either secular romance or mystical allegory, I compare Arabic and Persian versions with Islamic intellectual debates on *‘ishq* to approach the specificity with which *Layli and Majnun* asks the reader to consider multiple registers that subvert any modern division between literary and religious texts. I attempt to avoid generalizations such as Atkinson’s that seek to have the work speak to any universal human nature. Conversely, I would also like to eschew any sense of civilizational difference as this project approaches attitudes towards the body and towards sexuality in Islamic contexts. Historically, many from Euro-American cultures have seen “Islamic civilization” as a decadent and licentious mirror of a more refined, if more prudish, West. Indeed, the Orientalist view of pre-nineteenth century Islamic sexualities reinforced a sense of difference through repetitive tropes.²⁵ Such a view finds its way into the first volume of Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* as he declares the modern, Western view of sexuality as scientific contrasts to “ancient” and “Eastern” views on the *ars erotica* usage of the body.²⁶ Foucault’s view undoes the Orientalist view to a certain extent insofar as he rejects civilizational contrast by positing similarity between “ancient” and “Eastern” views on sex, yet the rejoinder to “Eastern” as an entire way of viewing the body overgeneralizes to the point of becoming a trope. This backdrop of Euro-American views on “Eastern” embodiment places a project like mine into a minefield of potentially repeating such tropes and generalizations.

25. Edward Said traces the institutionalization of Orientalist study to the eighteenth century, and he identifies despotism, splendor, and sensuality as tropes that are repeated in Euro-American art and scholarship since that time. On sensuality, Said cites the examples of Gustave Flaubert’s (d. 1880) depiction of Kucuk Hanem (d. 1870) and Victorian pornographic novels as examples of depictions of “Eastern” sensuality. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1978), 11-16.

26. Michel Foucault traces the establishment of medical, scientific discourse on sex in the West to the early nineteenth century, which he labels as *scientia sexualis*. Foucault contrasts this view with the *art erotica* (which influenced in his view “China, Japan, India, Rome, and the Arabo-Moslem societies”) wherein truths about sex are drawn from practical and experiential knowledge obtained through master-disciple relationships. The issue with this contrast is that it only allows for change within Western societies while the cultures named remain frozen or static, and it does not acknowledge the medical treatment of sex in the premodern world. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 54-73.

Rather than speaking generally, I suggest that Neẓāmī’s adoption of *‘ishq* as a concept in the romantic epic is a part of the larger spread of Persianate literary culture specific to the eleventh and twelfth centuries. With the rise of Persian local dynasties such as the Buyyids, Taherids, and Samanids and the decline of actual power held by the Abbasid caliphal seat in Baghdad, Persian was slowly adopted as the language of the courts.²⁷ Eventually, throughout Central and South Asia, Persian competed with Arabic as a language of cosmopolitan influence, dominating literary culture in these regions even as Arabic remained the language of authoritative discourses such as law and medicine.²⁸ It is within this world—a world which Mana Kia and others have referred to as “the Persianate”—that I maintain Neẓāmī’s approach to *‘ishq* developed.²⁹ The bulk of this dissertation looks to the prehistory of Neẓāmī’s adoption of *‘ishq* in *Layli and Majnun* with an eye towards the fact that this Persianate milieu reformulated inherited Arabic and Islamic concepts in a new cosmopolitan idiom. Instead of an “eastern” conception of love writ large, this is a Persianate

27. The major impetus came with Ismā‘īl Sāmānī’s (d. 907) widespread empire used Persian as a form of self-legitimization and patronized the earliest Persian court poets. When the Turkic Ghaznavid empire took over and extended much of Samanid territory, they continued the practice of patronizing Persian letters, which became standard for many Turkic dynasties that followed. For an overview of this formative period, see David Morgan, *Medieval Persia 1040-1797* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 11-34.

28. Citing the approaches to vernacularity by Sheldon Pollock and Alexander Beecroft, Franklin Lewis has characterized new Persian as an atypical cosmopolitan language that “eventually grew to displace or usurp to some degree the cosmopolitan language (Arabic) with which it found itself in competition.” This approach helps with recognizing language power differentials in the premodern Islamic world, which did not have a unitary cosmopolitan language. See Franklin Lewis, “A Book of Kings as the King of Books: The *Shahnameh* of Ferdowsi,” in *A Companion to World Literature: 601 CE to 1450 CE Epic and Community*, edited by K. Seigneurie (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2020), 4; Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 254 and 262; Alexander Beecroft, *An Ecology of World Literature*, 98.

29. Mana Kia points to the shared heritage of “ethical, literary, and commemorative texts” written in Persian between peoples of Central, South, and West Asia as inheritors of the Timurid Empire (c. 1370-1507). The contours of this world have also been traced in a series of essays in a recent edited volume by Nile Green. In my view, the romantic epic (*masnāvī*) form could be considered a Persianate literary form even as it was adopted in other literary languages such as Ottoman and Classical Kurdish. However, unlike Kia, I do not think it is helpful to say that people living in this Persianate world were “Persian,” given the modern ethnic connotations such a term denotes. See Mana Kia, *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin Before Nationalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), 9-11 and Nile Green, ed., *The Persianate World: The Frontiers of a Eurasian Lingua Franca* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019).

conception that is specific to the readers of romantic epics. The aim of this project is to historicize Neẓāmī’s deployment of *‘ishq* within a wider web to bring forth its conceptual work in *Layli and Majnun*, which I maintain has the potential to speak back to approaches to desire today.

II. The ethics of desire

I have included the phrase “the ethics of desire” in my title for two methodological reasons. The first is that thinking of *‘ishq* as a concept intervenes upon theories of desire in the academy today that stem from a limited archive of Eurocentric examples. These theories primarily derive from psychoanalysis, which I will outline below alongside a detracting view. Working against the uneven playing field of symbolic capital in humanistic inquiry, I attempt to locate the specificity with which premodern Islamic thinkers conceived of *‘ishq* as a critical aspect of the formation of human subjectivity. The second reason is more specific to Neẓāmī’s deployment of *‘ishq* in *Layli and Majnun*, which has ethical import insofar as the text connects the question of desire to social relations by rethinking kinship. These two reasons are interrelated as rethinking kinship is not, according to theoretical approaches today, always the focal point of conceptualizing desire and thus Neẓāmī’s deployment of *‘ishq* offers us an alternative approach.

Theoretical approaches to desire today regularly consider it a fundamental part of human subjectivity. Jacques Lacan’s approach to psychoanalysis is a primary register through which desire was and is theorized today.³⁰ Lacan’s work reformulates Freudian psychoanalysis towards analysis of a subject that comes into being through language.³¹ Lacan indicates that unlike other

30. For example, Judith Butler relies upon Lacan’s work as a way of contesting any ontology of gender through Lacan’s emphasis on sex as a product of the force of the prohibition of desire. See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 38 and 75, and *Bodies that Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 62-71.

31. For a lucid overview of Lacan’s work, see Jacqueline Rose’s introduction in Jacques Lacan, *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*, edited by Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (New York: W.W. Norton and Pantheon Books, 1985), 27-59.

post-Freudian interpretations, the formation of sexual identity must not be reduced to biological factors due to the mythic nature of the Oedipal complex. Instead, the moment of castration (also referred to by Lacan as the paternal metaphor) should be understood as the child's coming into being through language by taking up the position of a signifier who uses words to signify what they lack. Desire stems from a want of something other than what is signified through language, and it functions as that which forestalls complete satisfaction. The idea of complete satisfaction belongs to the realm of fantasy, and Lacan appeals to courtly love as a key example for explaining a fantastical desire of wholeness in subjectivity. The idealized woman of courtly love becomes a total object of fantasy for the desiring subject, and Lacan laments the pretense upheld in courtly discourse that external obstacles keep the desiring subject from his object of desire.³² Instead of dwelling in this perpetuation, Lacan suggests that it is the goal of psychoanalysis to expose the fantasy of unity, causing a rupture between what he terms the *object a*—cause of desire—and the Other, which in the courtly love example is the woman. The overall goal of this exposure is to recall “the moment of fundamental division through which the subject entered language.”³³ Desire results from a perpetuated wish to fill this lack of certainty within the subject.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's approach to desire offers the most thorough critique of the psychoanalytic approach. Invoking Marxist analysis, Deleuze and Guattari ground their

32. Without historical references, Lacan states that “Courtly love is an altogether refined way of making up for the absence of sexual relation by pretending that it is we who put an obstacle to it. It is truly the most staggering thing that has ever been tried. But how can we expose its fraud?” Lacan later adds that, “Earlier I made an allusion to courtly love, which appeared at the point when homosexual *amusement* had fallen into supreme decadence, into that sort of impossible bad dream called feudalism. In such depths of political degeneracy, it must have become noticeable that on the side of the woman, there was something which really would no longer do.” It is difficult to pin down what Lacan is talking about beyond a gesture towards medieval history, yet the recurrence of the example of courtly love indicates that it undergirds his saying “the woman does not exist,” which, beyond this particular example, is meant to make a subject realize the impossibility of obtaining their desires. See Lacan, *Feminine Sexuality*, 141 and 156.

33. For a nuanced explanation of how the courtly love example aligns with Lacanian terminology, see Jacqueline Rose's introduction in Lacan, *Feminine Sexuality*, 50-53.

arguments in *Anti-Oedipus* in the historical processes of capitalism to argue that desire cannot be reduced to a universal lack felt by a subject as a result of the Oedipal complex, and they insist that desire is instead produced by the infrastructure of capitalist production.³⁴ As with Lacan's linguistic approach, Deleuze and Guattari break down any sense of a unified subject, yet their materialist analysis focuses on how subjects are comprised of flows that they term "desiring machines."³⁵ They characterize the industrial world as an endless flow of production that occurs at a microlevels—analyzing elements such as blood, saliva, money, electricity—which are channeled by capitalist systems into productive use. The goal of their analysis is not an exposure of lack in the individual subject, but rather a channeling of the flow of desire towards anti-capitalist assemblages.

While offering a universal language, Lacan and Deleuze and Guattari's analyses foreground the Oedipal complex, even as the latter pair underscore the late nineteenth-century bourgeois family conditions under which Freud originally reread the Greek myth. This myth is a cultural narrative that scripts particular ways of relating to formative moments of subjectivity in early childhood. Rather than applying these paradigms, my work asks what happens when our terms for conceptualizing love and desire come from a different site of imagining? While love and desire might be concepts fundamental to human subjectivity across histories and cultures, these

34. Wendy Grace articulates how *Anti-Oedipus* differs from other Marxist analyses by focusing on the microlevels of molecules and flows that are considered by Deleuze and Guattari as not a part of the natural world, but instead as elements of production. This leads to their declaration that "desire is part of the infrastructure." See Wendy Grace, "Faux Amis: Foucault and Deleuze on Sexuality and Desire," in *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 36, no. 1 (Autumn 2009): 62 and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 104.

35. Deleuze and Guattari acknowledge insights gleaned from Lacan in a note that states "Lacan's admirable theory of desire appears to us to have two poles: one related to 'the object small a' as a desiring-machine, which defines desire in terms of a real production, thus going beyond both any idea of need and any idea of fantasy; and the other related to the 'great Other' as a signifier, which reintroduces certain notions of lack." As such, their approach to desire differs from Lacan's by refusing to locate any primary signifier. See Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 27.

theorists think outwards from a specifically Christian or Eurocentric framework that universalizes particular narratives.³⁶ Thinking with literatures from what is now associated with the global south, I respond to Aamir Mufti's call to "radicalize philology" by insisting that premodern Persian and Arabic texts think conceptually about desire and embodiment.³⁷ Analyzing *'ishq* does not have to only mean locating it within its contextual milieu (which in any philological project would always be important). It can also mean considering how these works frame subjectivity as connected to desire, which disrupts dominant approaches to desire and subjectivity today.

Instead of exposing lack or channeling desire towards anti-capitalist assemblages, Nezāmī's formulation of desire through *'ishq* intends for the reader to rethink kinship. The moment of encounter fundamental to a shift in subjectivity is not that of the parent-child relationship, but rather that of a meeting between young lovers. Iterative experiences of love beyond normative kinship follow. In both the Arabic and Persian versions that I study, the initial meeting between Layla and Majnun leads to their being placed at odds with a society whose kinship structure—a structure that traffics in women through familial bonds sealed through marriage—prohibits their union.³⁸ The lovers' subjectivity in these early sources forms counter to their society and it is

36. Paul Kottmann and Alain Badiou's work offer the latest philosophical approaches to love as through readings of Shakespeare, Plato, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Proust, and Lacan. See Paul A. Kottmann, *Love as Human Freedom* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017) and Alain Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, with Nicolas Truong (New York: The New Press, 2012).

37. Aamir Mufti has interrogated the category of "world literature" by insisting that philological labor make diverse forms of textuality visible. Mufti argues that "the critique of Orientalism must ultimately take us to the Orientalized spaces themselves." See Aamir Mufti, "Orientalism and the Institution of World Literatures," in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 36, no. 3 (Spring 2010): 461.

38. The phrase "traffic in women" was originally coined by Claude Lévi-Stauss whose work analyzed marriage as a most basic form of gift exchange in which women were the most prized gifts. I follow Eve Sedgwick in relying upon Gayle Rubin's reformulation of the phrase towards an understanding of how the subordination of women can be seen as a product of male-dominated kinship systems. The kinship system represented in the versions of the legend of Layla and Majnun that I study should be considered a representation and not as historical fact. Sedgwick's analysis allows for unpacking how structural elements of this imagined society impact the legend's overarching plot. See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 3 and 25-27 and Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of

scripted in gendered ways as Majnun's character voices critiques of the kinship structure publicly while Layla can only critique it in private. Yet instead of a sense of desire forestalled as with a Lacanian approach, Neẓāmī's version of the legend foregrounds the radical potential of desire temporarily realized. *'Ishq* is thematized throughout the text as leading to corporeal actions that exceed the confines of sexuality. Even as the text inscribes certain sexual norms, it likewise indicates that the corporeal effects of *'ishq* include ethical actions such as care and generosity, the inscribing of which become the goal of the text's thematization of *'ishq* itself. As with Deleuze and Guattari's approach, there is a channeling of the force of desire, yet in Neẓāmī's text the ethical actions that stem from *'ishq* create a vision of community beyond contemporaneous models of kinship.

As such, the bulk of this project methodologically engages with premodern intellectual discourses on *'ishq* to enable a better close reading of Neẓāmī's text. Textual and philological analysis allows for building an alternative ground from which non-Eurocentric epistemologies can emerge. I likewise employ theoretical insights from queer theory and animal studies that help illuminate the textual focus on kinship. I draw specifically from José Esteban Muñoz's articulation of queer futurity beyond reproduction, as well as queer feminist approaches to communal care.³⁹

Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, edited by Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 175-180.

39. In response to Lee Edelman's critique of reproductive futurity, queer theory since the early 2000s has focused on how temporal distortions can become a resource for political imagination. I draw from José Esteban Muñoz's approach to collectivity, which allows for an imagining of futurity beyond reproduction by focusing on quotidian moments of community. I likewise draw from Elizabeth Freeman's work on chrononormativity as a way of bringing forth the consequences of temporalities that center on biological reproduction by pointing to the political power of Majnun's way of stalling time. Cristina Crosby and Janet Jakobson's approach to caring queerly moreover informs my reading of Neẓāmī's portrayal of Layla as a lover as illustrative of an attempt to reimagine normative social relations. See Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 5-13; Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 137-143; Cristina Crosby and Janet Jakobson, "Disability, Debility, and Caring Queerly," in *Social Text* Vol. 38 Issue 4 (2020): 77-88.

These models help with unpacking the political work of Neẓāmī’s imagining of a collectivity beyond biological relatedness. Recent work in animal studies that follows Jacques Derrida’s critique of logocentrism likewise foregrounds kinship by reconsidering the species divide.⁴⁰ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, Cary Wolfe, and others have applied this critique to literary texts that consider animals as alternative kin.⁴¹ This approach is useful for illumination of Majnun’s relationship with animals as an alternative society that critiques the human society from which he flees, as well as for underscoring linkages between madness and animality embedded within the legend. These theoretical fields serve as resources from which I draw to illustrate aspects of how Neẓāmī’s text imagines alternative ways of being related, and none of them are used to unitarily explain the work. Instead, they are employed in order to illustrate how the text is reimagining kinship through its specific deployment of *‘ishq* and to make this reimagining legible by connecting it to related discourse in the present. I now turn to an intellectual-historical map of discourses on *‘ishq*, which provides the groundwork for locating Neẓāmī’s deployment.

III. *‘Ishq* across genres

Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037) begins his short treatise on love (*Risāla fī al-‘ishq*) by detailing the erotics of metaphysics. The first chapter declares that all beings evidently have “a natural desire and an inborn love (*‘ishq*) and it necessarily follows that love (*‘ishq*) in all things is the reason for

40. Derrida’s critique brings into question the terms through which non-human animals and humans have historically been differentiated—namely, through the latter’s capacity for rationality and speech. See Jacques Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign, 2 vols.*, ed. by Michel Lisse, Marie-Louise Mallet, and Ginette Michaud and trans. by Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009/2011).

41. I draw in particular from Cohen’s work as it situates animal studies within medieval studies. For a useful overview of how animal studies has impacted humanistic research, see Cary Wolfe, “Human, All Too Human: ‘Animal Studies’ and the Humanities,” in *PMLA* Vol. 124, no. 2 (March 2009): 564-575. See also Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Inventing with Animals in the Middle Ages,” in *Engaging with Nature: Essays on the Natural World in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Barbara A. Hanawalt and Lisa J. Kiser (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press).

their existence.”⁴² *Ishq* for Ibn Sīnā emanates from the divine as the force that enlivens all being, and simultaneously is that in which all being consists.⁴³ The diffusion of *‘ishq* into all essences leads to their longing for the divine, which is the source of *‘ishq* itself and which serves as the backdrop for Ibn Sīnā’s exploration for how different types of souls strive to transcend the material world.

Yet if we step back from this high philosophical register, we can see that Ibn Sīnā’s emphasis on metaphysical erotics has an impact on how he views human love. Indeed, Ibn Sīnā’s treatise proceeds by detailing that the inborn love of all beings is manifest according to their rank, which follows a traditional Aristotelian hierarchy of organisms by moving upwards from inanimate objects to animals to humans and finally back to the divine itself.⁴⁴ The chapter on human love is curiously titled, “*‘ishq* of the refined ones (*zurafā*) and the young (*fityān*) for beautiful faces.”⁴⁵ This recalls both the ideal of refinement upheld by poet-lovers in contemporaneous courtly love poetry and the Sufi practice of gazing at young boys.⁴⁶ Though potentially controversial, Ibn Sīnā’s evocation of the love of physical beauty offers a window into

42.

فبين أن لكل واحد من الموجودات المدبرة شوقاً طبيعياً وعشفاً غريزياً ويلزم ضرورة أن يكون العشق في هذه الأشياء سبباً للوجود لها

“It is evident that every single designed being has natural desire (*shawq*) and inborn love and it necessarily follows that *‘ishq* is in all things the reason for their existence.” Ibn Sīnā, *Risāla fī al-‘ishq*, edited by Ḥusayn Ṣiddīq and Rāwiyah Jāmūs (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 2005), 49.

43. Ibn Sīnā frequently refers to this divine form of *‘ishq* as *al-‘ishq al-kullī* (comprehensive/universal *‘ishq*). Ibn Sīnā, *Risāla fī al-‘ishq*, 51.

44. Aristotle formulates this chain of beings in dialogue with Platonic approaches in his *History Animalium*. For an overview, see Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 24-67.

45.

الفصل الخامس في ذكر عشق الظرفاء والفتيان للأوجه الحسان

Ibn Sīnā, *Risāla fī al-‘ishq*, 65.

46. I detail the ideal of refinement in chapter two. For an overview of the Sufi practice of gazing at young boys (*shāhid-bāzī*), See Lloyd Ridgeon, “The Controversy of Shaykh Awḥad al-Dīn Kirmānī and Handsome, Moon-Faced Youths: A Case Study of Shāhiz-Bāzī in Medieval Sufism,” in *Journal of Sufi Studies* 1,1 (January 2012): 3-30.

the inevitably corporeal connotations of the concept of *'ishq* as it was known by poets and Sufis even as he posits a spiritual, philosophical view. Drawing on a hadith that directs the believer to “seek satisfaction of your needs in beautiful faces,” Ibn Sīnā concretizes this satisfaction into three actions: embracing, kissing, and sexual intercourse.⁴⁷ The latter is reprehensible lest it is for the “rational” purpose of reproduction and needs to be according to religious law. As for embracing and kissing, if their aim is to “draw near and unite (they are) not abominable or corrupting, and one who loves with *'ishq* in this way is a refined youth and this is the *'ishq* of refinement and manliness (*murūwa*).”⁴⁸ For Ibn Sīnā, kissing and embracing are embodied actions that are

47.

اطلبوا الحوائج عند حسان الوجوه

وعشق الصورة الحسنة من الإنسان قد تتبعه أمور ثلاثة: أحدها حب معانقتها والثاني حب تقبيلها والثالث حب مباحعتها فأما حب المباحضة

“And three things follow from *'ishq* for beautiful faces in humankind: the first is love of embracing it, the second is love of kissing it, and third is love of intercourse with it.” Ibn Sīnā, *Risāla fī al-'ishq*, 73-74.

48.

حب المباحضة فمما يتعين عنده أن هذا العشق ليس خاصاً إلا بالنفس الحيوانية وأن حصتها فيه زائدة وأنها على مقام الشريك بل المستخدم لا على مقام الآلة وذلك قبيح جداً بل لن يخلص العشق النطقي ما لم تنقنع القوة الحيوانية غاية الانقماح ولذلك بالحري أن يتهم العاشق إذا راود معشوقه بهذه الحاجة اللهم إلا أن تكون هذه الحاجة منه بضرب نطقي أعني إن قصد به توليد المثل وذلك في الذكر من الناس محال وفي الأنثى المحرمة بالشرع قبيح بل لا ينسأغ هذا القصد ولا يستحسن إلا لرجل في امرأته أو في مملوكته

وأما المعانقة والتقبيل فإذا كان الغرض فيهما هو التقارب والاتحاد وذلك لأن النفس تود أن تنال معشوقها بحسها للمسي ونيلها له بحسها البصري فتشأنق إلى معانقته وتنزع إلى أن يختلط نسيم مبدأ الفاعلية النفسانية وهو القلب بنسيم مثلها في المعشوق فتشأنق إلى تقبيله فليسا بمنكرين في ذاتهما لكن استتباعهما بالعرض أموراً شهوانية فاحشة توجب التوقي عنهما... ولذلك لم يستنكر تقبيل الأولاد وإن كان مبدؤه مزعجاً لذلك الوداد إذ كان الغرض فيه التداني والاتحاد لا الهمة بالفحش والفساد فمن عشق هذا الضرب من العشق فهو فتى ظريف وهذا العشق تطرف ومروءة

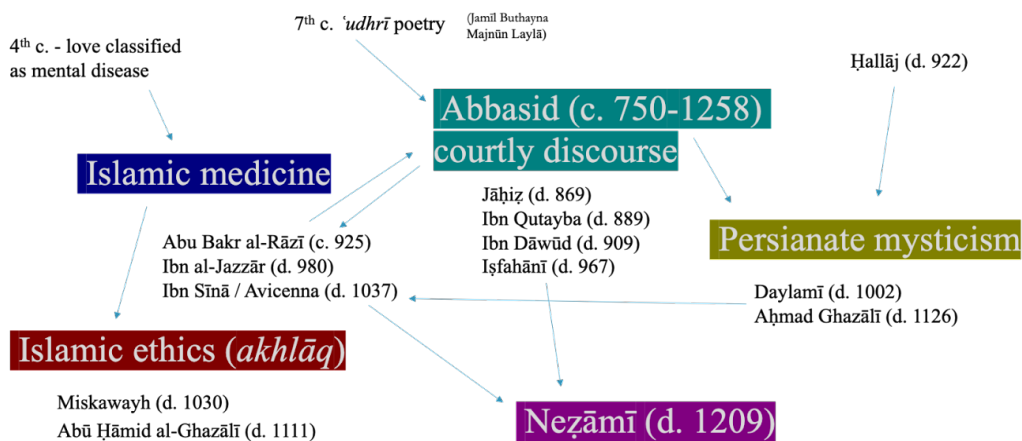
Love of intercourse indeed is a type of *'ishq* specific to the animal soul. The increase of its share reaches to the station of a companion, no, a master, and it is not a tool. And that is very ugly. Rather, rational *'ishq* is not purified unless the animal faculty is tamed to the utmost extent. Therefore with respect the lover (*al-'āshiq*) who pursues his beloved with this need is suspect, except if this need has a rational reason, I mean in pursuit of reproduction. And that is impossible with a man and with a woman forbidden by religious law is vile. That aim is not to be permitted nor regarded appropriate except for a man with his woman or his property.

And as for embracing and kissing, if the purpose of them were to come near and unite, and that is because the soul wishes (*tawadda*) to incline to its beloved (*ma'ashūqa-ha*) by the sense of touch or it inclines to him by the sense of sight, these two are not reprehensible in their essence. However, excessive, lustful (*shahwānīya*) matters follow them

permissible, and perhaps even recommended, as they affirm the status of a refined young man. Despite his emphasis on *'ishq* as a metaphysical force, Ibn Sīnā acknowledges that *'ishq* carries connotations that are inescapably attached to the body, a body that cannot be separated from the soul.

Ibn Sīnā's treatise gives a window into the complexity of the concept of *'ishq*, a concept which became an important site for physicians, philosophers, mystics, and poets to negotiate the boundaries of corporeality in the medieval Islamic world. This creates a web against which Neẓāmī's text can be read. These discourses are intertwined, dynamic, and continuously evolving, and the various thinkers whose works I specifically address throughout this project can be found on this map:

Figure 1: Map of Intellectual-Historical Discourses on *'Ishq*



I offer a comprehensive overview of medical discourse in chapter one, which provides the authoritative backdrop for opinions on *'ishq* in courtly and mystical discourse outlined in chapter

by accident, and it is necessary to therefore guard against them...and therefore it is not prohibited to kiss boys, although this is in principle unsettling, for this affection, if its aim is to draw near or unite is not abominable or corrupting and one who loves with *'ishq* in this way is a refined youth and this is the *'ishq* of refinement and manliness (*murūwa*). Ibn Sīnā, *Risāla fī al-'ishq*, 75-76.

two. The medical view reaches an epitome in the *Canon of Medicine*, Ibn Sīnā's medical textbook that was the standard textbook of Eurasia until the eighteenth century, wherein Ibn Sīnā classifies *'ishq* as a delusionary illness of the brain. This medical classification and its localization in the brain follows ancient medicine, however, the humoral causality of *'ishq* was fully theorized in Arabic and then passed to Europe, a transference which likely contributed to the rise of what has been called "the discovery of love" in medieval European courtly culture.⁴⁹ Yet this "discovery" had already occurred in Islamic society perhaps as early as the seventh century in the work of *'udhrī* (a term possibly translated as virginal love) poets—a purportedly Umayyad-era (661-750) group of poets whose *ghazals*, or short, monothematic poems often compared to the lyric, and who spoke of their lifelong devotion to a single beloved. Majnun himself was considered one of these *'udhrī* poets. Abbasid (c. 750-1258) courtly authors drew on the examples of *'udhrī* poets as they began formulating conceptual stances on *'ishq* that countered its medicalization.⁵⁰ Jāḥiẓ and Ibn Dāwūd, like Ibn Sīnā, agreed that *'ishq* is an illness (though they are less precise about its localization in the brain), yet they did not take a curative approach and instead reinforced the pleasures concomitant with *'ishq*'s ills.

The language of pleasure and of courtly love poetics was adopted in eleventh century Persianate mystical discourse, which added another layer of meaning to *'ishq* by equating it with the divine essence. This strain, which can be seen in how thinkers such as Aḥmad Ghazālī elaborate on the radical utterances of Ḥallāj, an early mystic who declares "I am the Real (*anā al-ḥaqq*),"

49. Mary Wack argues that "the medical notion of lovesickness influenced the transformation of 'courtly love' from literary convention to social practice." Wack traces this medical notion to Arabic sources, arguing that the close relationship between love and melancholia derives from Ibn al-Jazzār's text and from the greater significance of *'ishq* in Islamic culture. See Mary Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: The 'Viaticum' and its Commentaries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), xv and 34-38.

50. I focus on the works of Jāḥiẓ and Ibn Dāwūd as the earliest formulations of *'ishq* as a concept. For a list of Abbasid courtly authors' engagement with this literature, see Lois A. Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love Among the Arabs: The Development of the Genre* (New York: New York University Press, 1971), 3-50.

posits an ontological approach to *‘ishq* as divine essence, and insists that all creaturely manifestations of *‘ishq* are but a manifestation of the one, essential, divine *‘ishq*.⁵¹ This ontological position leaves mystics with an unanswered question: what to make of the messiness of matter and multiplicity? Though typically adopting an erotic language of lover and beloved, these mystics located the value of *‘ishq*’s physical or excessive connotations in divine love alone. Conversely, it is these selfsame physical connotations that caused Ḥanbālī theologians to reject *‘ishq* as a term for divine love for fear that the divine beloved, construed as a kind of romantic other, might appear to be needy instead of self-sufficient.⁵² Religious ethicists, such as Miskawayh and Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, likewise rejected *‘ishq* as the ideal form of human love because its excessiveness carries a risqué physicality that thwarts the primacy of the rational faculty of the soul.

Given its medical severity and ontological gravitas, *‘ishq* was an especially potent term by the time of the emergence of Neẓāmī’s *Layli and Majnun*. Returning to Ibn Sīnā, the *Treatise on ‘Ishq* indicates how corporeality, animality, and rationality were linked in this milieu in ways that resonates with and differs from Neẓāmī’s text. Prizing rationality, Ibn Sīnā eschews the actions of non-human animals (which, as with the Aristotelian conception, he refers to as “non-rational animals”) as overly corporeal. These actions include things like excessive enjoyment of sex, overabundance of wealth, and anything that leads to too much involvement with the sensorial

51. Joseph Lumbard has shown how this emphasis on Ḥallāj’s usage of *‘ishq* to describe the divine essence came to fruition in the twelfth-century Persianate world. See Joseph Lumbard, “From Ḥubb to ‘Ishq: The Development of Love in Early Sufism,” in *Journal of Islamic Studies* Vol. 18, No. 3: 346-347. For a synthetic overview of key themes emphasized in Islamic approaches to divine love, see William Chittick, “Divine and Human Love in Islam,” in *Divine Love: Perspectives from the World’s Religious Traditions*, edited by Jeff Levin and Stephen G. Post (West Conshohocken: Templeton Press, 2010).

52. Joseph Norment Bell has traced how Ḥanbālī thinkers such as Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1201), Ibn Taymīya (d. 1328), and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya (d. 1350) rejected *‘ishq* because of its implications of excess and longing, which they maintained could not be applied to the divine. Bell argues that Ḥanbālī rejection of the term should not be understood as merely a rejection of its association with carnality and should instead be considered a part of ongoing theological debates and dialogue with mysticism. I do not think Neẓāmī’s text is as engaged with Ḥanbālī views as it is with mystical treatises and I have bracketed analysis of these sources accordingly. Joseph Norment Bell, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam*, 162-167.

world.⁵³ Yet Ibn Sīnā likewise appeals to animals' own capacity for inborn *'ishq*, and he ambivalently declares their free will and praises their ability to make use of the faculty of sense-perception.⁵⁴ In a similarly ambivalent vein, Ibn Sīnā characterizes matter itself as a “blameworthy and reprehensible woman,” only to follow this statement with an affirmation that “matter has an inborn *'ishq*.”⁵⁵ For Ibn Sīnā, animals and women serve as examples of beings whose attachments to the sensorial world and whose lack of full rational capacity prevent them from attaining the most refined form of human *'ishq*. Yet these beings nevertheless possess *'ishq*, an affirmation which resembles the negative capability of the body in the section on refined lovers, and it is through contact with the sensorial and with matter that *'ishq* can be enacted. Neẓāmī's text likewise affirms matter and the sensorial even as it aims for transcendence. Yet as a literary text, *Layli and Majnun* does not make the same assumptions about rational capacity within an Aristotelian chain of beings and it instead illuminates the subjectivity of a madman, of a woman, and of animals as

53.

وكذلك الأمور الخاصة بالنفس الحيوانية إذا اعتبرت في الحيوان الغير الناطق بنوع الإفراط وإن لم يعد من جملة الشر بل عد ذلك فضيلة في قواها فلاضراره بالقوة النطقية... معدودة من جملة المثالب في الإنسان وتستحق الاجتناب والهجران

“And as such the matters pertaining to the animal soul if acknowledged in non-rational animals in excess do not count as vices but rather as virtues of their faculties. In humankind, it is a harm to the rational faculty and counts as a defect and it is proper to turn away and abandon them.” Ibn Sīnā continues by indicating things such as too much sex, opium, or wealth. See Ibn Sīnā, *Risāla fī al-'ishq*, 70.

54.

عشق القوة النباتية لا تصدر عنه الأفاعيل إلا بنوع طبيعي وبنوع أدنى وأدون وعشق القوة الحيوانية إنما تصدر عنه بالاختيار وبنوع أعلى وأفضل وبمأخذ أطف وأحسن حتى إن بعض الحيوان قد يستعين في ذلك بالقوة الحسية

“Actions do not emanate from *'ishq* of the vegetative faculty except for by the natural type and that are of a lower or inferior kind. Actions can emanate from *'ishq* of the animal faculty by choice and by a higher and better type that grasp a more delicate and beautiful source such that some animals (rarely) make use of the faculty of sense-perception.” Ibn Sīnā, *Risāla fī al-'ishq*, 63.

55.

.الهيولى مقر العدم... فإن الهيولى كالمرأة اللانمة الذميمة المشفقة عن استعلان قبحها فمهما انكشف قناعها غطت دمامتها بالكم فقد تقرر أن في الهيولى عشقاً عزيزياً

“And matter is the abode of non-existence. Indeed matter is like a blameworthy and reprehensible woman concerned about her beauty becoming known. Whenever her veil is uncovered, she plunges her monstrosity/ugliness in the sleeve. Thus it is established that matter has an inborn love.” Ibn Sīnā, *Risāla fī al-'ishq*, 57.

it explores the embodied effects of *ishq*. Unlike the philosophical, medical, and mystical genres briefly outlined in this section, Neẓāmī's text participates in its own genre of *adab*—a term variously translated as educational literature, *bildung*, *paideia*—which means that its literary value is accompanied by ethical work to which I now turn.

IV. *Adab* and fictionality

Layli and Majnun and its Arabic predecessors fall into the broad genre of *adab*, a genre of literary texts whose ethical work differs from normative Islamic ethics (*akhlāq*) as well as from some modern definitions of literature and the literary. Recent scholarship in Arabic literary studies has drawn on a premodern conception of *adab* as a way of emphasizing the intertwined relationship between aesthetic appreciation and embodied behavior in the reading and hearing of literature.⁵⁶ Michael Allen and Hoda El Shakry, literary scholars of the modern period, reference embodied practices embedded in the concept of *adab* as a way of uncoupling the study of literature from a fixation on textual analysis of aesthetics and mimesis.⁵⁷ As a word that traverses Islamic languages, *adab* moreover describes the literary texts of this study insofar as they are united by their high linguistic register and their incorporation of ethical prerogatives alongside their value as entertaining texts.⁵⁸ Neẓāmī's *Layli and Majnun*, as a Persian romantic epic, participates in the

56. Sarah bin Tyeer, drawing on the work of George Makdisi, describes *adab* as a kind of humanistic project that cultivates the well-rounded individual. Despite *adab*'s ethical prerogatives, I bypass the gloss of 'literary humanism' due to the variety with which *adab* texts reference animals and animality that may fall beyond the humanist project. See Sarah bin Tyeer, *The Qur'an and the Aesthetics of Premodern Arabic Prose*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 15-18 and 276-278 and George Makdisi, *The rise of colleges: institutions of learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981).

57. Both scholars draw on work from Saba Mahmood to highlight valences of ethics that inform *adab* and that are often left out of approaches to literature that focus on textuality in terms of mimetic function and generic classification. See Hoda El Shakry *The Literary Qur'an: Narrative Ethics in the Maghreb* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), 17-19 and Michael Allan, "How *Adab* Became Literary: Formalism, Orientalism and the Institutions of World Literature," in *Journal of Arabic Literature* 43 (2-3): 196.

58. Mana Kia has argued for the relevance of the concept of *adab* in the Persian through the eighteenth century, although she emphasizes the importance of language by classifying *adab* as a Persianate concept. Conversely, Shahab Ahmed has drawn broad connections between different Islamic cultures' usage of texts (including Neẓāmī's) for edifying purposes. I draw from Ahmed's approach by including Neẓāmī's *Layli and Majnun* as a text of *adab* that has

larger genre of *adab* as it inherits material from the Arabic tradition and reformulates the accretion of meanings associated with *‘ishq* in its greater intellectual environment.

The literary aspect of this archive of *adab* texts moreover allows for an incorporation of fictionalized elements. This is significant insofar as the thematization of *‘ishq* occurs in tandem with the fictionality of Nezāmī’s text and *‘ishq* is not an important term in the prior Arabic literary material. Fictionality in classical Arabic *adab* has become a subject of debate.⁵⁹ Rather than adopting a wholesale stance, I approach my sources in gradients by locating the conceptual work of the *isnād* (chain of transmitters cited prior to the relaying of literary material) and its undermining in each of the texts of my archive. Julie Orlemanski, critiquing both the alignment of the category of fiction with modernity as well as a kind of universalist approach that sees all narrative as fictional, has argued for “a *hermeneutic* conception of fictionality... that assumes its determination in encountering the record of past thought.”⁶⁰ I maintain that Orlemanski’s approach to fictionality highlights various societies’ engagements with the fiction-making process, which has payoffs for reconsidering the premodern Islamic literary landscape as one engaged in processes

a similar dual function of aesthetic pleasure and ethical edification to classical Arabic texts even as its presentation style differs. See Mana Kia, *Persianate Selves*, 10-15 and Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam?: the importance of being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 408.

59. The problem of fictionality in classical Arabic literature has recently been reassessed. An older paradigm, defined by Rina Drory’s work, held that premodern authors by and large were hostile towards fictionality in their theorizations of language conceived within a theological framework. Others such as Stefan Leder maintained that fictionality was simply not a main concern as Arabic literary theory did not account for it. Recently, Matthew L. Keegan and others have pointed to premodern Arabic texts that foreground the mediatedness of narrative as a way of breaking this approach. See Rina Drory, “Three Attempts to Legitimize Fiction in Classical Arabic Literature,” in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 18 (1994): 146-164; Stefan Leder, “Conventions of fictional narration in learned literature,” in *Storytelling in the framework of non-fictional Arabic literature*, edited by Stefan Leder (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1998), 34-60; Matthew L. Keegan, “Al-Tawḥīdī, Fictionality, and the Mediatedness of Narrative,” in *post medieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 13, no. 3-4 (Winter 2022): 331 as well as entire issue.

60. Julie Orlemanski’s approach points to how recognizing fictionality enables us to approach premodern societies’ ways of differentiating fact from what exceeded facticity. See Julie Orlemanski, “Who Has Fiction? Modernity, Fictionality, and the Middle Ages,” in *New Literary History* Vol. 50, no. 2 (Spring 2019): 147.

of active invention and subversion.⁶¹ The deployment of the *isnād* in premodern literary works conceptually offers an alternative to the modern dichotomy between history and fiction by highlighting various gradients of mediation in narrative prose. Each of the works in my archive fall within a mesh of inherited motifs—or as Julia Bray has suggested ‘a web of myths’—on Majnun that constitute the very material of *adab* that each writer shapes and reshapes.⁶² Ibn Qutayba and the *Dīwan* strive to preserve the *isnād* even as the latter work contains layers of narrative sedimentation that likely go beyond the realm of strict fact.⁶³ Iṣfahānī and Neẓāmī, on the other hand, directly undermine their sources, which makes their works more overtly fictionalized. This fictionality allows for a new approach to *‘ishq* alongside the rewriting of Layla and Majnun’s story in Neẓāmī’s text.

Yet the ethical aspect of Neẓāmī’s work as a work of *adab* likewise contributes to its reformulation of *‘ishq*. Formal techniques such as the incorporation of short tales, homilies, and epistolary exchanges incorporated into the work create an arena of textuality that engages a dialogic mode akin to Mikhail Bakhtin’s approach to the novelty of heteroglossia.⁶⁴ Yet instead of

61. In Persian literary studies, the conversation on fictionality seems to have reached a stalemate, as J. T. P. de Bruijn has offered a position similar to the universalist view whereby all premodern Persian narratives (*dāstāns*) can be read as fictional, while Bo Utas has argued that there was ‘no indigenous term for fiction’ and that premodern Persian literature thus lacks this facet of what makes ‘our modern concept of literature’ (Utas 2014, 169-171; De Bruijn 1999). While the former remains vague as to how we are to assess individual texts, the latter risks portraying all premodern Persian readers as lacking with respect to us moderns. Bo Utas, “Classical Persian Literature: Fiction, Didactics, or Intuitive Truth?” in *True Lies Worldwide: Fictionality in Global Contexts*, eds. Anders Cullhed and Lena Rydholm (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 169-171 and J. T. P. de Bruijn, “Fiction, I,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*, Vol. IX, Fasc. 6, 572-579. Last modified January 26, 2012. <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/fiction-i-traditional>.

62. Julia Bray, “‘Abbasid Myth and the Human Act: Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih and Others,” in *On Fiction and Adab in Medieval Arabic Literature*, edited by Philip F. Kennedy (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005), 2.

63. For example, the *Dīwan* includes scenes of Majnun speaking with a gazelle that responds, detailed meetings with Kuthayyir (another legendary *‘udhrī* poet), and instances of speakers stumbling across Majnun in an oasis that I analyze in chapter one.

64. Bakhtin neutralizes the positions of the author and reader through a heightened focus on the language of the text that maximizes structuralism’s comparative impulse through his schemata of various types of chronotopes available in the history of narrative fiction. Bakhtin is mostly interested in the novel as a way of challenging and extending Saussure’s synchronic approach to language through what Bakhtin identifies as the interlocking languages of the novel via polyglossia, but his focus on form extends to other genres as well such that he assesses an enormity of diverse literary works through his unifying principle of the chronotope. The dialogic mode of Neẓāmī’s text

regarding these as merely literary devices, I consider how the dialogic mode of the text serves as a way of cultivating ethical subject-formation through embodied practices embedded in the concept of *adab*. This way of approaching *adab* is particularly valuable for rethinking *Layli and Majnun*'s genre given the fact that the text has been divergently read as either a mystical allegory or a courtly romance and hence somehow "secular." Traversing modern categories, *Layli and Majnun* is both mystical and courtly, both "religious" and "secular," and reading it alongside this scholarship on *adab* helps with recentering the fact that the political work of aesthetics often engages the question of ethics. Weaving together multiple discourses on *'ishq*, *Layli and Majnun* refracts them through different characters and narratorial commentary as it creates a space in which, as Michael Allen postulates, innumerable readers engage the embodied work of textuality as they think through the relationship between various approaches.⁶⁵ Taking up these different perspectives in different chapters, this project shows how *Layli and Majnun*'s multifaceted approach to *'ishq* leads to a novel channeling of *'ishq*'s potency and its corporeal effects toward ethical actions.

V. Maddening love: Project overview

Chapter One (Madman/Animal/Poet: Locating Majnun) provides a web of sources against which to understand the coalescence of the literary figure of Majnun. I read excerpts from the Qur'an and the biography of the prophet Muhammad as well as from medical discourse on *'ishq*, demonstrating how the madman (*majnūn*, meaning mad or possessed by *jinn*) was a recognizable

resonates with Bakhtin's approach to the novel as a system of languages that mutually interanimate each other even as it might be considered a courtly romance if it were placed into its temporal group within Bakhtin's teleological schema. See Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 47-92.

65. Allan points to shifting disciplinary frameworks for approaching the "literary" in twentieth century Egypt that instructed readers on formalist modes of reading, responding, and engaging with texts that differed from prior notions of *adab*. These disciplinary frameworks consist of the formal study of literature as conceived of by modernized educational institutions, as well as the nationalization of libraries, the rise of teachers colleges, and the growth of a reading public. See Allan, "How *Adab* became literary," 175-176 and 181-182.

type of speaker in the late antique Islamic environment. I then touch upon the prevalence of animals in pre-Islamic poetry, specifically in the genre of *ṣa'ālīk* (brigand) poets whose poetry spoke of animals as alternative kin. These sources combined provide inroads for approaching conceptual links between madness and animality in the earliest Arabic material. Turning to literary analysis of entries on Majnun in *The Book of Poetry and Poets*, *The Book of Songs*, and the *Dīwan*, I show how Majnun becomes linked to animals and animality through a societal perception of his loss of rationality, which forms a boundary that keeps him on society's edge. There, the Arabic materials provide initial glimpses of how Majnun's relationship with animals (particularly with gazelles) present a vision of an alternative society, and how his role as a poet provides the bridge for his continued contact with the human realm.

I pick up Majnun's societal function as a poet in Chapter Two (Love that binds: Kinship, Sacrifice, and Conceptualizing *ishq*). This chapter further fleshes out the historical web of discourses on *ishq* by indicating how authors at the Abbasid court such as Jāhīz (d. 868-9) and Ibn Dāwūd (d. 908-9) responded to medical approaches by indicating the pleasures that come with *ishq*'s ills, as well as by sketching the historical adaptation of the term in tenth and eleventh century Persianate mystical discourse to describe the divine essence itself. This backdrop helps explain why *ishq* becomes such an important term in Nezāmī's text, which, unlike the Arabic material on Majnun, explicitly thematizes *ishq* as a force that leads to corporeal transformation and which plays with the accretion of meanings associated with the term. I tease out the implications of this thematization over the course of the remaining chapters, and in this chapter I highlight resonances between the Arabic material and Nezāmī's text by analyzing Majnun's performances of passion as a poet-lover, arguing that literary depictions of his behavior critique normative expectations of kinship relations. Drawing from Eve Sedgwick's approach to societies

that traffic in women, I analyze how Majnun's function as a poet-lover (*'āshiq*) in the Arabic material upholds a form of masculinity that finds power in rhetorical skill alongside displays of suffering. This resonates with courtly discourse on *'ishq* that locates pleasure in suffering, which is reverberated through Majnun's speeches in the first half of *Layli and Majnun* that foreground bondage vocabulary. Yet beyond rhetoric, *Layli and Majnun's* association of *'ishq* with corporeality likewise places on display Majnun's embodied transformations. I analyze three scenes from the first half of the text wherein Majnun performs consent to bondage, performances which stall and critique his society's kinship system based on the traffic in women. It is through his role as a poet that Majnun reimagines kinship through sacrificial logic, which is a critique present in both Arabic and Persian versions of the legend. This critique gains prominence in Neẓāmī's text as Majnun not only speaks of bondage but also performs it in a way that stalls normative kinship bonds in his society.

Chapter Three (Tales of Majnun: Asceticism and Animality) evaluates Majnun's creation of an alternative society amongst animals, which coincides with a shift in how his character defines *'ishq* itself. This shift occurs in the second half of *Layli and Majnun* as Majnun is described as one who has "broken the bonds" with his society and he more permanently takes up residence amongst the animals. I analyze how Majnun's speeches in this portion of the work resonate with contemporaneous mystical discourse that defines *'ishq* as an ontological substance that lies beyond all duality, which coincides with the textual exploration of Majnun's animal world as a space that allows for transcending dichotomous categories such as human/animal, man/woman. This exploration expands upon the Arabic materials' depiction of animals by including wild creatures such as lions and leopards. The presence of such wild animals offers Majnun protection as the text simultaneously depicts how the medically maddening effects of *'ishq* as well as Majnun's own

ascetic praxis causes his body to weaken as he hits his head on the ground and refuses food. I argue that the text's foregrounding of the animals' function as protectors of Majnun draws Majnun's ontological perspective on *'ishq* into question by redefining what unity means. Instead of overcoming matter and multiplicity as in contemporaneous Persianate mystical texts, Neẓāmī's text offers an alternative conception of unity that can be understood as something obtained through embodied relationships with others. This shows how *Layli and Majnun* differs from works classified as "mystical" today even as it plays with mystical vocabulary, a playing which I further underscore by highlighting how the text's fictionality provides space for narratorial commentary on main events. This commentary preserves Majnun as an exemplary lover due to his acceptance of mortality even as it simultaneously illustrates alternative ways of living with the force of *'ishq*.

Chapter Four (Letters from Layla: Ethics and Embodiment) turns to Layla's character as a way of exploring an alternative perspective on what can be done with the force of *'ishq*. Instead of an emphasis on transcendence, Layla's character in both the Arabic materials and *Layli and Majnun* is tied to materiality. Her role within the lovers' kinship system differs from Majnun's due to her gender, and her character instead emphasizes secrecy even as she critiques her society as well as Majnun's approach in private messages and letters. In *Layli and Majnun*, the amount of space allotted to Layla's critiques is extended by the text's experiments with reported speech, epistolary form, and with a final scene that brings the lovers together after Layla's husband has passed away. In these selections, Layla's character emphasizes embodied actions through the care she shows for Majnun and through an expression of sexual longing. I read her character's approach against normative Islamic ethical literature (*akhlāq*) on love, which imagines the highest form of love (defined as *maḥabba*) to be between allegedly self-sufficient men in the polis. In contrast, *Layli and Majnun's* foregrounding of the corporeal effects of *'ishq* positions Layla as a lover

whose approach channels *'ishq's* force towards actions that are aimed at transforming the material world. Drawing from critical insights on care, I show how the text's representation of Layla is not only a kind of inclusive move, but also an attempt at reimagining societal structures from the ground up by indicating the radical potential of mutuality in the romantic relationship. Unlike Majnun's creation of an alternative society amongst animals that relies upon transcending dualistic categories, Layla's critiques as fully illustrated in *Layli and Majnun* put forward a way of reimagining kinship from within the social. Her perspective on *'ishq* is novel for the time period, and as such suggests how *Layli and Majnun* as a text of *adab* thinks with the ethical import of *'ishq* in ways that differ from normative ethical literature (*akhlāq*).

In the epilogue, I consider how the text illustrates mutuality beyond the romantic by depicting a community formed around Layla and Majnun's story. I turn to the perspective of Zayd, a fellow poet-lover in *Layli and Majnun* who assists the lovers' final meeting that I analyze in chapters three and four. In a final dream sequence, Zayd dreams of the lovers in paradise as an old man informs him of the lovers' sad story. Awakening from this vision, Zayd offers a final speech endorsing *'ishq's* power, which seals its importance as the poem's main theme, yet this vision does not gesture toward an overcoming of embodied duality as with Majnun's approach to ontological unity nor an idealization of romantic love alone. Instead, both Layla and Majnun as well as mediators/interpreters (the old man, Zayd) make the vision possible. This dream points to how stories about love from the past that carry baggage by way of scripting gender norms also serve as a resource for imagining future forms of relationality. The community envisioned in this dream, and its garden setting, goes beyond forms of community that were available in the medieval Islamic world. These include normative kinship structures defined by familial relation or by the requirements of premodern citizenry as defined by an Aristotelian vision of the polis governed by

rational men. The fact that Zayd wakes up to endorse *ishq* resonates with how the text positions itself as a space for rethinking relatedness, and its ethical aim as a work of *adab* to transform the reader's subjectivity. *Layli and Majnun* models what community might look like if the reader, like Layla, Majnun, and Zayd, were to consider joining a group of potentially mad lovers, and the text serves as a space for inculcating a transformation of subjectivity that looks past familial kinship or rational, male citizenry as the primary means of belonging.

Chapter One: Madman/Animal/Poet: Locating Majnun

As the madman *par excellence* of Islamic literatures, Majnun's name reveals something of his character. An epithet for those deemed insane, *majnūn* carries connotations of one possessed by *jinn*, who are often considered to inspire madness.¹ The Qur'an employs the term *majnūn* to differentiate the speech of soothsayers or madmen from that of true prophets.² The literary figure Majnun—a figure the tradition often associates with Qays ibn al-Mulawwah (d. c. 688)—emerges as an archetypal madman-poet in quasi-biographical accounts dated from the ninth century onwards.³ Marked in such a way, Majnun's epithet calls his humanity into question by questioning his very rationality, a questioning that literary texts amplify by illustrating connections between Majnun's madness and his life amongst non-human animals. Several scholars have noted the prominence of animals in the legend of Layla and Majnun—for example, Asghar Seyed-Gohrab notes how serpent imagery in the Persian material depicts the desires of both protagonists, while Ruqayya Khan analyzes the gazelle as a symbol in the Arabic material that recalls the beloved.⁴ Yet few have looked beyond anthropomorphic qualities to ask, what else is going on with the

1. Ibn Manzūr's definition of *majnūn* focuses on possession, either by *jinn* or the divine, citing *majnūn* as a passive participle related to the verb *'ajannahu* (to madden or to veil/conceal). The latter translation is possibly explained by Sībawayi's note that the term implies having an experience of wonder (*ta'ajjub*), which may lead to concealing oneself. See Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān Al-'Arab*, ed. by Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh 'Alī Kabīr, Aḥmad Ḥasab Allāh, and Hāshim Muḥammad Shādhilī (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1981), 703.

2. See Q 15:6; 26:27; 44:14; 51:39; 51:52; 52:29; 54:9; 68:2; 68:51; 81:22. These usages, all within Sūras attributed to the initial phases of revelatory output in Mecca and explored in the first section of this chapter, both declare that the prophet Muhammad is not a madman (*majnūn*), and contrast the miraculous activities of prophets such as Moses with those of magicians or madmen, gesturing to the proximity of these categories in the Qur'an's late antique environment.

3. The earliest source on Majnun's life that I explore in this chapter, Ibn Qutayba's (d. 889) *Kitāb al-Shi'r wa-l-Shu'arā'*, connects Majnun to Qays and offers two alternatives on his lineage.

4. See Ruqayya Khan, "Pastoralism and the 'Wild Man' in an Early Arabic Romance," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 11, no. 2 (2008): 143-145 and Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, "Majnun's Image as Serpent," in *The Poetry of Nizami Ganjavi: Knowledge, Love, and Rhetoric*, edited by Kamran Talattof, Jerome W. Clinton, and Kenneth A. Luther (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 83-95.

plethora of animals in the legend?⁵ What to make of the fact that Majnun, as a madman, is often himself perceived as animalistic?

This chapter approaches connections between madness and animality underlying the coalescence of Majnun as a literary figure. I place the earliest literary material on Majnun into conversation with a variety of contextual materials to flesh out the categories of madness and animality in the legend's setting and reception: I begin by reading excerpts from the Qur'an and the *sīra* (biography of the prophet Muhammad), demonstrating how the madman (*majnūn*, meaning mad or possessed by *jinn*) was a recognizable type of speaker in the late antique Islamic environment. These early Islamic texts reveal a proximity between the categories of madness and prophecy, which gave way to a popular view on masculine madness as societally permissible. This popular view was, however, complemented by a growing corpus of medical literature in the Abbasid milieu during and after the Baghdad translation movement that brought together indigenous, Greek, Persian, and Sanskritic knowledge.⁶ In the second section, I turn to how the early Islamic medical tradition conceived of a particular kind of madness that has bearing on Majnun's character as a love-poet—the theorization of *'ishq* as a mental illness.⁷ Unlike the popular view on madness, physicians thought of the embodied behaviors inspired by *'ishq* as a

5. Renate Würsh has noted the exceptional use of animals in Nezāmī's *Layli and Majnun* as “active participants in the unfolding of the plot itself, rather than as the protagonist of a fable” as being relatively rare in classical Persian literature. I maintain that this same kind of multifaceted approach should be taken up with the Arabic material, whose usage of animals goes beyond anthropomorphic inscription of moral values. I likewise draw inspiration from Patricia Cox Miller's approach to animals in early Christianity that both acknowledges anthropocentrism in premodern texts and locates a “zoological imagination” that eschews a homogenized category of “the animal.” See Renate Würsh, “‘Let Even a Cat Win Your Heart!’ Nizāmī on Animal and Man,” in *A Key to the Treasure of the Hakim*, eds. J.C. Bürgel and Christine van Ruymbeke (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2011), 262 and Patricia Cox Miller, *In the Eye of the Animal: Zoological Imagination in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 4-10.

6. The height of the translation movement is usually dated to the eighth through tenth centuries. For a brief overview on cultural impacts, see Ruqayya Khan, *Bedouin and 'Abbasid Cultural Identities: The Arabic Majnun Layla Story* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 8-10.

7. As explained in the introduction, I leave *'ishq* (a term that has often been rendered as *érōs*) untranslated to historicize its usage against premodern Islamic discourses on desire.

kind of madness that needed to be cured. Both approaches to madness underlie the crystallization of Majnun as a literary figure whose madness becomes troped, in highly variable ways, as animalistic. In the third section, I offer a brief overview on animals and animality in pre-Islamic poetry to probe the specificity with which the literary material on Majnun links his perceived animality with non-human animals. Animals such as gazelles, wolves, and birds of various kinds make frequent appearances in literary texts prior to the emergence of Majnun as a literary figure, most notably in the poetry of *ṣa`ālīk* (brigand) poets whose poetry spoke of animals as alternative kin. This genre provided fertile ground for the incorporation of a rich array of animals into Majnun's story.

Against these historical backdrops, I argue that the Arabic material on Majnun demonstrates conceptual links between madness and animality, defined by a socially construed perception of irrationality.⁸ I examine connections between Majnun's loss of rationality and his relationship with animals in the Arabic anecdotal accounts of Ibn Qutayba (d. 889) and Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (d. 967), as well as in a source known as *Dīwan Majnūn Laylā*, which is attributed to Abū Bakr al-Wālibī. *Dīwans* are typically compilations of the poems of any given author arranged by meter or rhyme after their death. This source is atypical insofar as its overall structure coheres around a narrative of Majnun's legendary life, making it an extended version of the quasi-biographical accounts. It is possible that Wālibī lived in the ninth century, although historical

8. I draw loosely from La Marr Jurelle Bruce's conceptions of and approaches to madness. Bruce has delineated several modes of madness including phenomenal madness, medicalized madness, rage, and psychosocial madness. Bruce also adopts what he refers to as "mad methodology" that "neither vilifies the mad person as evil incarnate, nor romanticizes the mad person as resistance personified." This approach fruitfully incorporates critiques of ablism, while being capacious enough to consider violence enacted by those classified as mad. See La Marr Jurelle Bruce, *How to Go Mad Without Losing Your Mind: Madness and Black Radical Creativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 6-11 and 44.

information about his life remains scant.⁹ This has led the critic As‘ad Khairallah to conclude that Wālibī himself may have been a legendary character under whose name many compilers pieced together a gradual accretion of material on Majnun.¹⁰ Given the fact that the earliest manuscript of this source dates to 1245, this may very well be the case, although it is difficult to declare given the fragmented nature of the manuscript tradition. If we consider the *Dīwan* to likely contain layers of historical sedimentation, then it is possible to place it within a larger genre of anecdotes (*akhbār*) collected around poetry attributed to famous figures from the Arab-Islamic past. This genre gained prominence in the ninth and tenth century Abbasid milieu.¹¹ Despite ongoing historiographical

9. The editors Abdul-Sattar Ahmad Farraj and Hudā Wā‘il ‘Āmir of Majnun’s *Dīwan* postulate that Wālibī lived in the second half of the second century hijrī (roughly early ninth century) based on the inclusion of transmitters in the chains of transmission (*isnād*) whose lives are more historically verifiable. In some manuscripts, this includes the musician Ishāq Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī (d. 850) and the lexicographer and transmitter Abū ‘Amr al-Shaybānī (d. c. 821-831). Additionally, Yuri ‘Abd al-Ghanī notes that the cataloguer Ibn al-Nadīm (d. c. 995) includes an independent work entitled *Majnūn Laylā* in his famous *Book Catalogue (Kitāb al-Fihrist)*, which suggests that there was an extant, independent work circulating about Majnun’s life other than the biographical entries found in Ibn Qutayba and Iṣfahānī’s works. It remains unclear to me why Wālibī is nonetheless entirely absent from Iṣfahānī’s work if Wālibī did in fact live prior to him. This could be because the *Dīwan* includes material that may be attributable to other poets (especially Jamīl or Kuthayyir, fellow ‘*udhrī*’ poets whose verses are regularly interchanged for Majnun’s). David Larsen argues that Jamīl and Majnun are connected through Kuthayyir, who was both an early teller of Majnun’s tales and Jamīl’s main transmitter (*rāwī*). See Abū Bakr al-Wālibī, attrib., *Dīwan Majnūn Laylā*, ed. by Abdul-Sattar Ahmad Farraj (Cairo: Dār al-Miṣr lil-Ṭibā‘a, 1963), 33; Abū Bakr al-Wālibī, attrib., *Dīwān Ash‘ār Majnun Banī ‘Āmir Ma‘a Ba‘d Aḥwālīh*, ed. by Huda Wa‘il Amir (Beirut: al-Mu‘assasah al-‘Arabīyah lil-Dirāsāt wa-al-Nashr, 2011), 24-26; Abū Bakr al-Wālibī, attrib., *Dīwan Qays ibn al-Mulawwah Majnūn Laylā*, ed. by Yuri ‘Abd al-Ghanī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmīya, 1999), 19-20; David Larsen, email message to author, February 24, 2023.

10 . Khairallah has argued that the *isnād* serves as a conventional device in the *Dīwan*. This could be the case, and Hudā Wā‘il ‘Āmir has noted the impossibility of *isnāds* that link Abū ‘Amr al-Shaybānī (d. c. 821-831) and Nawfal ibn al-Musāḥiq (d. 693). However, the remaining evidence Khairallah cites remains ambiguous—the fact that the *Dīwan* states that al-Wālibī narrates Majnun’s anecdotes in “his own time (*fī zamāni-hi*)” does not have to mean that al-Wālibī lived at the same time as Majnun, as Khairallah suggests as a possible scenario. Unlike the undermining of the *isnād* in Iṣfahānī’s work, the *Dīwan* never points to the active intervention of any compiler. I prefer, given the lack of definitive dating of Wālibī’s life, to claim that the *Dīwan* likely represents an accretion of material beyond Wālibī’s potential lifespan. This allows for accounting layers of historical sedimentation without necessarily undermining the possibility of a historical Wālibī. See As‘ad Khairallah, *Love, Madness, and Poetry An Interpretation of the Mağnūn Legend*. (Beirut: Beirutur Texte und Studien: 1980), 58-60 and Abū Bakr al-Wālibī, attrib., *Dīwān Ash‘ār Majnun Banī ‘Āmir Ma‘a Ba‘d Aḥwālīh*, ed. by Huda Wa‘il Amir (henceforth *Dīwan*), 25.

11 . Beatrice Gruendler has argued that this was a time of transition as scribes began committing earlier oral traditions to writing after the standardization of the Arabic language. Anecdotes (*akhbār*) thus carried with them various historical strata that represented both the time of the anecdote itself, and the time of the compiler. Compilation could be a process of maximal or minimal intervention. In the case of the *Dīwan*, Wālibī’s actions as compiler seem to have been minimal as there is both not intrusion of a narratorial voice and the textual space allotted to anecdotes is minimal with respect to the preservation of Majnun’s poetry. This could be a further reason why later compilers could

questions, the *Dīwan* remains the fullest account of material circulating on Majnun in the premodern Arabic tradition writ large, and I reference it for the purpose of understanding the depth and main contours of Majnun’s story in Arabic to place this into comparison with Neẓāmī’s Persian rendition.¹²

These sources cover the earliest narrative material depicting Majnun’s life, and they offer a range of ways in which premodern authors manipulated conventions of historical verification to elaborate on Majnun’s life amongst the animals. At times, Majnun appears as a kind of “uncivilized Bedouin” whose beastliness marks him as the other of an urbane, Abbasid milieu.¹³ Yet at other times, the presence of non-predatory animals—most notably gazelles—in Majnun’s story brings forth not only his own intrinsic animality, but also the possible worlds imagined through relations with animals that offer alternatives to human societal limitations.¹⁴ In these moments, a confusion of normative relations between predator and prey, as well as wild and tame creatures occurs. I draw on Tarek El-Ariss’ theorizing of *tawahḥuṣh* (becoming wild, beastly) as a concept that blurs the human-animal boundary that is deeply engrained in Arabic literature to bring forth how this

have added to the *Dīwan*, which further explains its highly differentiated manuscript tradition. See Beatrice Gruendler, *Abū Bakr al-Ṣūlī: The Life and Times of Abū Tammām* (New York: NYU Press, 2015), xv-xx.

12. R. Blachère considers that the *Dīwan*, despite its many issues, “cannot be regarded as occupying an insignificant place in the study of archaic poetry.” Furthermore, Huda Wa’il Amir has stated that Wālibī’s account is more comprehensive than Ibn Ṭūlūn’s (d. 1546) later rendition, because the latter was trained in hadīth criticism and thus had a more rigorous method for eliminating anecdotes with weak chains of transmission. See Ch. Pellat, “Madjnūn Laylā,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, second edition, edited by P. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill Online, 2012) <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0608> and *Dīwan*, 14-15.

13. I draw from Ruqayya Khan’s work on the Arabic material attributed to Majnun, to arrive at this description of a perception of Majnun as an “uncivilized bedouin.” Khan has argued that late Abbasid culture inscribed cultural primitivism in the “romanticized, exoticized Bedouin,” an inscription that she claims gained prominence after the translation movement and the rise of cities that made the early Islamic milieu fascinating in its alterity. See Ruqayya Khan, *Bedouin and ‘Abbāsīd Cultural Identities: The Arabic Majnūn Laylā Story* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 3-17.

14. For compelling articulations of the potentials that arise from rethinking human-animal relations, which have been influential for my own thinking, see Jacques Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign*, and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Inventing with Animals in the Middle Ages,” 39-62.

blurring allows for an imagining of an alternative society.¹⁵ Taken together, the challenging aspect of the marvel of Majnun’s life amongst animals is that it inspires wonder and what might be called the dark side of wonder that keeps Majnun at a distance because of his non-human alterity.¹⁶ Majnun’s life amongst animals on the edge of human society thus reveals how rationality is a prerequisite for inclusion, which is something that both he as madman and his non-human animal companions appear to lack.

I. Madness in the Qur’an and *sīra*

When read together, the Qur’an and *sīra* provide a glimpse into popular views of the madman (*majnūn*) as a powerful receptor of supernatural knowledge in ways akin to prophets in the late antique Arabian Peninsula. Michael Dols has traced these popular views into the medieval period, and his work has demonstrated a non-curative view of epilepsy in particular due to a popular understanding of it as “the priestly/prophetic disease” in Ishāq ibn ‘Imrān’s (d. c. 903-909) treatise on melancholia.¹⁷ Yet despite Dols’ claim that premodern Islamic societies “permitted a much wider latitude to the interpretation of unusual behavior than does modern Western society,” his own research points to the practices of physical restraint in medieval Islamic hospitals and the

15. See Tarek El-Ariss, “Return of the Beast: From Pre-Islamic Ode to Contemporary Novel,” in *Journal of Arabic Literature* 47, 1-2 (2016): 62-90.

16. Lara Harb has argued that wonder was an overarching aesthetic in the later Abbasid milieu. Though this concept is often associated with a positive sense of wonder—denoted, as Harb indicates through terms such as *‘ajab* (wonder), *ta’ajjub* (wonderment), and *badi’* (innovative, original, and marvelous—there is also a parallel, negative sense more typically associated with things that are strange/foreign (*gharīb*)). Notably, Harb states that this negative sense is often brought forward by being paired with the term *waḥshī* (wild, uncultivated), which is from the same root as *tawāḥḥush* (becoming wild), the term often used to describe Majnun. See Lara Harb, *Arabic Poetics: Aesthetic Experience in Classical Arabic literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 5-6.

17. Michael Dols cites Ishāq ibn ‘Imrān as noting “a Hippocratic view that the melancholic may become epileptic, and that the Greeks called this illness the ‘sacred disease’ and considered it to be a divine punishment; in vernacular Arabic, one was accustomed to calling it the prophetic disease (*al-marad al-kahāna*), because of the obscurity of its causes and its attribution to the *jinn*.” See Michael Dols, *Majnun: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 70-74.

more broadly curative views held by those writing within the tradition of Galenic medicine.¹⁸ In this section, I therefore look to the Qur'an and *sīra* as texts that can speak to popular ideas about madness, ideas that existed alongside a growing corpus of medical literature in late antique and medieval Islamic contexts.

Qur'anic usage of the term *majnūn* generally aims to differentiate prophets from madmen. The term is used ten times, all within Suras that are attributed to the initial phases of the prophet's revelatory output in Mecca. In Sura al-Takwīr (Q 81:22), the term is deployed after a series of oaths that announce the impending apocalypse.¹⁹ These oaths set the tone for marking the arrival of the prophet's message, heightening the intensity of the moment as an event of cosmic and local significance that overturns both the natural world and what the Qur'an views as the unjust practice of female infanticide.²⁰ The oaths then give way to a declaration of prophecy in Q 81:19 that states "indeed, it is a word conveyed by a noble messenger (*innahu la-qawlu rasūlin karīmin*)," which affirms Muhammad's direct connection to supernatural authority that is given through Qur'anic revelation.²¹ Immediately following this pivotal moment, the Qur'an states that the prophet is not

18. Dols describes the ways in which Galenic medicine separated illness from the mystical or supernatural realm, views which were developed into typologies in the medieval Islamic context by Ḥunayn ibn 'Ishāq (d. 873), al-Rāzī (d. 925), and others. On Dols' overall claim see Dols, 5; On the development of the Islamic hospital see Dols, 45-47.

19. Many of the oath clusters in the Qur'an make use of a bipartite structure, wherein the speaker swears by phenomena of a hierarchically superior or futuristic realm, before returning to an emphatic statement which emphasizes the present moment. For more on oath clusters, see Angelika Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and the Making of a Community: Reading the Qur'an as a Literary Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 103.

20. As in other contemporary cultures such as the Greeks, Romans, and that of Carthage, Arab Bedouin society valued male children more than female children because female children might become a financial burden or lead to attacks on the family's honor. Donna Lee Bowen has emphasized that female infanticide (*wa'd*) was common enough in pre-Islamic Arabia to be assigned a specific term, and notes that the practice is referred to seven times in the Qur'an (Q 16:57-58; 81:8-9, 14; 6:137, 140, 151; 17:31; 60:12). See Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'ān: The Early Revelations* (Ashland: White Cloud Press, 1999), 49-50 and Donna Lee Brown, "Infanticide," in *Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Johanna Pink. Consulted online March 1, 2023. <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQSIM_00221>

21. Although the object of vision is left unspecified, most commentators identify him/it with the angel Gabriel. According to some commentators, these verses comment upon the prophet's behavior of covering himself after receiving a vision of Gabriel with six hundred wings, and they serve to refute the accusation that he was possessed by

mad (*majnūn*) nor inspired by “an outcast devil (*shayṭānin rajīmin*).”²² This signals not only how the Qur’an establishes the category of prophecy, but also the late antique environment against which this category is established. In another Sura primarily concerned with the impending apocalypse, al-Qalam (Q 68:2), the term *majnūn* is used in direct address to the prophet at the beginning of the Sura to declare that “you are not, by the favor of your lord, a madman” before returning back to the term at the end of the Sura to denote it as a charge used against the prophet by non-believers.²³ Although each instance insists on differentiation, this repetitive association gestures to the existence of a category of supernaturally inspired madmen whose speech was heard as proximate to prophetic speech in the Qur’an’s late antique environment.

Suras traditionally attributed to a later Meccan phase expand upon the Qur’anic category of prophecy through comparisons of the prophet Muhammad with Biblical prophets, and in such comparisons the term *majnūn* once again appears alongside a list of other figures associated with access to the supernatural such as the magician (*saḥīr*) or the priest (*kāḥin*).²⁴ The Qur’an often compares Moses and Muhammad both in terms of the quality of their speech and their shared privilege of having visually witnessed aspects of the divine.²⁵ Moreover, the Qur’an recounts in

a *jinn*. See Seyyed Hossein Nasr et al., eds., *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015), 1482.

22. Translated Sahih International, available at <https://quran.com/81> (accessed 20 August 2021).

23. Sura 68 is notable in this regard insofar as the term *Majnun* appears at the beginning and end of the sūra. Following Carl Ernst’s notion of the tripartite structure of this sūra, *Majnun* reads as a key term used by rejectors of revelation as a way of discrediting prophetic speech. See Carl Ernst, *How to Read the Qur’an* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 81-83. Translated by Sahih International, available at <https://quran.com/68> (accessed 9 May 2021).

24. *Kāḥin* is a difficult term to translate as the sources indicate multiple functions as a priest, seer, or revealer of divine will who “regulated worship and interpreted omens.” The term is etymologically linked to the Hebrew word for “priest,” (*kōhēn*), from the root *k/h/n* meaning to predict or tell the future. See Muntasar F. al-Hamad and John F. Healey, “Late Antique and Near Eastern Context: Some Social and Religious Aspects,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Qur’anic Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 85-87.

25. Angelika Neuwirth has analyzed the various narratives on Moses in the Qur’an as “a vantage point from which to survey traces of an ongoing interaction between the proclaimer and his audience, one which attests a development of their religious identity.” If, as Neuwirth argues, Moses’ experience is illustrative of psychological contours of prophecy, the appeals to such an experience further contextualize the association of prophecy with

three different Suras the way in which the Pharaoh of prophetic lore accuses Moses of being a madman.²⁶ Riffing on the motif of Moses' staff transforming into a snake, Sura al-Dhāriyāt (Q 51:39 and 52) quotes the accusation made by Pharaoh of Moses of being “a magician or a madman (*sāhirun aw majnūnun*)” before gesturing to Muhammad's similar situation by stating that “similarly, there came not to those before them any messenger except that they said, ‘a magician or a madman.’”²⁷ Such comparisons show the ways in which the Qur'an draws upon the deep roots of the prophetic traditions of late antiquity in its construction of the category of madness, and how it relates the madman to other types of figures who it claims have access to supernatural authority.

As in the Qur'an, the *sīra* aims at establishing the place of Muhammad amongst other prophets and its breadth offers an opportunity for further exploring popular understandings of madness as they relate to early Islamic conceptions of prophecy.²⁸ While the Qur'an briefly mentions skeptics of the prophet's message that later commentators connect to members of the prophet's own family of the Quraysh, the *sīra* intimately details such encounters. In one such encounter, members of the Quraysh consult with Walīd ibn al-Mughīra, an elder of the family whom the tradition recalls alongside his uncle Abū Jahl as a fierce opponent of the prophet's message, about how to explain the prophet's behavior to the Arabs arriving at the time of the

madness. See Angelika Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and the Making of a Community: Reading the Qur'an as a Literary Text*, 277-287.

26. Other than the example explored here, Q 26:27 is part of a longer account that includes the detail about the staff; Q 44:14 addresses the immediate Meccan environment but is followed by a lengthy account of how Pharaoh rejected Moses as an explanation of the deniers of Muhammad's message.

27. Magic (*sihr*), like madness, is associated with supernatural forces and received a tacit endorsement in early Islam. For more on licit and illicit forms of magic, see T. Fahd, “Sihr,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, eds. P. Bearman et al (Leiden: Brill online) http://dx.doi.org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7023.

28. *Sīra* means “way of going/acting,” “epistle,” “pamphlet,” and “the life and times of / biography.” Martin Hinds and Maher Jarrar have debated about the various kinds of documents that originally circulated under the rubric. I cite from the traditional narrative attributed to Ibn Hishām in order to bring forth the received and endorsed views on madness in the emergent Islamic environment. For more on the composition of the *Sīra*, see W. Raven, “*Sīra*,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, eds. P. Bearman et al (Leiden: Brill online) http://dx.doi.org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1089.

pilgrimage festival in Mecca. This occasion sparks a debate about how to classify the prophet's activities, and the community gives various suggestions that reflect a list of figures who are likewise identified by their access to the supernatural:

<p>At the time of the festival, a group from the Quraysh gathered around their elder Walīd ibn al-Mughīra, who said to them, “Oh people of the Quraysh, indeed the time of the festival has arrived. Delegations of the Arabs will be coming to you and they will have heard about this affair regarding your companion. Therefore, decide together on one opinion regarding him and do not bicker with lies or refutations of one another.”</p> <p>They said, “You tell us your opinion and we will agree with it.”</p> <p>He said, “No, you all speak, and I will listen.”</p> <p>They said, “We say he is a priest (<i>kāhin</i>).”</p> <p>He said, “No, by God, he is not a priest, for we have seen priests and with him there is no murmuring like a priest nor his rhymes (<i>saj`ihī</i>).”</p> <p>They said, “We say he is a madman (<i>majnūn</i>).”</p> <p>He said, “He is not a madman, for we have seen madness (<i>al-junūn</i>) and we know it, and with him there is no strangling or convulsing nor whispering temptations (<i>waswasa</i>).”</p> <p>They said, “We say he is a poet.”</p> <p>He said, “He is not a poet, for we know all about poetry—the meters of <i>rajaz</i>, <i>hazaj</i>, its form, as well as its powers of grasping and releasing (the listener)—and his is not poetry.”²⁹</p>	<p>ثم إن الوليد بن المغيرة اجتمع إليه نفر من قريش وكان ذا سن فيهم وقد حضر الموسم فقال لهم يا معشر قريش إنه قد حضر هذا الموسم وإن وفود العرب ستقدم عليكم فيه وقد سمعوا بأمر صاحبكم هذا فأجمعوا فيه رأياً واحداً ولا تختلفوا فيكذب بعضكم بعضاً ويرد قولكم بعضه بعضاً. فقالوا فأنت يا أبا عبد شمس فقل وأقم لنا رأياً نقول به. قال بل أنتم فقولوا أسمع. قالوا نقول كاهن. قال لا والله ما هو بكاهن لقد رأينا الكهان فما هو بزمزمة الكاهن ولا سجعه. قالوا فنقول مجنون. قال ما هو بمجنون لقد رأينا الجنون وعرفناه فما بخنقه ولا تخالجه ولا وسوسته. قالوا فنقول شاعر. قال ما هو بشاعر لقد عرفنا الشعر كله رجزه وهزجه وقريضه ومقبوضه ومبسوطه فما هو بالشعر.</p>
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In these negotiations, the community suggests an extended list of the figures that are used in the Qur'an for types of speakers that may be confused with prophets in general and the prophet Muhammad in particular. Moreover, Walīd ibn al-Mughīra's responses show that the similarities and differences between these figures hinge on classifying very subtle differences in types of supernaturally inspired speech—the priest is the one who murmurs or speaks in rhymed prose (*saj`*), whereas the madman whispers devilish temptations (*waswasa*), both of which are declared

29. Ibn Hishām, *Sīrat al-Nabī* (Cairo: Maktabat Muḥammad ‘Alī Ṣabīḥ, 1963), 173-174. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

here to be distinct from the prophet's own form of speech. The comment about poetry is remarkably specific in terms of detailing varieties of metered speech and ecstatic performance, which offers a definition that places prophetic speech beyond its bounds.³⁰ This exchange concludes with Walīd ibn al-Mughīra declaring that the prophet is most similar to a magician (*sāḥir*), which solidifies his position for the tradition as an opponent even as he is assimilated into the community through his sons' conversion.³¹ Although this brief conversation aims at establishing the true nature of prophetic speech, the ensuing commentary suggests the ways in which these categories of speech overlapped in the popular imagination.³²

These brief selections from the Qur'an and *sīra* signal a late antique backdrop wherein a variety of figures could be identified by their powerful speech that claimed supernatural inspiration. Even as these sources assert that the madman lacks the divine source of inspiration that underpins the prophetic claim, they also point to how a community hears the madman's speech as akin to prophetic speech. Moreover, the madman retains a sense of supernatural inspiration that is specifically marked by the demonic, as can be seen in the *sīra*'s association of the madman's speech with devilish whisperings (*waswasa*). This suggests that the madman's speech is more threatening than the poet's speech. While these texts give voice to a popular view in the late antique Arabian Peninsula of an acceptance of madness given its proximity to prophecy and poetry, they

30. This similar association of categories can be seen in Q 52:29-30, where the Qur'ānic voice declares that the prophet is not a priest (*kāhin*), madman (*majnūn*) or a poet. The Qur'ān refutes an association of the prophet's speech with poetry in many places, particularly at the end of the Sūra al-Shu'arā' (The Poets, Q 26:224-227).

31. Ibn Hishām, 173. For more on Walīd ibn al-Mughīra, see Zettersteen, K.V., "al-Walīd b. al-Mughīra" in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, eds. P. Bearman et al (Leiden: Brill online) http://dx.doi.org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7848.

32. A similar conversation is recapitulated slightly later in the *Sīra* when Naḍr ibn al-Ḥārith contrasts the prophet's being "a most agreeable young man, trustworthy in his speech," with each of these other types of supernaturally inspired speakers. See Ibn Hishām, 188.

also point to how madness was further marked by negative associations that prepared the ground for medical approaches.

II. *ʿIshq* as mental illness in early Islamic medicine

Early Islamic medicine grew out of and systematized the humoral approach to the body largely attributed to Galen (d. 216).³³ Key thinkers include Iṣḥāq ibn ʿImrān (d. c. 903-909), Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 925 or 935), ʿAlī ibn ʿAbbas al-Majūsī (d. c. 982-994), and Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037). During the late antique and early medieval periods, Alexandria became a key port of exchange of medical ideas where Greek and Syriac works were translated to Arabic and then passed along to the Latin West.³⁴ Prior to the twelfth-century translation of Ibn Sīnā’s *Canon of Medicine* (*Qanūn fī al-Ṭibb*), Constantine (d. 1087) brought Arabic medical textbooks from North Africa to Italy in the early eleventh-century, which led to the production of the *Viaticum*, his work on morbid love, a rough adaptation of Ibn al-Jazzār’s (d. 979) *Provisions for the Traveler and the Nourishment of the Settled* (*Kitāb zād al-musāfir wa qūt al-ḥādir*). Mary Wack has discussed how this transference of medical knowledge likely contributed to “the discovery of love,” or, a revolution in sensibility commonly referred to as courtly love that swept through European culture in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries.³⁵ In the next chapter, I turn to an earlier precedent of courtly love in Arabic

33. Galen’s work on humoral theory was highly eclectic especially when it comes to mental illness. Galen rejected various medical sects (rationalists, empiricists, etc) in favor of establishing Hippocrates as a medical authority and of elaborating a totalizing approach to illness through the idea of bodily humors. Later exponents of Galenism drew on other thinkers such as Rufus of Ephesus (fl. c. 100) to help systematize aspects that Galen himself did not fully cover, such as melancholia. Michael Dols has arrived at the conclusion that Galen’s approach to insanity was similar to a Roman legal view that made it a matter neither of morals or medical treatment, but a loss of rationality. See Michael Dols, *Majnūn: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society*, 36-37. For an overview of Greek medicine and a balanced take on its influence on the Islamic world, see Peter E. Pormann and Emilie Savage-Smith, *Medieval Islamic Medicine* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 9-12.

34. Savage-Smith and Pormann detail the Alexandrian medical curriculum as including sixteen treatises from Galen as well as Hippocratic treatises, which were abridged and reformulated through commentary and paraphrase in Arabic, Hebrew, and Latin and which represent the syncretic philosophy of Late Antiquity. For a historical overview, see Savage-Smith and Pormann, 13-15.

35. Wack argues that “the medical notion of lovesickness influenced the transformation of ‘courtly love’ from literary convention to social practice.” Wack traces this medical notion to Arabic sources, arguing that the close

poetry and consider the possibilities of influence and/or parallel development. Here I will analyze the development of the humoral causality of *'ishq* as a disease, which culminates in Ibn Sīna's theorization that heightens the severity of *'ishq* by authorizing bodily evacuation by means of forced vomiting (*istifrāgh*), a severe form of treatment.³⁶

Humoral theory, broadly speaking, relies on the principle of balance. To avoid excess, one should strive to regulate six external factors—the environment, activity and rest, sleep and wakefulness, nourishment, excretion and retention, and psychic events.³⁷ Drastic shifts in any of these factors may result in an imbalance of the body's four humors—phlegm, blood, yellow bile, and black bile—through what was gradually theorized as a unidirectional process of “cooking” or incineration: overheating caused phlegm to become blood, blood to become yellow bile, and yellow bile to become black bile.³⁸ Each of these humors was thought to carry their own properties: the cold and dry properties of black bile, for example, oppose the heat and moisture that all living beings need to survive. A build-up of black bile in the body served as the etiological source of many diseases such as leprosy, rabies, melancholia, and *'ishq*.³⁹

The fact that psychic events were amongst the factors that contributed to the body's overall balance led medieval Islamic medical writers, like their Greek forerunners, to speculation on

relationship between love and melancholia derives from Ibn al-Jazzār's text and from the greater significance of *'ishq* in Islamic culture. See Mary Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: The 'Viaticum' and its Commentaries*, xv and 34-38.

36. *The Canon of Medicine* became prominent only gradually, and it was through many later authors' glossing and condensing that it gained its prominence. For a nuanced take on gradual uptake of this work in Europe, the Middle East, and South Asia, see Emilie Savage-Smith, F. Klein-Franke, and Ming Zhu, “Tibb,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Second Edition, ed. P. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill Online) http://dx.doi.org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1216

37. Dols, 63.

38. Dols, 19.

39. Dols, 18. The severity of *'ishq* in the Islamic medical tradition and its association with loss of rationality leads me to this translation of “love-madness” for its manifestation instead of lovesickness.

connections between the mind and the body.⁴⁰ Moral philosophy had a bearing on medicine in general and on the treatment of *ishq* in particular. An early example of this connection can be seen in Rāzī's (d. 925) *On Spiritual Medicine (al-Ṭibb al-rūḥānī)*, which develops a moderately ascetic ideal of life based on the premise that all pleasures presuppose a prior pain.⁴¹ The discussion on pleasure comes to a head in a section that Rāzī titles "On *ishq* and familiarity (*al-ulfa*) and a few summary words on pleasure."⁴² This section offers a polemic against "the vileness of *ishq*," and Rāzī declares that he is responding to courtly authors who he describes as "the effeminate men (*khanithūn*), love-poets, dandies, the affluent, and men who are affected by lusts" and adds that "they are nearly never free from this affliction, especially if they frequently look to the stories of lovers and recitation of delicate love poetry and if they listen to sad songs and melodies."⁴³ Against these groups, Rāzī posits a rational masculinity that he locates in

40. Wack notes that Constantine follows the Gaelic tradition by localizing the passions in the brain rather than the heart. This began to change in the thirteenth century as medicine came further into contact with Aristotelianism. It is not fully clear to me yet as to why the Islamic tradition maintains the classification of *ishq* as a disease of the brain, despite an earlier uptake of Aristotelian thought that focused on the heart. See Wack, 38.

41. Known as Rhazes in the Latin West, Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 925) was a physician, philosopher, and alchemist most known for the compilation of his medical notes in *Kitāb Ḥāwī fī l-ṭibb (The Comprehensive Book of Medicine)* that was translated in 1279 as *Continens*, his magnum opus *Kitāb jāmi al-kabīr (Great Medical Compendium)* as well as for his work on smallpox and measles. See L.E. Goodman, "al-Rāzī," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, second edition, eds. P. Bearman et al. Consulted online on 15 December 2022 http://dx.doi.org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_6267

42.

في العشق والالفة وجملة الكلام في اللذة

Translations are my own, though I have occasionally referenced A.J. Arberry, *The Spiritual Physick of Rhazes* (London: Murray, 1950), 38-49. All Arabic text is from Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, *Ṭibb al-rūḥānī*, ed. by 'Abd al-Latīf Muḥammad Abd (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍah al-Miṣrīyah, 1978), 53.

43.

أعني العشق وخساسته

فأما الخنثون من الرجال والغزلون والفراغ والمترفون والمؤثرون للشهوات الذين لا يهتمهم سواها ولا يريدون من الدنيا إلا إصابتها... فلا يكادون يتخلصون من هذه البلية لا سيما إن أكثروا النظر في قصص العشاق ورواية الرقيق الغزل من الشعر وسماع الشجي من الألحان والغناء

"I mean *ishq* and its vileness." This statement serves as a way of shifting the treatise from its discussion of pleasure in general to *ishq* more specifically.

philosophers who are the ones characterized by the ideals of refinement (*ẓarf*) and etiquette (*adab*). These same ideals are the ones claimed by writers and poets of the Abbasid court, and Rāzī's deployment of them reclaims power by rearticulate the ideal.⁴⁴ Rāzī does not only emasculate these groups, but also dehumanizes anyone who could count as a lover (*āshiq*) by declaring "indeed, lovers trespass the limits of beasts in their lack of control of the soul."⁴⁵ The category of "lovers" is then further delineated as Rāzī notes that *ishq* is not in the habits of philosophers, but "it is the frequent and constant habit of the uncivilized Arabs, the Kurds, the uncouth, and the Nabateans," which is then followed by a declaration that the Greeks are the most refined people (*umma*) and that they have less by way of *ishq*.⁴⁶ Here we can see how hierarchizing discourse tracks onto

"But the effeminate men (*khanithūn*), love-poets, dandies, affluent, and men who are affected by lusts are those who do not give importance to anything except for pleasure and who do not want from the world anything but pleasure's attacks...they are nearly never free from this affliction, especially if they frequently look to the stories of lovers and recitation of delicate love poetry and if they listen to sad songs and melodies." The *khanithūn* are a particularly difficult group to track, and various historical uses imply translations ranging from effeminate men, hermaphrodite, male entertainer or prostitute, and/or crossdresser. This ambiguity, alongside the other groups that Rāzī lists, indicates that Rāzī intends to refer to anyone who could be considered to be not "properly" men. See Rāzī, *Ṭibb al-rūḥānī*, 56 and 53. On the *khanithūn*, see Ed., "Liwāṭ", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al. Consulted online on 10 December 2022 <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_4677>

44. Khan has located the prominence of the ideal of refinement (*ẓarf*) in a group she calls "genteel savants" (*ẓarīf*), or "elegant, fashionable cliques that took the famous ninth century love treatise Book of the Flower (*Kitāb al-Zahrā*) as a core manual of their subculture." Certainly, the historical verifiability of this claim is subject to debate, though the terminology around refinement is repeated in poetry and prose from the period. See Khan, *Bedouin and Abbāsīd Cultural Identities*, 14.

45.

إن العُشَّاق يجاوزون حدَّ البهائم في عدم ملكة النفس

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Rāzī, *Ṭibb al-rūḥānī*, 56.

46.

وهؤلاء هم الموسومون بالظرف والأدب... ونحن نجد هذه الأمور مع الفلاسفة فقط، ونرى العشق لا يعتادهم ويعتاداً كثيراً دائماً أجيال الأعراب والأكراد والأعلاج والأنباط. ونجد أيضاً من الأمر العام الكلي أنه ليست أمة من الأمم أرق فطنةً وأظهر حكمةً من اليونانيين، ونجد العشق في جملتهم أقل مما في سائر الأمم

Indeed (the philosophers) are those who are characterized by refinement (*ẓarf*) and etiquette (*adab*), and we find these affairs with the philosophers only, and we see *ishq* is not their habit, but it is the frequent and constant habit of the uncivilized Arabs (*ajlāf* can also mean skinned animal), the Kurds, the uncouth, and the Nabateans. And we also find it to be a universal fact that there is not a people (*umma*) from amongst the peoples that is more delicate in terms of intelligence and more refined in terms of wisdom (*ḥikma*) than the Greeks, and we see *ishq* in most of them less than we see in all of the rest of peoples. Rāzī, *Ṭibb al-rūḥānī*, 59-60.

these groups' perceived irrationality, which is affirmed by their proclivities towards 'ishq. Rāzī's moral philosophy recognizes a potency of 'ishq without offering a cure and instead foregrounds groups of people who are to be regarded as non-exemplary.

Later works put forward a more diagnostic approach. Ibn al-Jazzār's (d. 979) *Provisions for the Traveler and the Nourishment of the Settled (Kitāb zād al-musāfir wa qūt al-ḥādir)* places on display a medical approach that is pragmatic in orientation. Intended for the traveler without access to a physician, *Provisions for the Traveler* was translated into Latin, and subsequently provided medieval Europe a technical vocabulary for discussing the ills of love.⁴⁷ Ibn al-Jazzār defines 'ishq as "amongst the diseases that are engendered in the brain—it is excess of desire (*shawq*) due to contemplating and lust and thereafter the greatest of pains of the soul follows it, I mean, anxieties and sleeplessness."⁴⁸ Following a Galenic approach, Ibn al-Jazzār concretizes 'ishq by locating its effects in the brain and by differentiating it from desire (*shawq*). Ibn al-Jazzār goes on to clarify that 'ishq is that which overflows from love (*maḥabba*), that it is an excess of affection (*mawwada*), and that it is perhaps "an intense natural need to emit excess from the body."⁴⁹ Sexual intercourse appears as a cure, which was increasingly adopted by later Islamic

47. Mary Wack connects the rapid interest in the *Provisions for the Traveler* with both an interest in the Aristotelianized sciences of Islam that emphasized the materiality of the human body, and, subsequently, with the rise in literacy in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries with the emergence of universities and interest in a reform of religious experience towards the affective. See Wack, 32.

48.

والعشق من الأدوية التي تتولد في الدماغ وهو إفراط الشوق مع فكرة وشهوة ولذلك صار يتبعه أعظم أوجاع النفس أعني الفكر والسهر

Ibn al-Jazzār, *Zād Al-musāfir Wa-qūt Al-ḥādir*, edited by Muḥammad Suwaysī and Rāḍī al-Jāzī (Tunis: al-Dār al-'Arabīyah lil-Kitāb, 1986), 83.

49.

وقد قال بعض الفلاسفة اسم لما فضل عن المحبة وكما أن النصح إفراط المودة وربما كانت علة العشق شدة حاجة الطبيعة إلى اخراج الفضل عن البدن. وقد زعم روفس الحكيم أن الجماع نافع لمن تغلب عليه المرة السوداء والجنون ويرد عليه عقله ويحل شدة انهماك العاشق

physicians.⁵⁰ Moreover, Ibn al-Jazzār, unlike Rāzī, notes the humoral causation of black bile, which leads to an acknowledgement of *‘ishq*’s severity that causes the lover’s rationality to yield and that could eventually lead to the more severe mental disease of melancholia.⁵¹ Following ancient medicine, Ibn al-Jazzār recommends wine as a cure for the body and music for the soul.⁵² Although Ibn al-Jazzār agrees with Rāzī that the threat *‘ishq* poses to rationality is bad for bodily health, his diagnostic approach carries less of a sense of moral judgement.

Though Ibn al-Jazzār’s work hints at humoral causality, the diagnostic approach reached a new level of theorization with Ibn Sīnā’s *Canon of Medicine*. For the first time, *‘ishq* is not listed as sub-type of melancholia, but “a delusionary illness (*marad waswāsī*) similar to melancholia.”⁵³

And some of the philosophers have said that it is a name for what overflows from love (*maḥabba*) and however much there is guidance, it is the excess of affection (*mawadda*) and perhaps the disease of *‘ishq* is an intense natural need to emit excess from the body. And Rufus the wise maintained that the total usage is for one who at once is overcome with black bile and madness and his rationality (*‘aql*) yields to it and the lover (*al-‘āshiq*) dissolves in intense abandon. Ibn al-Jazzār, 83.

50. Kecia Ali has discussed how classical Islamic jurisprudence saw lawful sex as “good, healthy, and praiseworthy,” but that on the whole, legal scholars saw sex within the law as “not only permissible but recommended for males,” whereas female partners were presumed to acquiesce and be available for men’s needs and were presumed to be interchangeable. For a nuanced discussion that differentiates between classical dictates and modern practice, see Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics in Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur’an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006), 56-74.

51.

كذلك قال جالينوس إن قوى النفس تابعة لمزاج البدن فإن لم يعالج العاشق ويقابل بما يستعمل فكره ويطيب نفسه ويلهيها عن التماذي في الفكر لنلا تخرج إلى الحد المعروف بالماليخوليا

—

And therefore Galen said that the potency of the soul follows the disposition of the body, and if the lover had not been cured and confronted what he was applying his thoughts to and regained the health of his soul and distracted it from persistence in thinking then it would reach the known limit of melancholia. Ibn al-Jazzār, 84.

52.

وقد زعم روفس أن الشراب دواء قوي للمحزونين والخائفين والعاشقين... وقد زعم بعض الفلاسفة أن السماع كالروح والشراب كالبدن

—

And Rufus maintained that wine was a strong medicine for the depressed and the anxious and the lovers. And some of the philosophers maintained that listening to music is for the soul and wine is for the body. Ibn al-Jazzār, 84-85.

53.

هذا مرض وسواسي شبيه بالمالنخوليا

—

“This is a delusionary illness, which is similar to melancholia.” Mary Wack details how the association of love with melancholia in medieval Islamic medicine stems from Ishāq ibn ‘Imrān’s (d. 908) work, but she does not note that Ibn

This classification heightens not only the bodily effects of *ishq*, but also the extremity with which the physician sought to treat it. Ibn Sīnā details an elaborate version of the “pulse test”—a test that dates back to antiquity wherein a physician would attempt to learn the beloved’s identity through mentioning various names while taking the patient’s pulse—which he claims to have tried, and which facilitates, if necessary, the physician in uniting the patient with the beloved according to “the manner permitted by religion and law.”⁵⁴ This grants the physician power equivalent to a jurist, and it acknowledges sex within the law as one valid approach to a cure. Claiming to have seen this cure work in one case, Ibn Sīnā offers a comment that acknowledges “the subordination of the body to mental delusions.”⁵⁵ This affirms a general principle of humoral theory that psychic events are one of the six external factors that should be regulated to preserve good health, and it acknowledges *ishq* as an external force, which releases it from moral judgement.

Sīnā no longer relegated *ishq* to being a sub-type. See Wack, 35 and Ibn Sīnā, *al-Qānūn fī t-ṭibb* vol. 2 (Būlāq, 1877), 71. I have also referenced Dols’ translation in *Majnūn*, 484-485.

54.

فإن معرفة معشوقه أحد سبل علاجه. والحيلة في ذلك أن يذكر أسماء كثيرة تعاد مراراً، ويكون اليد على نبضه، فإذا اختلف بذلك اختلافاً عظيماً، وصار شبه المنقطع، ثم عاود وجرّبت ذلك مراراً، علمت أنه اسم المعشوق، ثم يذكر كذلك السكك والمسكن والحرف والصناعات والنسب والبلدان، وتضيف كلاً منها إلى اسم المعشوق ويحفظ النبض حتى إذا كان يتغير عند ذكر شيء واحد مراراً، جمعت من ذلك خواص معشوقه من الاسم والحلية والحرفة وعرفته، فإنا قد جربنا هذا واستخرجنا به ما كان في الوقوف عليه منفعة، ثم إن لم تجد علاجاً إلا تدبير الجمع بينهما على وجه يحلّه الدين والشريعة فعلت

Knowledge of the beloved is one of the ways to cure (a lover). And the trick to this is to mention many names repeatedly while a hand is on his pulse and if it differs greatly or seems to stop, then repeat. I have tested this many times and I have learned the name of the beloved. Then recall in the same way lanes, residences, professions, crafts, genealogies, and countries and combine each of them with the name of the beloved while checking the pulse. When it changes at the mention of one thing repeatedly, you will gather from this all the particularities of the beloved—the name, the appearance, and the occupation. We have tested this and we have brought forth from it what was useful. Then if you did not find a cure except to arrange their uniting then do it according to the manner permitted by religion and law. Ibn Sīnā, *al-Qānūn fī t-ṭibb* vol. 2, 72.

55.

لما أحس بوصول من معشوقه بعد مطل معاودة في أقصر مدة قضينا به العجب، واستدلنا على طاعة الطبيعة للأوهام النفسانية

When he felt union with his beloved, there was recovery in the shortest period. We found this astonishing, and were thus informed about the obedience of the physical disposition to the psychic delusions (*awhām al-naḥsāniya*).

Other treatments for Ibn Sīnā include bodily evacuation by means of forced vomiting, entertainment, and various forms of sex and seduction from other people who replace the desire for the beloved. Evacuation is reserved for the most severe of patients in whom the physician can recognize the burning of bodily humors, which would lead to a build-up of black bile.⁵⁶ Other cures are for less severe patients who are still “amongst the rational” and who might realize the psychic event is nothing but “a delusion (*waswasa*) and a kind of madness (*junūn*).”⁵⁷ Loss of rationality remains the breaking point. Ibn Sīnā then specifies other forms of sex and seduction that can be curative as he suggests that old women or effeminate men may parody the beloved.⁵⁸ This suggestion affirms that for Ibn Sīnā, as with the ancient Greek physicians that preceded him, a lover was generally a man, and it mirrors what he considers in the *Risāla fī l-‘ishq* (*Treatise on ‘ishq*) to be lawful and desirable forms of touching and kissing between men.⁵⁹ Moreover, Ibn Sīnā

56.

تتأمل هل أدت حاله إلى احتراق خلط بالعلامات التي تعرفها، فتستفرغ

—
You should contemplate whether his condition can be attributed to the burning of a humor by the signs that you can recognize, and if so, you should evacuate. Ibn Sīnā, *al-Qānūn fī ṭ-ṭibb* vol. 2, 72.

57.

وإن كان العاشق من العقلاء، فإن النصيحة والعظة له والاستهزاء به وتعنيفه والتصوير لديه أن ما به إنما هو وسوسة وضرب من الجنون

—
If a lover is amongst the rational, then he can be given advice and warning, as well as be mocked and treated harshly for it. For the image that he has is nothing but a delusion and a kind of madness.” Perhaps this explanation of an image in the mind relates to the general power that Ibn Sīnā gives to the imaginative faculty. Ibn Sīnā, *al-Qānūn fī ṭ-ṭibb* vol. 2, 72.

58.

ومما ينفع في ذلك أن تحاكي هؤلاء العجائز صورة المعشوق بتشبيهات قبيحة، ويمثلن أعضاء وجهه بمحاكيات مبيضة، ويُدمنن ذلك ويُسهبن فيه، فإن هذا عملهن، وهن أحذق فيه من الرجال إلا المخنثين، فإن المخنثين لهم أيضاً فيه صنعة لا تقصر عن صنعة العجائز

—
Among useful things is for these old women to imitate the appearance of the beloved with ugly imitations and to bear parts of their bodies in detestable parody. They continue as such and elaborate on the beloved because it is their job, and they are more skillful in this than men except for effeminate men (*al-mukhannathīn*) and the effeminate men are also skillful in this in no way inferior to the skill of the old women. Ibn Sīnā, *al-Qānūn fī ṭ-ṭibb* vol. 2, 72.

59. There Ibn Sīnā suggests that sexual union is only rational if it is for the purpose of reproduction, but that hugging and kissing are natural byproducts of the *‘ishq* of a man of refinement. See Emil Frackenheim, “A Treatise

also suggests that buying slave girls (*jawārī*) and increasing sexual activity with them is another way of curing *‘ishq*.⁶⁰ As such, sex within the law was one way amongst many for curing the severity of *‘ishq*, a severity that was fully conceptualized to be the result of humoral imbalance in Ibn Sīnā’s work.

These thresholds of diagnosis help contextualize Majnun as a literary figure who loses rationality but who does, occasionally, regain it with cures such as food, entertainment, and mention of the beloved’s name. Several times various members of Majnun’s family suggest that he marry another woman, which resembles the curative approach of sex within the law but which Majnun rejects due to a kind of ascetic devotion that does not appear to be dominant amongst premodern Islamic traditions.⁶¹ Majnun’s refusal to be cured as well as his status as “a Bedouin” gives way to a view of his animality that dehumanizes in ways similar to Rāzī’s discussion of groups affected by *‘ishq*. Yet Majnun’s animality also resonates with pre-Islamic poetry, which provides a very different way of understanding human-animal relations and to which I now turn.

on Love by Ibn Sina,” in *Medieval Studies* 7,1 (1945): 222 and Ibn Sīnā, *Risālah fī al-‘ishq*, ed. by Ḥusayn Ṣiddīq and Rāwiyah Jāmūs (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 2005), 74.

60.

اشتراء الجوارى، والإكثار من مجامعتهم، والاستجداد منهم، والطرب معهم

—
(Among the recommended activities are also) the buying of slave-girls (*jawārī*), and the increase of sexual intercourse with them, acquiring new ones and taking pleasure in them. Kecia Ali has analyzed the relationship between enslavement and femaleness in early Islamic jurisprudence and has shown how slave concubinage helped define marriage by way of comparison and contrast. Normatively speaking, men were allowed four wives but an unlimited number of slave concubines. For a longer discussion, see Kecia Ali, *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 8 and 164-87.

61. I draw from Alexander Knysh’s historical periodization provides a helpful framework for considering Sufism’s shifting emphases: early pietistic movements after the arrival of Islam, the consolidation of apologetic and hagiographic literature about sufis and sufism in the tenth and eleventh centuries, the growth of literary and philosophical works that speculate about sufism in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and the rise of Sufi orders (*ṭarīqat*) thereafter. While ascetic devotion was prominent amongst the earliest phase, it is but one component of later phases and Sufis such as Ahmad-e Jām (d. 1141) or Abū Sa‘īd Abū l-Khayr (d. 1049) engage precisely in worldly and carnal feats to prove their own spiritual manliness. For further differences between asceticism and Sufism see Christopher Melchert, *Before Sufism: Early Islamic Renunciant Piety* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 177-195 and Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 5-8.

III. Animality in pre-Islamic poetry

Non-human animals are abundant in pre-Islamic poetry. Descriptions of animals appear in the *nasīb* (love-prelude) and the *raḥīl* (journey) of the *mu‘allaqāt* (hanging odes), and different animals offer divergent windows into the ritual functions and lifestyles of this society.⁶² Although there are open questions on pre-Islamic poetry’s historicity, its mythic significance allows for a broad-based understanding of how poetic discourse imagined non-human animals and human-animal relations prior to and during the emergence of Majnun as a literary figure.⁶³ The most significant animal is the camel, which is typically sacrificed for the sake of the tribe at the end of the poem to mark the symbolic importance of generosity.⁶⁴ Many *mu‘allaqāt* contain lengthy descriptions of other animals, often used in similes as intricate ways of describing the camel, such as Labīd ibn Rabī‘a’s descriptions of the onager and oryx.⁶⁵ Overall, these depictions show a deep familiarity with animals from the standpoint of external description and the act of sacrifice serves the function of affirming the poet’s power within the tribe. Suzanne Stetkevych, Stefan Sperl, James Montgomery, and others have explored the ways in which the *mu‘allaqāt* poet’s power

62. The *mu‘allaqāt* (suspended odes) are traditionally regarded to have been winning poems of an annual poetic contest held near Mecca, subsequently embroidered on cloth, and suspended from the Ka‘ba. Historiographical issues continue for poetry retroactively dated to the Umayyad period (661-750) due to a scarcity of texts. On issues of attribution of the *mu‘allaqāt*, see Abdulla el-Tayib, “Pre-Islamic Poetry,” in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 111-113 and Gregor Schoeler, *The Oral and the Written in Early Islam*, trans. Uwe Vagelpohl and ed. James Montgomery (London: Routledge, 2006). On the fragmented reception of Umayyad texts, see Khan, *Bedouin and ‘Abbāsīd Cultural Identities*, 34.

63. I bracket historiographical questions and follow Suzanne Stetkevych’s approach to thinking of individual poets as “personae constructs of a mythic, folkloric, and archetypal nature.” Suzanne Stetkevych highlights how the genre of Arabic literary biography combined anecdotes (*akhbār*) and genealogies (*ansāb*) along with excerpts of poetry to construct these personae. Though debates about authenticity continue to varying degrees, Stetkevych notes how attributions often rely more on the popular and literary imagination as evidenced by the genre of literary biographies. See Suzanne Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 124-131.

64. Stetkevych details how Labīd, for example, initiates the traditional slaughter of a camel that is then hospitably shared with the kinship group and its dependents, noting how the boast in Labīd’s poem switches from the first-person singer to the plural as the praise of self slips into praise of the kinship group. See Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak*, 39-40.

65. *Ibid.*, 253-255.

hinges upon embodying a communalist ethos of *murū'a* (manliness)—a term akin to the Latin *virtus* as it combines manliness with the ability to provide for a kinship group, which is often associated with the final boast (*fakhr*) of an ode (*qaṣīda*).⁶⁶ Stetkevych has argued that this boast represents the poet's completion of a rite of passage, pointing to the ode of Labīd as paradigmatic due to its declaration of the collective power of the tribe and of celebrating this power in drinking and feasting.⁶⁷ This boast typically coincides with the camel sacrifice, and as such an animal is used as the means through which human kinship is affirmed and re-established.

In contrast to the *mu'allaqāt*, poems of the *ṣa'ālīk* (plural, singular *ṣu'lūk*) or outcast/brigand poets describe a poet who leaves behind what he considers to be unjust practices of his kinship group and goes to live in the wilderness. The *ṣu'lūk*'s boast typically praises his own self-sufficiency or the self-sufficiency of other *ṣa'ālīk* like him.⁶⁸ In these poems, animals are likewise central, but instead of serving the tribe as with the camel sacrifice, the poet sees himself as one among them. Animals as alternative kin is a theme prominent in one of the most famous poems of the *ṣa'ālīk*, Shanfarā's *Lāmiyya* (Poem rhyming in the letter "lām"). According to later quasi-biographical accounts, Shanfarā becomes estranged from his natal tribe due to either their keeping him as a slave or their killing of his father, and this causes him to seek a life outside human

66. Stefan Sperl highlights how an "anthropocentric worldview internalized by the tribal ethos of *murū'a* (manliness) is countered by the Qur'an's own ethos of hospitality, which rearticulates the actions of the generous hero (*karīm*) as winning reward in the afterlife," while Stetkevych describes the articulation of *murū'a* as built into the bipartite or tripartite structure of the *qaṣīda* itself, which ritually allows the speaker to undertake a kind of rite of passage as he sacrifices lost love for the greater good of the collective. See Stefan Sperl, "The Qur'an and Arabic Poetry," in *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 402-403; Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak*, 4-8; James E. Montgomery, "Dichotomy in Jāhīlī Poetry." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 17 (1986): 1-20.

67. Angelika Neuwirth has discussed how banquet scenes in Qur'anic paradise share images with the boast of *mu'allaqāt* poetry, arguing that the deployment of tropological similarities served to promote the new eschatological theology of the Qur'an to a milieu accustomed to thinking in terms of material rewards. Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and the Making of a Community*, 76-96.

68. Stetkevych maintains that *ṣu'lūk* is an intensified adjectival form of the verb *ṣalaka* (to travel, to go along a road) and cites Lane's definitions of "poor, needy, having no property, no reliance on anything; a thief, robber." See *Ibid.*, 87.

society as well as his own, eventual, blood-vengeance.⁶⁹ The *Lāmiyya* opens by declaring these inversions of kinship affiliation:

<p>Raise the chests of your camels, brothers from my mother, and go. I incline towards a tribe other than you.⁷⁰</p>	<p>أَقِيمُوا بَنِي أُمِّي صُدُورَ مَطِيئِكُمْ فَأَنِي إِلَى قَوْمٍ سِوَاكُمْ لَأَمِيلُ</p>
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The camels symbolize the strength of Shanfarā’s tribe, whose natal intimacy with him is carefully denoted when he calls them “brothers from my mother” (*banī ummī*) and he commands them to depart. This departure reverses the expectations that Shanfarā will either depart with them only to return and prepare the camel sacrifice. Instead, the poet declares that he inclines towards a different tribe and ambiguity of who this tribe is lingers.⁷¹ This ambiguity is, however, resolved a few lines later as Shanfarā names his alternative kin:

<p>I have other kin than you—the swift wolf, spotted leopard, and long-maned hyena. They are the family who do not spread an entrusted secret, and they do not abandon a criminal because of his crimes.⁷²</p>	<p>وَلِي دُونَكُمْ أَهْلُونَ سَيِّدٍ عَمَلَسٌ وَأَرْقَطُ زُهْلُولٌ وَعَرْفَاءُ جَيْئَلُ هُمُ الْأَهْلُ لَا مُسْتَوْدِعَ السِّرِّ ذَائِعُ لَدَيْهِمْ وَلَا الْجَانِي بِمَا جَرَّ يُخْدَلُ</p>
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Not only are these alternative kin animals, but also they are predatory animals, and Shanfarā’s claiming of them as his family or kin (*ahl*) marks him as a kind of predatory creature himself.⁷³

69. Ibid, 125-129.

70. I have translated these passages to bring forth parts that follow in the commentary. They are, however, heavily reliant upon the translations of Michael Sells and Suzanne Stetkevych. For the Arabic text see *Dīwan al-Shanfarā*, ed. Emil Ya‘qūb (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 2015), 58, line 1. See also Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak*, 143-150 and Michael Sells, *Desert Tracings: Six Classic Arabian Odes by ‘Alqama, Shānfara, Labīd, ‘Antara, Al-A’sha, and Dhu al-Rūmma* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 24-31.

71. Stetkevych notes the rhetorical emphasis of *ṭibāq* (antithesis) that helps with understanding the significance of “inclination” (*amyalū*) as juxtaposed with the command “raise” (*aqīmū*)—a verb that also shares the root of q/w/m with the word for tribe (*qawm*) and for the idea of finding the right path (*mustaqīm*), which in effect is the opposite of the act of inclining. See Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak*, 150.

72. Shanfarā, *Dīwan*, 59, lines 5-6.

73. These animals are only referred to by epithets (*‘amallas* - swift, also black and white denoting the wolf; *arqaṭ* - black and white spotted, typically denoting a snake or leopard; *‘arfā’* - long-maned, referencing a hyena). Stetkevych notes that this substitution suggests ambiguity, and I would add that it likewise adds a sense of the animals as those beings which are typically seen in the wild, in contrast to Shanfarā’s declared intimacy with them. See Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak*, 151.

Shanfarā is at home with them because their society is more accepting of him as an alleged criminal than human society.⁷⁴ The poem continues to enforce this idea of non-humans as alternative kin, with Shanfarā even suggesting that his sword and bow are his companions (*aṣḥab*).⁷⁵ Instead of claiming antisocial behavior alone, Shanfarā develops an idea of community that he finds more suitable than his natal kinship group that extends beyond the human realm.

These kinship inversions subvert not only the primacy of his natal tribe, but also the boundaries of wildness and tameness that might separate the non-human animal world from human society. Describing hunger in the outskirts of human society, Shanfarā’s poem launches into an extended simile that compares this hunger to a wolf’s lifestyle:

<p>I go out each morning with little sustenance like a thin wolf led from wasteland to wasteland, dust colored.</p>	<p>وَأَعْدُو عَلَى الْقَوْتِ الزَّهِيدِ كَمَا غَدَا أَزَلُّ تَهَادَاهُ التَّنَائِفَ أَطْحَلُ</p>
<p>The hungry wolf meets the wind hurriedly swooping down the ravines, bounding.</p>	<p>غَدَا طَاوِيًا يُعَارِضُ الرِّيحَ هَافِيًا يُخَوْتُ بِأَذْنَابِ الشَّعَابِ وَيَعْسِلُ</p>
<p>When his prey escapes from his pursuit, he calls out, and his companions, emaciated, respond.⁷⁶</p>	<p>فَلَمَّا لَوَاهُ الْقَوْتُ مِنْ حَيْثُ أَمَّهُ دَعَا فَأَجَابَتْهُ تَطَائِرُ نُحْلُ</p>

Hunger is a need that is shared by both the speaker and the wolf. The hungry wolf’s movements give way to its intrinsic sociability as he finds wolf companions when his prey escapes. Although the wolf is portrayed as a hungry predator, its intrinsic sociability as well as the shared feeling of

74. Later in the poem, Shanfarā refers to himself as “one hunted for crimes (*tarīd jināyāt*),” an epithet that flows from the fact that he claims murder in this poem as well as from the general lore about the incriminating reasons for his being an outcast. See Shanfarā, *Dīwan*, 68 line 46.

75.

ثَلَاثَةٌ أَصْحَابِ فُؤَادٍ مُسَبِّعٍ
وَأَبْيَضُ إِصْلِيْبٌ وَصَفْرَاءُ عَيْطَلُ

(I have) three companions—a brave heart
A white sword, and a yellow bow.

Shanfarā, *Dīwan*, 60, line 11.

76. Shanfarā, *Dīwan*, 63-64, 27-29.

hunger between the wolf and the speaker has the effect of blunting any sense that the wolf is a fearful, wild creature. The simile continues by playing with a sense of the wolf being both tame and wild:

<p>Gaping mouths as if their jaws were split sticks, grim and bold.</p> <p>He howls and they howl on the open plain as if they were women wailing from a high place.</p> <p>He hesitates and they hesitate, he takes comfort in them and they in him, together destitute.</p> <p>He complains and they complain, then he turns back and they turn back. For patience, when complaints are useless, is best.⁷⁷</p>	<p>مُهَرَّتَهُ فُؤَةً كَأَنَّ شُدُوقَهَا شَفُوقُ الْعِصِيِّ كَالْحَاتِّ وَبُسْلُ فَضَجَّ وَضَجَّتْ بِالْبِرَاحِ كَأَنَّهَا وَإِيَّاهُ نُوحٌ فَوْقَ عَلِيَاءٍ تَكَلُّ وَأَغْضَى وَأَغْضَتْ وَأَتَسَى وَأَتَسَتْ بِهِ مَرَامِيلُ عَزَّاهَا وَعَزَّتْهُ مَرْمِلُ شَكَا وَشَكَتْ ثُمَّ أَرَعَوَى بَعْدُ وَأَرَعَوَتْ وَاللَّصْبِرُ إِنْ لَمْ يَنْفَعِ الشُّكُّوْ أَجْمَلُ</p>
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The gaping jaws symbolize the inescapable violence to the wolf’s predatory nature, yet the last line notes that the wolf is also a model of patience. This reversal comes after the intrinsic sociability of wolves is emphasized through pairings of verbs (he howls and they howl, he hesitates and they hesitate, etc.), and the simile ends with a holistic sense of the wolf as paradoxically both patient and hungry, both tame and wild, just like the poet. The blurring of any human/animal distinction is further evidenced by the many times the poem uses the verb *ālafu* (to be accustomed) to describe how the poet becomes accustomed to things usually viewed as animal-like—sleeping on the barren earth, remaining thirsty, etc.⁷⁸ The play between what is wild and what is domestic behavior underlies the entire poem as a dialectic that simultaneously gives evidence to the animality of the human. Yet unlike the wolf who howls with its mates in ways comparable to wailing women—an

77. Shanfarā, *Dīwan*, 65, lines 32-35.

78. The verb appears when Shanfarā claims to not be startled like an old man (line 19), to be used to little to drink (line 24), and to a hard bed (line 42), and to anxieties (*humūm*) that continuously plague him (line 48). See Shanfarā, *Dīwan*, 62-68.

image that again blurs any human/animal boundaries by recalling women’s ritual lament (*rithā*)—the lone speaker never enjoys companionship amidst his trials.⁷⁹

The shared sentiment between the speaker and the wolf is, however, broken by the tribe itself who asserts a difference between human and non-human animals. After the poet brags of his night-raid on the tribe that results in blood vengeance (“I widowed women and orphaned children”), there is an imagined conversation between two groups about what has happened.⁸⁰

Each group makes guesses on the unidentifiable sound of the night-raid:

<p>They said: our dogs were howling in the night. We said: was it a wolf prowling or a hyena?</p> <p>(They said) it was nothing but a snarl then they went to sleep. We said: was it a startled sandgrouse or hawk?</p> <p>(They said) if it was one of the jinn, what an ominous night visitor, and if it were a human—no, a man does not act like that.⁸¹</p>	<p>فَقَالُوا لَقَدْ هَرَّتْ بِلَيْلٍ كِلَابُنَا فَقُلْنَا أَذِئْبٌ عَسَّ أَمْ عَسَّ فُرْعُلُ</p> <p>فَلَمْ يَكُ إِلَّا نَبَأَةٌ تُمْ هَوَمْتُ فَقُلْنَا قَطَاةٌ رِبْعٌ أَمْ رِبْعٌ أُجْدَلُ</p> <p>فَإِنْ يَكُ مِنْ جِنِّ لِأَبْرَحٍ طَارِقاً وَإِنْ يَكُ إِنْساً مَا كَهَا الْإِنْسُ تَفْعَلُ</p>
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The various animals named are the typical ones that frequent pre-Islamic poetry, and the second group’s mention of the wolf establishes it as a wild creature to be juxtaposed with the human. The last line shows how the category of the human is socially constructed by the tribe who insist that no human could commit such an act of violence.⁸² I will return to this association of animality

79. My thanks to Paul Losensky for drawing my attention to this image. For more on poetry of ritual lament, see Alan Jones, *Early Arabic Poetry vol. 1* (Reading: Ithaca Press Reading for the Board of the Faculty of Oriental Studies, Oxford University, 1992) and Tahera Qutbuddin, “Women Poets,” in *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia vol. 1*, ed. by Josef W. Meri (New York: Routledge, 2016), 865-867.

80.

فَأَيَّمْتُ نِسْوَاناً وَأَيَّمْتُ أَلْدَةَ

Shanfarā, *Dīwan*, 70, line 57.

81. Shanfarā, *Dīwan*, 70-71, lines 59-61.

82. As a result, Shanfarā is marked as an outsider in ways that bear eerie resemblance to Bénédicte Boissoron’s discussion of race and animality in modern American and French contexts—his blackness, though unacknowledged in the poem, reinforces a view of his violence that simultaneously marks him as animalistic. “Shanfarā” means “he who has large lips,” and various anecdotes suggest that he was either dark skinned, of a less reputable lineage, or both. Boissoron’s question of “to what extent, therefore, is radicalization and animalization atavistically ingrained in our collective memory?” seems to resonate far beyond her context of study, and the community’s dehumanization of Shanfarā occurs alongside a view of his actions as feral, pointing to what Bénédicte Boissoron locates as “the

with violence when considering Majnun’s animality as concomitant with his being viewed as a “Bedouin” other, here simply marking that there are effects to consider when the human/animal boundary blurs beyond the positing of animals as alternative kin.

I want to briefly consider a poem from one other *ṣu ‘lūk*, Ta’abbaṭa Sharran, which speaks further to the idea of animals as alternative kin by addressing the question of predator-prey relations between humans and non-human animals during the hunt. Hunting was a typical courtly activity, and during the Abbasid period a separate genre of poetry known as *ṭardiyyāt* (hunting poems) flourished.⁸³ While *ṭardiyyāt* poems reflect a desire for mastery over the animal world, Ta’abbaṭa Sharran’s poem, like Shanfarā’s *Lāmiyya*, reflects the idea of living peacefully among wild animals. The *Book of Songs* quotes this poem after an anecdote that describes how Ta’abbaṭa Sharran proposed to marry a woman only to be rejected by one of her kinsmen, which leads to a life in the wilderness and which bears notable resemblance to Majnun’s story.⁸⁴ The poet then describes this lifestyle in the third person:

<p>He spends nights in the beasts’ habitation places until they are accustomed to him, and at morning he does not prevent them from pasturing.</p> <p>They saw a young man who did not care to hunt beasts. Even if they greeted a human, they greeted him all together.⁸⁵</p>	<p>يَبِيتُ بِمَعْنَى الْوَحْشِ حَتَّى الْفَتْنَةُ وَيُصْبِحُ لَا يَحْمِي لَهَا الدَّهْرَ مَرْتَعًا رَأَيْنَ فَنَى لَا صَيْدٌ وَحْشٍ يُهْمُهُ فَلَوْ صَافَحَتْ إِنْسًا لَصَافَحَتْهُ مَعًا</p>
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intersectional fantasies of racialization and animalization.” See A. Arazi, “al-Shanfarā,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam* Second Edition, ed. P. Bearman et al. Accessed online on 16 November 2022 <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1035>, and Bénédicte Boissoron, *Afro-Dog: Blackness and the Animal Question* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), lx and xxvii.

83. This development was a part of poetic developments of the *qiṭ‘a* (fragmentary poem) of the Abbasid period, and Abū Nuwās (d. 814) was the first poet to have a separate *ṭardiyya* section of his collection of poems. For an overview of the genre, see Jaroslav Stetkevych, *The Hunt in Arabic Poetry: From Heroic to Lyric to Metapoetic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), 91-225.

84. On the marriage story, see Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak*, 90.

85. Arabic text from *ibid*, 295.

Instead of naming individual animals, Ta'abbata Sharran merely mentions his companions as “beasts (*al-wahsh*),” while simultaneously undoing any sense of their alterity or wildness by claiming that they could become accustomed to a human (*ālafna-hu*, again from the verb *ālafu*, signaling the beasts’ own capacities of domestication).⁸⁶ The fact that he does not hunt them facilitates their friendly exchange, and yet the poet later describes his ability to “terrify a group of gazelles.”⁸⁷ As I will discuss in the sections that follow, this is strikingly different from Majnun’s relationships with gazelles, and Ta'abbata Sharran’s animality, like Shanfarā’s, appears to be marked by the beastly in ways that affirm a specifically threatening posture. Indeed, the meaning of Ta'abbata Sharran’s name—a nickname meaning “he who carried evil under his arm,” which is attributed in some anecdotes to his bringing a ram to his kin that becomes a demonic *ghūl*—underscores how he is particularly marked by the demonic.⁸⁸ Majnun’s nickname is more ambiguous as madness retained a sense of being associated with prophecy, and the *jinn* appear in the Qur’an and other sources as both good and evil unlike the *ghūl*.⁸⁹ This brief sketch of animals and animality in pre-Islamic poetry provides a backdrop for approaching the setting of the earliest

86. *Wahsh* can also mean deserted places, further contributing to a contrast between these two words even as its usage here and elsewhere in the Arabic material typically refers to wild animals.

87.

أَدْعُرُ السَّرْبَ أَجْمَعًا

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It seems that *sirb* could also refer to other animals in flocks, most likely still domesticated. This contrast between beastly and domesticated is likewise brought forth at the end of Shanfarā’s *Lāmiyyah*, where the poet likens himself to a buck surrounded by she-goats. See Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak*, 91 and 295.

88. The *ghūl* in the *qaṣīda* is typically a female subspecies of *jinn* that strikes fear in the one who encounters her through her shapeshifting abilities. On the nickname, see Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak*, 93-94. On the *ghūl*, see Michael Sells, “Guises of the Ghūl: Dissembling Simile and Semantic Overflow in the Classical Arabic *Nasīb*,” in *Reorientations: Arabic and Persian Poetry*, ed. Suzanne Stetkevych (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 139-140.

89. In the Qur’an, the *jinn* are thought to be created from “smokeless fire,” (Q 55: 14)—as opposed to humans who are created from clay and angels from light—and they are capable of salvation, while also being associated with Iblīs (Satan) (Q 18:48). See D.B. MacDonald, H. Massé, P. N. Boratav, K.A. Nizami, and P. Voorhoeve, “*Djinn*,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al. Accessed online on 1 December 2022 <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0191>

sources on Majnun’s life, sources which depict more and more complex ways of understanding human-animal relations that speak back to issues in human society.

IV. Early sources on Majnun’s Life

The earliest sources on Majnun’s life offer an array of depictions of human-animal relations, which stems from varying degrees of fictionality that can be detected through their undermining of inherited material. Despite their differences, each of the sources fit under the broad genre of *adab*—a term that many scholars gloss as ‘*paideia*’ or ‘educational literature’ instead of merely ‘literature’ to emphasize an intertwined relationship between aesthetic appreciation and embodied behavior that is encoded through reading such texts.⁹⁰ While Ibn Qutayba’s *Book of Poetry and Poets* and the *Dīwan* present the story through anecdotes from various chains of transmission (*isnāds*), Iṣfahānī’s *Book of Songs* directly undermines the *isnād* method. For those unfamiliar with how an *isnād* works, here is an example from the *Book of Songs*:

<p>Aḥmad ibn ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn ‘Ammār informed me; he said, ‘Aḥmad ibn Sulaymān ibn Abī Sheikh related to me on the authority of his father on the authority of Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥakam on the authority of ‘Awāna who said, [anecdote follows].’⁹¹</p>	<p>أخبرني أحمد بن عبيد الله بن عمار قال حدثني أحمد بن سليمان بن أبي شيخ عن أبيه عن محمد بن الحكم عن عوانة قال...</p>
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90. Both Ibn Qutayba and Iṣfahānī’s works follow the methodology of Islamic biographical literature (*tabaqāt*) for literary figures. Ibn Qutayba’s work is a chronologically arranged poetic anthology that covers over two hundred poets, from the pre-Islamic period through the ninth century, while Iṣfahānī’s is a massive collection of Arabic music and culture from the pre-Islamic period to the end of the ninth century. Originally intended to record Hārūn al-Rashīd’s hundred most celebrated songs, the work far exceeds its conception through the variegated *akhbār* that provide historical and biographical information on the song-writers and poets. Biographical literature was one genre that fell under the broader genre of *adab*, which also included things like poetry, prose, historiography, geography, and some encyclopedias. Moreover *adab*’s polysemy simultaneously gives evidence to the embodied subject-forming processes intertwined with reading a corpus of texts. For more on Ibn Qutayba, see Joseph E. Lowry, “Ibn Qutayba,” in *Dictionary of Literary Biography Volume 311: Arabic Literary Culture*, ed. Michael Cooperson, Shawkat M. Toorawa and Roger Allen (Detroit: Gale Research Inc, 2005), 173; On Iṣfahānī see Hilary Kilpatrick, *Making the Great Book of Songs: Compilation and the Author’s Craft in Abū L-Faraj Al-Isḥāhānī’s Kitāb al-Aghānī* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 23; on *adab*, see Hoda El Shakry, *The Literary Qur’ān: Narrative Ethics in the Maghreb*, 17-19 and introduction.

91. Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī* vol. 2 (Cairo: al-Mu’assasah al-Misrīyah al-‘Āmmah lil-Ta’līf wa-al-Tarjamah wa-al-Ṭibā’ah wa-al-Nashr, 1963), 9.

What is significant for my purposes is not who these people are but the extendibility of the list into more and more transmitters. Additionally, what or who gets counted as an authority varies widely. Even in this relatively sound *isnād*, one authoritative name is simply ‘his father,’ whereas in other *isnāds* the passive verb ‘it was said (*qīla*)’ circumvents the question of verifiable authority entirely. Rather than characterizing this method as lacking veracity, I suggest that the deployment of the *isnād* in these works conceptually offers an alternative to the modern dichotomy between history and fiction by drawing attention to gradients of mediation in narrative prose. Beatrice Gruendler, Hilary Kilpatrick, and other scholars of classical Arabic literature have pointed to the playful use of the *isnād* in texts that propose infeasible relationships between transmitters or that convey strikingly different information.⁹² Gruendler has shown how anecdotes (*akhbār*) of *adab* works can be understood as “skillful dramaturgy” of a “*literized* social context.”⁹³ This understanding of the anecdote is important for my purposes because it allows for an approach that both acknowledges the value of narrative bits that surround the poetry, and recognizes the fact that they contain information beyond fact. Though I analyze poetry attributed to Majnun in these sources, the majority of this chapter aims to understand these anecdotal depictions of Majnun so as to approach the social construction of his animality.

92. Kirsten Beck has provided an overview of this scholarship and has argued that this playful use of the *isnād* calls attention to how knowledge is produced. This usage differs from the deployment of the *isnād* in other genres such as *ḥadīth* (sayings of the prophet Muhammad) criticism, a genre whose legitimizing practices include detailed biographies of the transmitters. I build on current approaches to the literary *isnād* that see it as a technique that is self-consciously manipulated. In other words, I am suggesting that the literary *isnād* as well as the deliberate undermining of transmitted material provide ways of locating degrees of distance from verifiability in premodern *adab*. See Kirsten Beck, “Iṣfahānī’s Invitation to Madness: Introduction to the Majnūn Laylā Story,” in *Journal of Arabic Literature* 49, 4 (2018): 332-333.

93. Gruendler also describes how *akhbār* play with and condense time and index orality to establish an overall scene that adds to the poetry itself by directing it towards edifying and/or entertaining purposes. See Beatrice Gruendler, “Verse and Taxes: The Function of Poetry in Selected Literary Akhbār of the Third/Ninth Century,” in *On Fiction and Adab in Medieval Arabic Literature*, ed. Philip Kennedy (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005), 90-96.

Ibn Qutayba's entry in the *Book of Poetry and Poets* is the earliest account of anecdotes contextualizing poetry attributed to Majnun. This work uses the methodology of Islamic biographical literature (*ṭabaqāt*) for literary figures and generally aims to consolidate its source material and to provide a coherent vision of an Islamic past. Unlike the entries of most of the other poets that merely situate the various poetic citations, the entry on Majnun presents a unified narrative—presenting us with most of the main plot points of later versions including the lovers-to-be meeting as children, Majnun's going mad when Layla's family blocks their union, the attempt to win her in battle with the help of local tax collector Nawfal b. Musāhiq, an encounter with Layla, Majnun's father's attempt to "cure" Majnun of his love by taking him to the Ka'ba, and Majnun's eventual, permanent relocation to the desert and his death.⁹⁴ The entry begins with two alternatives for the poet's lineage from anonymous *isnāds*, signaling both a desire to locate a historical person and uncertainty, as the entry appeals to the passive verb "it is said (*yuqāl*)."⁹⁵ Though not directly undermining the *isnād*, even this earliest source implicitly acknowledges uncertainty as to whether Majnun can be identified with any historical person by citing multiple lineages.⁹⁵ Quickly Majnun's nickname becomes the focal point "because of the dwindling of his rationality due to the severity of his passion (*li-dhahābi 'aqli-hi bi-shiddati 'ishqi-*

94. Notably, an anonymous speaker's encounter with Layla in this earliest source includes poetic attributions to her as well. Yet unlike Majnun, her speech is cut short by the speaker's questioning of her own non-normative behavior of crying and fainting as the speaker asks "do you not fear God (*mā ta-taqīna Āllah*)?" Although Layla's position as a fellow poet-lover is thus represented, it is not thoroughly explored. See Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb al-Sh'ir wa al-shu'arā' aw ṭabaqāt al-shu'arā'* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyah, 1985), 375.

95. The entry begins by stating that Majnun is either of the tribe of Ja'da ibn Ka'b ibn Rabī'a ibn Ṣa'sa'a, or of 'Uqayl ibn Ka'b ibn Rabī'a before switching in the next sentence to his nickname. The entry moreover ends on a curious note of concern for the poet's legacy. Ibn Qutayba declares, "Majnun has offspring in the Najd," before turning to a list of correct and incorrect attributions. This places distance between the details accumulated in the anecdotes and a sense of verifiability. See Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb al-Sh'ir wa al-shu'arā'*, 373 and 379.

hi).”⁹⁶ The juxtaposition of *‘ishq* against rationality (*‘aql*) shows how this work, like contemporaneous medical discourse, sees *‘ishq* as a kind of disease that overcomes the mind.

Turning to the anecdotes, the sources of transmission in the rest of the short entry remain variable—one anecdote, reported on the authority of “an old man from the Murra family,” a family of prominence during the arrival of Islam, describes a first-hand account from Majnun’s father.⁹⁷ This account shows how Majnun’s association with wild animals had become a significant motif:

<p>After the revelation of the affair, (Layla’s father) married her to another man, and my son went mad out of passion and longing for her so we detained and shackled him, but he was biting his tongue and lips and we feared that he would cut them off. When we saw that, we released him, and so he is in the desert with the beasts (<i>al-wahsh</i>). Every day his food is brought and placed before him where he can see it. Once they move away from it, he comes and eats.⁹⁸</p>	<p>بعد ظهور الخبر زوجها من رجل آخر فجن ابني وجداً عليها وصبابة بها فحبسناه وقيدناه فكان يعض لسانه وشفتيه حتى خشينا ان يقطعهما فلما رأينا ذلك خلينا سبيله فهو في هذه الفيافي مع الوحش يذهب في كل يوم بطعامه فيوضع له حيث يراه فاذا تنحوا عنه جاء فأكل</p>
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Majnun’s father reveals the defining trait of his son going mad out of passion, which leads to his family’s condemnation as they detain and shackle him. The shackles only worsen his self-harming behavior, which results in his exclusion from human community and his relocation to the desert to live amongst beasts (*al-wahsh*). Unlike later texts, this anecdote merely mentions but does not dwell on the beasts, and it indicates how Majnun has surpassed the boundaries of human societal belonging due to either his lack of rationality and/or his unwillingness to acculturate to his community’s kinship structure. Majnun resembles a kind of skittish animal himself as he retains a proclivity towards violence that marks him as beastly, yet the biting of his tongue and lips shows that he has a specific inclination towards self-harm.

96. Ibid, 373.
 97. Landau-Tresson, “Murra,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam, second edition*, edited by P. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill Online) http://dx.doi.org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_5546
 98. Ibn Qutayba, 377.

Unlike Ibn Qutayba’s interest in verification, Iṣfahānī enumerates ten pages of anecdotes on Majnun’s lineage alone, including theories that state that such a person did not exist or that there were multiple Majnuns (*majānīn*) that coalesced into one persona. One anecdote declares that Majnun was not as a historical person, but a representative of a style of poetry (*ash‘ār al-majānīn*), which is juxtaposed against a more preferable, rational style (*shi‘r al-‘uqalā*).⁹⁹ This reference to style over persona may be contextualized by what is typically referred to as *‘udhrī* poetry, a style which is associated with seventh-century poets who dwelled on their personal suffering due to allegedly unconsummated desire that I analyze in depth in the next chapter. Iṣfahānī’s enumeration of various theories reflects the work of the *isnād* as an ever-lengthening chain that provides distance from verifiability. What pushes Iṣfahānī further along this gradient than Ibn Qutayba is not only the accrual of new material but also his deliberate undermining of the *isnād* method itself:

<p>I recall what has come to me from approved and pleasing anecdotes about him, acquitted from any responsibility for them. Indeed, many narrators attribute much of the poetry mentioned in the anecdotes to others than him and those who relate anecdotes about him attribute it to him. I thus set forth this qualification, absolved from the blame of critics.¹⁰⁰</p>	<p>وأنا أذكر مما وقع إلي من أخباره جملاً مستحسنة متبرئاً من العهدة فيها فإن أكثر أشعاره المذكورة في أخباره ينسبها بعض الرواة إلى غيره وينسبها من حكيت عنه إليه وإذا قدمت هذه الشريطة برئت من عيب طاعن ومنتبع للعيوب</p>
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As As‘ad Khairallah has pointed out, Iṣfahānī here undercuts any factual knowledge to be gained from the subsequent anecdotes.¹⁰¹ Instead, Iṣfahānī puts forth a disclaimer that directs attention to the literary value of the anecdotes and their potential to provide pleasure.¹⁰² Absolving himself

99. Iṣfahānī vol. 2, 2-3.

100. Iṣfahānī vol. 2, 11.

101. Khairallah, *Love, Madness, and Poetry*, 54.

102. Kirsten Beck (2018, 334-335) has argued that this particular section welcomes confusion. As Michelle Karnes has discussed in a comparative approach between medieval European and Islamic texts, many medieval readers could have experienced confusion as pleasurable. See Kirsten Beck, “Iṣfahānī’s Invitation to Madness: Introduction to the Majnūn Laylā Story,” 334-335 and Michelle Karnes, “The Possibilities of Medieval Fiction,” in *New Literary History* 51, no. 1 (2020): 210.

from the responsibilities of verification, Iṣfahānī makes an appeal to reading content beyond its facticity, explicitly marking this section’s fictionality.

This undermining of the *isnād* facilitates the incorporation of new perspectives on Majnun’s animality. In some anecdotes of the *Book of Songs*, Majnun’s life with animals is an object of reproach similar to the mention of beasts in Ibn Qutayba’s account. One such account indicates how the detail of Majnun’s life amongst animals marks a point of no return:

<p>At the beginning of his affair, Majnun was seeing Layla and was familiar (<i>ya’lafu</i>) and intimate (<i>ya’nasu</i>) with her. Then she was concealed from his sight and his people consoled him by saying, “We will marry you to the most exquisite girl from amongst your close relatives,” but he refused all but Layla and was talking endlessly about her. At times he found rest in the wishes of his people and became calmed by their words, and at times sadness and anxiety were stirred up in him such that he could not gain control of himself and he wandered out of his madness (<i>yahīma ‘alā wajhi-hi</i>). And that was before he became wild (<i>qabla an yatawawḥasha</i>) with the beasts in the wastelands and his people were blaming and reproaching him.¹⁰³</p>	<p>كان المجنون في بدء أمره يرى ليلى ويألفها ويأنس بها ثم غيبت عن ناظره فكان أهله يعزونه عنها ويقولون تزوجك أنفـس جارية في عشيرتك فيأبى إلا ليلى ويهذى بها ويذكرها فكان ربما استراح إلى أمانيتها وركن إلى قولهم وكان ربما هاج عليه الحزن والهم فلا يملك مما هو فيه أن يهيم على وجهه وذلك قبل أن يتوحش مع البهائم في القفار فكان قومه يلومونه ويعذلونه</p>
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This anecdote reveals stages of Majnun’s separation from human community, sealed by the animal motif. At first, Majnun is depicted as appropriately sociable, given through the pair of verbs *ya’nasu* (to be friendly), a verb which shares a root with the Arabic word for “human” (*insān*), and *ya’lafu* (to be acquainted or habituated), which is connected to the root for a close friend or lover (*ilf*). Majnun’s people attempt to locate another partner for him that fulfills normative kinship requirements, and his subsequent refusal leads to his wandering and eventually his own becoming wild (*an yatawawḥasha*) like the beasts. This verb reflexively deploys the term for beasts (*al-waḥsh*) and renders porous the boundary marked by their initial mention in Ibn Qutayba’s

103. Iṣfahānī vol. 2, 42.

account.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, Majnun’s people interpret Majnun’s own animality alongside his life amongst the beasts as warranting blame and reproach.

Other anecdotes contain a mixture of reactions—the last one I cite here offers both a similar perspective on the animal motif and an alternative view from an anonymous source. This anecdote describes Majnun and his father’s trip to the Ka’ba, and the quick shift in narrative voice indicates differing interpretations:

<p>Then his father said to him, ‘Cling to the drapes of the Ka’ba and ask God to heal you of love of Layla.’ And he clung to the drapes of the Ka’ba and said, ‘O God, increase in me love of Layla and affection for her and do not make me ever forget recollection of her.’ And he wandered thus and was confused and could not regain control.</p>	<p>ثم قال له أبوه تعلق بأستار الكعبة واسأل الله أن يعافيك من حب ليلى فتعلق بأستار الكعبة وقال اللهم زدني لليلي حبا وبها كلفا ولا تنسني ذكرها أبدا فهام حينئذ واختلط فلم يضبط قالوا فكان يهيم في البرية مع الوحش ولا يأكل إلا ما ينبت في البرية من بقل ولا يشرب إلا مع الظباء إذا وردت مناهلها وطال شعر جسده ورأسه وأفته الظباء والوحوش فكانت لا تنفر منه وجعل يهيم حتى يبلغ حدود الشام فإذا تاب إليه عقله سأل من يمر به من أحياء العرب عن نجد فيقال له وأين أنت من نجد قد شارفت الشام</p>
<p>They said: He was wandering in the highlands with the beasts (<i>al-wahsh</i>) not eating except the herbs that grow in the highlands nor drinking except for with the gazelles (<i>al-zibā</i>) when they came to their watering-places. And the hair of his body and his head grew long and the gazelles and the beasts grew accustomed to him (<i>alifat-hu</i>) and were not fleeing from him. So he set out wandering until he arrived at the borders of Shām (greater Syria), whereupon he came to his senses and asked one man from the region who passed by him about the Najd (central Saudi Arabia), and he said to him, ‘And how far have you come from the Najd! You have approached Shām!’¹⁰⁵</p>	

Rejecting his father’s advice, Majnun wanders in a way that the first narrator condemns as his inability to regain control. Yet immediately thereafter, the anecdote switches voice to an anonymous “they” who reinterpret Majnun’s life amongst animals as a miraculous feat. This reinterpretation offers details that soften the motif, such as the inclusion of feminine gazelles and

104. Tarek El-Ariss, building on the work of ‘Abd Allāh al-Ghadhdhāmī, theorizes *tawahhush* (becoming wild, beastly) as a concept that renders the boundary between the human and “that which is radically outside and terrifying” porous. In addition to being unsettling, Nezāmī and Iṣfahānī deploy Majnun’s *tawahhush* as generative for reimagining social relations. See El-Ariss, “Return of the Beast,” 63-66 and ‘Abd Allāh al-Ghadhdhāmī, *Al-Qabīlah wa-l-qaba’iliyyah, aw, huwiyyāt mā ba’d al-ḥadāthah* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-‘Arabī, 2009), 11.

105. Iṣfahānī vol. 2, 22.

the deployment of the verb for “being acquainted or habituated” (again *ya ’lafu*, here *alifat-hu*) for the beasts themselves. This creates an image of Majnun’s communing with animals as peaceful since this perspective extends the narration by detailing Majnun’s search for the Najd.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, this “they” carries no legitimate *isnād*, and, thinking back to Iṣfahānī’s undermining of the *isnād* method, it seems to be included for its own literary value. Rather than condemning Majnun’s life amongst beasts, this “they” reinterprets Majnun’s own animality as well as the beasts’ ability to become habituated like and to humans as a space for imagining an alternative form of community.

V. The *Dīwan*, madness, and animality

The *Dīwan* intertextually references several aspects of pre-Islamic poetry and its wilderness setting discussed so far. These references both locate Majnun as a poet who speaks in ways similar to pre-Islamic poets and create a setting that is filled with animals which bring forth Majnun’s own animality and the imagining of animals as alternative kin. The *Dīwan* imagines Majnun stopping and weeping at the traces of his beloved’s (*aṭlāl*) campsite, recalling the opening words of Imru’ al-Qays’ famed *mu’allaqāt* “Halt, two friends, and we will weep for the memory of beloved and home (*qifā nabki min dhikrā habībīn wa manzili*).”¹⁰⁷ His longing for Layla’s

106. Jaroslav Stetkevych has discussed the geopolitical and mythopoetic centrality of the Najd region (modern day central Saudi Arabia) in classical Arabic literature, arguing that it typically represented the place of linguistic origins. See Jaroslav Stetkevych, *The Zephyrs of Najd: The Poetics of Nostalgia in the Classical Arabic Nasīb* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 122.

107.

وَقَفْنَا عَلَى أَطْلَالِ لَيْلَى عَشِيَّةً
بِأَجْزَاعِ حُرُوزِي وَهِيَ طَامِسَةٌ دُنُرٌ

—
We stopped at the traces of Layla in the evening
At the rugged high place and it is effaced in coverings

Abū Bakr Wālibī, attrib., *Dīwān ash’ār Majnun banī ‘Āmir ma’a ba’d aḥwālih*, ed. by Huda Wa’il Amir (Beirut: al-Mu’assasah al-‘Arabīyah lil-Dirāsāt wa-al-Nashr, 2011), 290. Henceforth abbreviated as “*Dīwan*.” For a translation and discussion of Imru’ al-Qays’ poem, see Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak*, 241-285.

homeland in the Najd reflects the archetypal longing of the pre-Islamic poet in the *nasīb* (love-prelude) for the Najd, a region of the Arabian peninsula that is also associated with the autochthonous home of the Arabic language.¹⁰⁸ The Najd wilderness becomes the specific place within which Majnun enacts a nostalgic longing, as can be seen from this short poem:

<p>I long for the land of the Ḥijāz and my need is tents in the Najd, before which the glance is short.</p> <p>And my gaze toward the Najd is not useful, yes, no, but upon it I am looking.</p> <p>is there in each day a glance then a tear? My eye for you flowing, its water descending.</p> <p>The heart finds rest only in its nearby sadness and its far-off remembrances.</p> <p>They say: how many tears from his eyes flowing? (I say) tears for her flow, scattering all the time.</p> <p>Nor is it water that flows from the eye, but rather a soul as it melts, dripping.¹⁰⁹</p>	<p>أَجْنُ إِلَى أَرْضِ الْحِجَازِ وَحَاجَتِي خِيَامٌ يَنْجِدُ دُونَهَا الطَّرْفُ يَقْصُرُ</p> <p>وَمَا نَظْرِي مِنْ نَحْوِ نَجْدٍ بِنَافِعِي أَجَلٌ لَا وَلَكِنِّي عَلَى ذَلِكَ أَنْظُرُ</p> <p>أَفِي كُلِّ يَوْمٍ تَطْرَهُ ثُمَّ عَبْرَةٌ لِعَيْنَيْكَ يَجْرِي مَأْوَاهَا يَنْحَدِرُ</p> <p>مَتَى يَسْتَرِيحُ الْقَلْبُ إِمَّا مُجَاوِرٌ حَزِينٌ وَإِمَّا نَازِحٌ يَنْدَكِّرُ</p> <p>يَقُولُونَ كَمْ تَجْرِي مَدَامُ عَيْنِهِ لَهَا الدَّهْرُ دَمْعٌ وَكَفُّ يَنْسَدِرُ</p> <p>وَلَيْسَ الَّذِي يَجْرِي مِنَ الْعَيْنِ مَأْوَاهَا وَلَكِنَّهَا نَفْسٌ تَذُوبُ فَتَقَطِرُ</p>
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The desire to glance upon the tents of the Najd here recalls how the *mu‘allaqa* poet typically opens his remembrance of the beloved by considering an abandoned campsite. Majnun’s longing (*aḥn̄*) replays one of the most common topoi of pre-Islamic poetry, a longing for the homeland (*han̄n̄ ila al-watan*).¹¹⁰ Yet the imagined dialogue at the end of this poem alludes to how Majnun, unlike the *mu‘allaqa* poet, does not cease his crying and remembrance of the beloved to meet the

108. Jaroslav Stetkevych, in discussing the central role of the Najd in classical Arabic literature, claims that for both geopolitical and mythopoetic reasons the Najd “historically and legendarily enjoyed an undisputed claim to autochthony as regards purity of lineage and correctness of the Arabic language.” See Jaroslav Stetkevych, *The Zephyrs of Najd*, 122.

109. *Dīwan*, 103-104.

110. See Beatrice Greundler, “Al-Han̄n̄ ilā l-Awtan and Its Alternatives in Classical Arabic Literature,” in *Representations of Homeland in Modern Arabic Literature*, eds. Sebastian Gunther and Stephan Milich (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag AG, 2016), 18.

expectations of masculine behavior in the community. This lack of acclimatization more closely resembles the behavior of a *ṣuʿlūk* poet like Shanfarā, however for Majnun time itself instead slows down and is measured by the poet’s scattering of tears and dissolving of breaths as Majnun enacts the position of a poet who speaks monothematic ghazals.¹¹¹ As such, Majnun’s poem resonates with the landscape of the *muʿallaqat* even as it differs in mentality.

Beyond traces of the beloved’s campsite, inherited topoi include references to specific animals that set the stage for Majnun’s identification with them. The dove (*ḥamāma*) stands out as an animal whose cries sound like Majnun’s own weeping, a fact that is recognized by Majnun in his poetry that makes use of animal similes:

<p>My two friends, is there in the Shām a plentiful fountain that is made to cry for the Najd? Perhaps I help it weep.</p> <p>The weepers deserted it except for a dove—a ringdove whose mate had left it,</p> <p>who is answered by another on a reed that bends so it nearly brings her to the earth.¹¹²</p>	<p>خَلِيلَيَّ هَلْ بِالشَّامِ عَيْنٌ عَزِيرَةٌ تُبْكِي عَلَى نَجْدٍ لَعَلِّي أَعِينُهَا وَأَسْلَمَهَا الْبَاكُونَ إِلَّا حَمَامَةً مَطْوَقَةً قَدْ بَانَ مِنْهَا قَرِينُهَا تُجَاوِبُهَا أُخْرَى عَلَى خَيْرَانَةٍ يَكَادُ يُدَانِيهَا مِنَ الْأَرْضِ لِينُهَا</p>
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This passage opens with a reference to “my two friends (*khalīlayya*),” another topos that recalls the two friends often called upon in pre-Islamic poetry and that is frequently mentioned throughout the *Dīwan*.¹¹³ The general theme of weeping for the Najd is introduced, and then Majnun’s verse becomes increasingly specific as he compares this weeping to criers greeting a fountain in the dry plains of the Najd and then to doves and finally to a ringdove who cries specifically out of separation from its mate. The association of a ringdove with a lover seems to have remained

111. I draw loosely from Renate Jacobi’s discussion of time in the *ʿudhrī* ghazal, a genre which I foreground in the next chapter. Renate Jacobi, “Time and Reality in Nasīb and Ghazal,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 16 (1985): 16-17.

112. *Dīwan*, 133. My thanks to Kay Heikkinen for help with translating the dove image.

113. See also, for example, *Dīwan* 89, 133, 205, 247, 248, 276, 279, and 326.

prominent in the Arabic tradition, as evidenced by the title of Ibn Ḥazm’s famous treatise on love, *The Ring of the Dove (Tawq al-Ḥamama)* as well as in poetry of lament (*rithā’*).¹¹⁴ Anthropomorphized as a lover, the dove is inherited by the *Dīwan* from its poetic environment and passed on to future generations. Yet the animals present in the *Dīwan* extend beyond the dove and its anthropomorphic use, and include other birds such as the crow, sparrow, and sand grouse, various kinds of camels, sheep and livestock, wolves, gazelles, as well as the more ambiguous category of “the beasts (*al-waḥsh*).”¹¹⁵ Each of these types of animals carries specific implications,

114 . My thanks to Tahera Qutbuddin drawing attention to the usage of the ringdove in the (*rithā’*).

115. See, for example, the following poem that uses a series of similes with animal imagery (of camels, sand grouse, crows, ring-doves) as Majnun describes how he promises to not forget Layla with the extended construction of “I won’t forget you as long as...(wa mā ansāka mā...), which also resembles poetry of lament.

فَوَاللَّهِ مَا أَنْسَاكَ مَا هَبَّتِ الصَّبَا
وَمَا نَاخَتْ الْأَطْيَارُ فِي وَضْحِ الْفَجْرِ

وَمَا وَجَفَتْ تَحْتَ الرَّحَالِ بَرَكَبِهَا
قِلَاصٌ تَوْمُ الْبَيْتِ فِي الْبَلَدِ الْقَفْرِ

وَمَا نَطَقْتُ بِاللَّيْلِ سَارِيَهُ الْقَطَا
وَمَا صَرَخَ الْغُرْبَانُ فِي وَضْحِ الْفَجْرِ

وَمَا لَاحَ نَجْمٌ فِي السَّمَاءِ وَمَا بَكَتْ
مُطَوِّفَةٌ شَجْوًا عَلَى فَنَنِ السِّدْرِ

وَمَا طَلَعَتْ شَمْسٌ لَدَى كُلِّ شَارِقٍ
وَمَا هَطَلَتْ عَيْنٌ عَلَى وَاضِحِ النَّحْرِ

وَمَا حَمَلْتُ أَنْثَى وَمَا خَبَّ ذَعْلِبُ
وَمَا طَفَحَ الْأَذْيُ فِي لُجَجِ الْبَحْرِ

وَمَا اغْطَوْطَشَ الْغُرْبِيبُ وَاسْوَدَّ لَوْنُهُ
وَمَا مَدَّ طَوْلَ الدَّهْرِ ذِكْرَكَ فِي صَدْرِي

أَتَبْكِي الْحَمَامُ الْوُرُقُ مِنْ فَقْدِ الْفِيهِ
وَيَسْلُو وَمَالِي مِنْ لَيْلَةٍ مِنْ صَبْرِ

And by God I do not forget you as long as the east wind blows

which give a window into how animality tracks onto Majnun's character in very different ways. As in the *Book of Songs*, Majnun's life amongst peaceful animals at times is viewed as kind of alternative society, while at other times Majnun's own becoming wild and his life amongst wild animals illustrates his inability to fit into his own society's kinship structure.

The major plot points of the *Dīwan* revolve around kinship issues and tend to be told somewhat rapidly. Majnun's continued conflicts with his kin due to his unrelenting commitment to Layla drive him further into madness, which becomes a cycle that results in Majnun's life on society's edge amongst animals and his death. In effect, Majnun's conflicts with his kin further his own going wild (*tawahhush*). In the beginning of the legend, the *Dīwan* describes Majnun and Layla's meeting as rapidly giving way to their separation:

and as long as the birds wail in the brightness of dawn

and as long as the camels canter under the saddle of riders
to the house of prayer in the desolate lands

and the sand grouse speaks in the night
and the crow cries in the brightness of the dawn

and the stars appear in the sky and the ring-dove cries distressed
on the branches of the lotus tree

and the sun rises in all the eastern parts
and the eye cries in torrents over the wide part of the chest

and women get pregnant and the fast camel saunters
and waves overflow in the depths of the sea

and the crows blacken.
Memory of you extends the length of time in my chest

Do the doves of the foliage cry from losing their friend
or forget? What do I have of patience?

Dīwan, 61-64.

<p>And when it was that day that Qays presented to her his wish in order to see if in her heart there was for him the like of what there was for her in his heart, she blocked it. Then his eyes flooded with tears from her blocking him and he said...</p> <p>I fell in love with Layla when she was a heedless child, when her breasts had not yet appeared to her companions.</p> <p>Two youths we tended the lambs—would that we had never grown up, nor had the lambs grown old.</p> <p>And then Layla answered him while crying from what she heard of his poetry, and she said:</p> <p>Before people, we appear with hatred yet each one for his companion is firm.</p> <p>Eyes have revealed us in what we wanted, yet in our hearts is the hidden desire.</p> <p>And when he heard what she said, he fell down unconscious. When he recovered, he said:</p> <p>Thrown down by violent love and desire, what youth is safe from the thirst of love?¹¹⁶</p>	<p>فلما كان ذات يوم سألتها قيس حاجة لنفسه لينظر هل له في قلبها مثل الذي لها في قلبه فمنعته حاجته فاغرورقت عيناه لمنعها إياه حاجته وقال</p> <p>تَعَلَّقْتُ لَيْلَى وَهِيَ غَرٌّ صَغِيرَةٌ وَلَمْ يَبْدُ لِلْأَثْرَابِ مِنْ تَدْيِهَا حَجْمٌ</p> <p>صَغِيرِينَ نَزَعَى الْبَهْمَ يَأْلَيْتُ أَنَّنَا إِلَى الْيَوْمِ لَمْ نَكْبُرْ وَلَمْ تَكْبُرِ الْبَهْمُ</p> <p>فأجابته ليلى وهي باكية لما سمعت شعره فقالت</p> <p>وَكُلُّ مُظْهَرٍ لِلنَّاسِ بُغْضًا وَكُلُّ عِنْدَ صَاحِبِهِ مَكِينٌ</p> <p>تُخْبِرُنَا الْعَيُونَ بِمَا أَرَدْنَا وَفِي الْقُلُوبِ نَمَّ هَوًى دَفِينٌ</p> <p>فلما سمع مقالتها خر مغشياً فلما أفاق قال</p> <p>صَرِيحٌ مِنَ الْخُبِّ الْمُبْرَحِ وَالْهَوَى وَأَيُّ قَتَى مِنْ غُلَّةِ الْخُبِّ يَسْلَمُ</p>
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Before he becomes Majnun, Qays presents his desires for Layla who blocks them, due to the fact that acting on such desires before marriage would cause Layla to be disavowed.¹¹⁷ The rapid weaving together of these couplets signals the crystallization of a legend around Majnun in the *Dīwan*, which offers a more thorough account of the life of the man behind the poetry than the quasi-biographical sources.¹¹⁸ In this version, Majnun nostalgically recalls the lovers' meeting as children, a recollection that both diminishes the role of sexuality (he notes Layla's breasts but in

116. *Dīwan*, 50-53.

117. Ruqayya Khan has analyzed the function of the secret in 'udhrī love-stories such as Majnun Layla, arguing that secrecy is not only a key component of the plot as can be seen in this passage, but also as a marker of the self. See Ruqayya Khan, *Self and Secrecy in Early Islam* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), 72-97.

118. The first pair of couplets in this passage is the same pastoral original couplet in Ibn Qutayba and the *Book of Songs*, yet the *Book of Songs* offers more alternatives on the lovers' meeting including Majnun's conversing with a group of women that includes Layla who are distracted by the arrival of another, more handsome man. The next day Majnun visits Layla and she declares her preference for him. See Ibn Qutayba, 374 and al-İşfahānī, 11-12.

passing) and heightens the contrast between a peaceful, pastoral childhood amongst lambs and the subsequent pain of separation. The lambs, like the lovers, thrive within the domesticated world of Majnun and Layla's mutual kin.

The *Dīwan* emphasizes the role of kinship issues in the lovers' separation, which represents the people living in pre- and early Islamic Arabia as strictly tribal. Ruqayya Khan has pointed out the dramatized dimension of this form of representation in the *Book of Songs*, and I build on her approach of reading these anecdotes as portraying a reductive vision of "the Bedouin" and their mores.¹¹⁹ These mores are what drives the plot and what underscores Majnun as a romantic figure who transgresses them. For example, the *Dīwan* asserts several times that an unnamed Sultan asks for Majnun's blood on behalf of Layla's family.¹²⁰ In one poignant moment where Majnun is close to reuniting with Layla thanks to the help of a local nobleman, Nawfal, the *Dīwan* states that Layla's family "met them with pointed swords and they said, 'By God, Majnun will never enter our house ever, and the Sultan has asked for his blood.'"¹²¹ This paints a picture of Layla's family as protecting their daughter's honor with force. Moreover, the *Dīwan* often comments that "the Arabs" (a term used in the *Dīwan* to refer to Bedouin people of Majnun's immediate milieu) refused to marry their women to men who advertised their love because this act threatens the

119. Khan cites Ibn Khaldūn's (d. 1406) definition of Arabs as those who dwell outside cities and who have a strong sense of blood ties (*ʿaṣābīya*) and furthermore states "the 'arab are thus a section of the *badw*, the people of the *bādiya*, characterized by the importance of genealogical relations." See Khan, *Bedouin and 'Abbāsīd Cultural Identities*, 4.

120. See, for example, this anecdote from early on in the text:

ففتن جلساؤه عند ذلك فأخبروا أباهما به فحججوها عنه وقدموه إلى السلطان فأهدر لهم السلطان دمه إن هو زارها

—
Those he was sitting with became aware of that and they informed her father about it and he veiled her from him and handed him over to the Sultan and the Sultan allowed for them to shed his blood. *Dīwan*, 52-53.

121.

فتلقوه بالسلاح الشاكي وقالوا والله لا يدخل المجنون منزلنا أبدا وقد أهدر السلطان دمه

—
Dīwan, 208-209.

family's honor.¹²² These statements dramatize the issue of familial honor as particularly associated with the Bedouin, even if such kinship issues were shared by larger segments of society, and they create a backdrop of conflict with the lovers' story.

As kinship issues continue, Majnun begins to lose touch with the domesticated world. Majnun's family often suggests that he marry another woman, a solution that resembles medical treatments of *'ishq* at the time. In one such instance, Majnun's poetry draws attention to these kinship issues by identifying those who suggest such a solution as "my father, my maternal, and my paternal cousins," who all blame him for continuing to love Layla.¹²³ After their recommendation, Majnun begins to adopt more extreme forms of behavior:

And when they made him listen to what he hated (that he could marry another woman), he went on his way sadly distressed, and thoughts of her state were increasing until they forbade him from eating and drinking and he stopped speaking with people and the one who saw him whether enemy or friend began to feel the utmost mercy for him.¹²⁴

أسمعوه ما يكره فمر على وجهه آيساً حزيناً يكثر
الفكرة في أمرها حتى منعه ذلك من الطعام والشراب
وترك محادثة الناس وصار في حد يرحمه من رآه من
عدو وصديق

122. See for example the following anecdote that purports to summarize marital practices of "the Arabs," and links *'ishq* to those people:

لما شهر بليلي خطبت له فأبى أبوها أن يزوجها منه وهكذا كانت العرب تفعل إذا شهر رجل بحب امرأة لم يزوجها منه فاشتد
وجده وتراقى سورة عشقه

When Majnun became notorious for having made speeches about Layla, her father refused to marry her to him. That is what the Arabs were doing if a man was becoming notorious for love of a woman, they would not marry her to him. So his passion increased and the force of his *'ishq* rose. See *Dīwan*, 280. Peter Webb has argued that social groups only gradually labelled themselves as "Arab" as a rise of changes inaugurated by the arrival of Islam, and that many of the stereotypes today that associate Arabness with bedouinity arose after the philological codification of Arabic in the ninth century "which fashioned a classical, 'canonical' notion of Arabness that has influenced so much writing about Arab origins ever since." See Peter Webb, *Imagining the Arabs: Arab Identity and the Rise of Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 5 and 294-340.

123.

لقد لامني في حُبِّ ليلي أقاربي
أبي وابن عمي وابن خالي وخاليا

My relatives have blamed me for love of Layla
My father and my maternal and paternal cousins

Dīwan, 75.

124. *Dīwan*, 77.

Here, Majnun’s distress because of kinship issues serves as the reason for his loss of appetite. This passage shows how the typical effects of the disease of *‘ishq*, such as emaciation or being asocial, are socially construed. The marriage economy upheld by Majnun’s kin contributes to and perpetuates Majnun’s behavior, which further removes him from human sociability. He begins to wander, and the majority of the *Dīwan* builds a world around Majnun’s wanderings in the wilderness.¹²⁵ These anecdotes offer a fertile site for considering the ways in which animal relations and Majnun’s animality parallel and challenge this imagined, domestic world of human sociability and its kinship structure.

In the wilderness, the *Dīwan* places on display predator-prey relations between animals and Majnun’s attempts to disrupt predator-prey relations between humans and non-human animals. Majnun’s own poetic speech often deploys animal imagery in the form of predator-prey relationships in order to describe the relationship between the beloved and the lover. Identifying himself as a lover, Majnun plays with the power dynamics of normative gender relations by deploying animal imagery that imagines Layla as predator. One repeated poem compares Layla to both a hungry wolf and a butcher of sparrows:

<p>And you are like an evil wolf when it said once to the camel while it was poor and hungry—</p> <p>are you not she who is without anything and still you abuse me?</p>	<p>وَكُنْتَ كَذَنْبِ السَّوِّءِ إِذْ قَالَ مَرَّةً لِعُمْرُوسَةَ وَالذَّنْبُ غَرْتَانُ مُزْمِلُ أَلَسْتَ الَّتِي مِنْ غَيْرِ شَيْءٍ سَنَمْتِنِي</p>
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125. There are direct resonances between the *Dīwan* and the anecdotes of the *Book of Songs* when it comes to detailing these wanderings. For example, both sources describe an anecdote of Majnun wandering around the Shām region in search of the Najd, whereupon Majnun asks an anonymous bystander—

أين أرض بني عامر؟ فيقال له وأين أنت منها! عليك بنجم كذا

“Where is the land of Banū ‘Āmir? And it was said to him: and where are you from it! Upon you is such-and-such a star.” This kind of direct quotation leads me to the conclusion that the *Dīwan* builds on and attempts to support Khairallah’s conclusion that it is a later compilation that was retroactively attributed to a singular narrator so as to provide the legend with a sense of overall coherence. See *Dīwan*, 143, and al-Isfahānī, 52.

<p>And she said: when was that? The wolf said: when there was one who possessed one year.</p> <p>And she said: I gave birth last year but you wished to deceive. So here, eat me, there is nothing for you to eat here.</p> <p>And you were like the butcher of sparrows always with his eyes full of sadness, shedding tears for them—</p> <p>do not look, Layla, to the eye but look to the hand what it does to the sparrow.¹²⁶</p>	<p>فَقَالَتْ مَتَى ذَا؟ قَالَ ذَا عَامٍ أَوَّلُ فَقَالَتْ وَوَلِدْتُ الْعَامَ بَلْ رُمْتُ كَذِبَةً فَهَاكَ فَكُنِّي لَا هُنَاكَ مَأْكُلُ وَكُنْتُ كَذَّبَاحِ الْعَصَافِيرِ دَانِيَاً وَعَيْنَاهُ مِنْ وَجْدِ عَلَيْهِمْ تَهْمِلُ فَلَا تَنْظُرِي لَيْلَى إِلَى الْعَيْنِ وَانْظُرِي إِلَى الْكَفِّ مَازَا بِالْعَصَافِيرِ تَفْعَلُ</p>
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Both comparisons make Layla into a predator, although the wolf comparison paints her as particularly evil. I examine further in the chapters that follow the gendered ramifications of this version of the lover-beloved relationship, a version whose hierarchy resembles the broader contours of Abbasid courtly love poetics. In this particular poem, the image of the hungry wolf when applied to Layla causes identification of Majnun with the self-sacrificing camel. Camel sacrifice would have been immediately recognizable from its deployment in the *mu‘allaqāt*, and as such Majnun’s use of this image paints him as innocent and as a significant, if still animalistic, member of the tribe.¹²⁷ The second image of the butcher is a bit less ruthless, yet it simultaneously imagines Layla as violent. Both images serve to reinforce a “natural” way of understanding the lover-beloved relationship as operating on an uneven axis of power similar to predator-prey relations in the natural world.

Yet these imagined predator-prey relations of Majnun’s poetic speech are couched within the realities of predator-prey dynamics of the wilderness setting itself. One anecdote that brings

126. *Dīwan*, 170-171. The butcher/sparrow image is repeated verbatim in *Dīwan*, 102.

127. This identification with the camel resembles a poem that Dana Sajdi has analyzed in which the female poet, Laylā al-Akhyaliya, identifies with the camel instead of the rider in a *qaṣīda*, a genre typically reserved for men. Sajdi argues that this substitution allows al-Akhyaliya to subvert the model of male hero who risks death while remaining within conventional expectations. A similar move of subversion occurs here, though not in the imagining of the journey (*raḥīl*) section, but instead in the boast (*fakhr*) of camel slaughter. See Dana Sajdi, “Trespassing the Male Domain: The *Qaṣīdah* of Layla al-Akhyaliyya,” in *Journal of Arabic Literature* 31, 2 (2000): 121-146.

together these two levels highlights how Majnun’s own perspective is limited. Kuthayyir, a fellow poet-lover whose role I explore in more depth in the next chapter, comes across Majnun in the desert while hunting gazelles. Kuthayyir, like the speakers of many other anecdotes, is frightened when he sees a person who he does not deem sociable (*anīs*, a word related to the word for human, *insān*) and asks, “Are you a human or a jinn?”¹²⁸ Once Majnun declares that he is, in fact, a man, Kuthayyir invites him to assist him in trapping gazelles. Majnun agrees, which leads to an interaction wherein he identifies Layla with the gazelle:

<p>So I watched him as he hunted a gazelle that was the most beautiful gazelle, then he grasped its horn and began looking at the beauty of its face and said,</p> <p>“Oh semblance of Layla, do not fear today I am a friend from amongst the beasts.</p> <p>Your eyes are her eyes and your neck is her neck, though her leg is more delicate than yours.”</p> <p>Then he set her free and started looking at her traces and said,</p> <p>“I say as I have released her from her shackles, “if you say thanks, it is because of Layla you are freed.””¹²⁹</p>	<p>فأقمت عليه حتى اقتنص ظبية كأحسن ما تكون من الطباء ثم قبض على قرنها وأقبل ينظر في محاسن وجهها ويقول</p> <p>أيا شبيهة ليلى لا تُراعي فأنتي لك اليوم من بين الوحوش صديق</p> <p>فعيناك عيناها وجيدك جيدها سوى أن عظم الساق منك دقيق</p> <p>ثم أطلقها وجعل ينظر في أثرها ويقول</p> <p>أقول وقد أطلقتها من وثاقها فأنت ليلى إن شكرت طليق</p>
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Rather than reinforcing normative predator-prey relations as in the poem on the butcher, Majnun’s poem here declares to the gazelle that he is “a friend from amongst the beasts.” His identification of a gazelle with Layla is frequently repeated throughout the anecdotes and reflects a general

128.

قال أخبرك يا أمير المؤمنين بينما أسير في بعض البوادي في يوم شديد الحر إذ رفع لي شخص في مفازة ليس بها أنيس فذعرت منه ثم دنوت منه فإذا أنا بإنسان حسن الوجه جعد الشعر فقلت له إنسي أنت أم جني؟ فقال بل إنسي

(Kuthayyir said), “Oh commander of the believers, one day when I was walking at midday on a very hot day, a person appeared to me in the desert who did not seem sociable (*anīs*) and so I was frightened of him. Then I neared him and by God the beauty of his face and curls of his hair! I said to him, ‘Are you a human or a jinn?’ And he said, ‘I am a man.’ See *Dīwān*, 94-95. This exact form of questioning if Majnun is a human or jinn is repeated in different encounters such as an anonymous man’s encounter with Majnun at an oasis and often accompanies the onlookers’ fear. See *Dīwān*, 109.

129. *Dīwān*, 96-97.

tendency in early Islamic poetry to use the gazelle and its beauty as a metaphor for the beloved's beauty.¹³⁰ The last line indicates a comparison opposed to the likening of Layla to a wolf, and it is Layla's own benevolence as well as the similarity of her to a gazelle in terms of being in shackles that causes Majnun's action of freeing it.¹³¹ This form of catch and release repeats a few times in this particular anecdote, revealing a liberating potential of a blurring of the human-animal boundary that simultaneously undoes, temporarily, the predator-prey relations of the hunt. The anecdote ends, however, with Kuthayyir catching the final gazelle and breaking its ankles, indicating a limit to this undoing imposed by Kuthayyir's hunger.¹³²

I want to explore one more anecdote that will help with thinking through the limits of undoing predator-prey relations. In this anecdote, an unnamed hunter is also setting up traps for gazelles as Majnun approaches. When this hunter catches a gazelle, Majnun rushes to free it and proclaims a poem that once again compares the gazelle to Layla. This causes the hunter to get angry at Majnun:

<p>And when the hunter saw what he had done, he said: what is this? Do you not fear God? For indeed I have not eaten and my family has not eaten for three days, and in that gazelle was my prosperity and the prosperity of my family today. And Majnun said to him: Indeed God will not leave you and your family without your daily sustenance.¹³³</p>	<p>فلما رآه الصياد صنع ما صنع قال يا هذا أما تتقي الله فإني لم أكل و عيالي منذ ثلاثة أيام شيئاً وقد كان في هذا الطبي غناي وغنى أهلي اليوم قال له المجنون إن الله لا يدعك وعيالك بلا رزق...</p>
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130. The gazelle in Arabic and Persian poetry is often compared to the beloved and can symbolize both graceful and powerful aspects of beauty. On poetic examples of this comparison, see J.C. Bürgel, "The Lady Gazelle and Her Murderous Glances," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 20, no. 1 (March, 1989): 1-11.

131. Sara Ahmed has identified a connection between love and hate, which seems to play out in Arabic love poetry as well as can be evidenced by this poem as well as sources such as Abū Tammām's *Ḥamāsa*, which dedicates a section both to love of and to "the censure of women," (*madhammāt al-nisa*). See Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 122-130 and Abū Tammām, *Dīwān Al-ḥamāsah*, ed. Yaḥyā ibn 'Alī Tibrīzī, and Muḥammad 'Abd al-Mun'im Khafājī (Cairo: Maktabat Muḥammad Alī Ṣabīh, 1955).

132.

فوئبت إليها وكسرت يديها طمعاً في لحمها

(Kuthayyir said): then I jumped to her and broke her ankles out of a desire for her meat. *Dīwān*, 100.

133. *Dīwān*, 215.

The hunter's complaint underscores what is possibly a class difference between himself and Majnun as he asserts how the gazelle will provide necessary sustenance for his family.¹³⁴ Majnun does not heed this complaint, and the anecdote continues by offering several more instances of Majnun freeing gazelles from the hunter's trap. Ironically, this cycle comes to a close when a wolf appears and kills the last gazelle. While the wolf is eating the gazelle, the hunter shoots an arrow and kills the wolf.¹³⁵ This anecdote shows that even as Majnun's actions and vantage point plays with undoing normative predator-prey dynamics, the wolf's hunger and the hunter's poverty indicates how such actions are circumscribed within a greater, hostile world wherein the undoing of such relations is not possible for all.

More than Majnun's perspective on animals, the *Dīwan*'s textual depiction of Majnun's own becoming wild (*tawahhush*) offers a view of human-animal relations that is more unsettling. Majnun's appearance repeatedly shocks people who encounter him in the wilderness. One anecdote recalls how a man from the tribe of Asad encounters Majnun in an oasis.¹³⁶ After resting beneath palm trees, this man purportedly awakens to a frightening sight:

<p>Someone had approached who had nothing on his body except hair hanging down (long) on his chest and a fuzzy/downy beard extending over a fold of fat on his belly. Sight of him frightened me and my heart flew off and was alarmed out of fear and dread. And I feared that he would cause my death, and I had no doubt that he was a satanic demon (<i>mārid</i>)¹³⁷</p>	<p>قد أقبل ما على جسده غير شعر منسدل على صدره وزغبات يأخذن إلى عنقه فراعني منظره واستطار قلبي خوفا ووجلا وخشيت أن يكون فيه هلاكي وما شككت أنه شيطان مارد</p>
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134. It is difficult to assert class difference with any certainty, although the means of Majnun's father (through his ability to take his son to Babel, Mecca, propose marriage) are repeatedly emphasized.

135.

جاء ذئب فقتلها وأقبل يأكلها فعمد إلى قوس الصيد فأوترها وفوق فيها سهماً ثم رمى الذئب فقتله

A wolf came and killed the gazelle and began eating it, then the wolf went towards the bow of the hunter and the hunter strung and placed an arrow on it and then cast it at the wolf and killed it. *Dīwan*, 215.

136. The *Dīwan* notes that the tribe of Asad is a tribe often connected to the prophet Muhammad's family of the Quraysh. See *Dīwan*, 107.

137. *Dīwan*, 109.

This man covered in hair turns out to be Majnun. The speaker of this anecdote's fear shows how Majnun's animality appears as threatening and results in the speaker marking Majnun as demonic specifically through a kind of evil spirit known as a *mārid*.¹³⁸ As with Ta'abbata Sharran and the *ghūl*, this man's perception of Majnun as a *mārid* has a dehumanizing effect. Yet the speaker slightly retracts this position when, after Majnun recites a poem, the speaker asks, "Are you a man or a *jinn* (*insīyun anta am jinnī*)?"¹³⁹ Majnun's humanity returns with his poetry, and this speaker's reactions show how Majnun's behaviors mark him as potentially threatening. This wavering between fear and amazement when encountering Majnun is repeated several times across the anecdotes of the *Dīwan*, and Majnun's poetry often provides the tipping point for a reaction that accepts his non-normative behavior.¹⁴⁰ The shift to a response of amazement resembles the acceptance of madness in the late antique Islamic environment that can be detected from the proximity of the category to prophecy and poetry in the Qur'an and *sīra*, and Majnun's appearance as a kind of hairy beast lingers as potentially threatening even as it is overcome by the rhetoricity he displays as a poet.

138. The term *mārid* can mean either a rebel, insurgent, or refractory person, or a demon or evil-working spirit. The first meaning associated with revolting may have connotations with the revolt of Iblīs against God. For a full contextualization, see Th. Bianquis, "Mārid," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al. Accessed online on 9 December 2022 <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_8815>

139. *Dīwan*, 110.

140. Another anecdote reports, for example, how a man comes across Majnun crying and reciting poetry, which leads to the following reaction that shows how Majnun's humanity hinges on his poetry:

قال الأعرابي فما شككت أنه شيطان فتركته ومضيت وأنا شديد الروع فدخلت ديار بني عامر وقلت هل من قرى؟ فقالوا انزل بالرحب والسعة فنزلت فقالوا ما لك مذعوراً؟ فوصفت لهم الحال فعرفوه وبكوا بكاء شديداً وقالوا أتدري من ذاك؟ فقلت لا فقالوا ذاك مجنون بني عامر فاستنشدت شيئاً من شعره فأنشدوني

I had no doubt that he was a satan and I left him and went away and I was very frightened. Then I entered the homes of the tribe of 'Āmir and I said: are you receiving guests? And they said: dismount and you will be welcomed kindly. So I dismounted and they said: why are you frightened? And I described to them his state and they knew him and cried a severe cry and they said: do you know who that is? I said: no. They said: that is Majnun of the tribe of 'Āmir, and I asked for something of his poetry and they began reciting to me. *Dīwan*, 271.

Yet Majnun’s animality is not only beastly. Not only does the *Dīwan* depict Majnun as saving gazelles, an action which inscribes gendered norms of the lover coming to save the beloved, but also it plays with identifying Majnun with a gazelle himself. This genders Majnun differently, and it creates a way of seeing Majnun’s own animality as not merely frightening, but as also inspiring wonder. When the local nobleman Nawfal initially comes across Majnun, for example, he sees Majnun living peacefully amongst gazelles:

<p>Nawfal ibn Musāḥiq said to me: I went out one day fishing in the waters and with me was a group of my friends and when I was feeling the feverish heat, I came across a tree. Near it were a group of gazelles and a person, a human, who was standing in the midst of that tree. And my companions were amazed from that sight and I recognized him after a while. When I saw him, I dismounted from my mount and I disguised myself and I set out walking slowly until I came to that tree and I climbed onto its branches and I was higher than him and the gazelles. And he had let his hair hang down on his eyebrows and his eyes and he was grazing from the fruits of that tree and not raising his head so I quoted an example of a verse from his poetry...¹⁴¹</p>	<p>حدثني نوفل بن مساحق قال خرجت يوماً أتصيد الأروى ومعي جماعة من أصحابي حتى إذا كنت بناحية الحمى إذا أنا بأراكة فيها قطيع من الطباء فيها شخص إنسان يرى من خلل تلك الأراكة فتعجب أصحابي من ذلك وعرفته ساعة رأيته فنزلت عن دابتي وتخففت من ثيابي وخرجت أمشي رويداً حتى أنتيت الأراكة فرقيت على فنن منها وأشرفت عليه وعلى الطباء فإذا هو قد تدلى الشعر على حاجبيه وعينه وهو يرتعي من ثمر تلك الأراكة لا يرفع رأسه فتمثلت ببيت من شعره</p>
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This anecdote indicates that Nawfal does a kind of double take, repeating that he saw “a person, a human” who was grazing amongst the gazelles. The sight of Majnun blurs the human-animal boundary and inspires amazement (*ta‘ajjub*) in Nawfal and his companions, becoming a kind of marvel. Scholars of medieval Islamic philosophy, literature, and literary theory have discussed the deployment of marvels and of marvelous poetic speech as an incitement to wonder.¹⁴² Here Nawfal and his companions decide to approach Majnun due to their amazement, and they recite his poetry in a sense of admiration. The blurring of the human-animal boundary inherent to Majnun’s own

141. *Dīwan*, 252.

142. This point has been noted by Lara Harb, Michelle Karnes, and Travis Zadeh. All three scholars note the cognitive pleasure associated with wonder, although Harb notes the ways in which negative associations with the strange (*gharīb*) also accompany such enjoyment. See Harb, 5-6; Karnes, 212-213; Travis Zadeh, “The Wiles of Creation: Philosophy, Fiction, and the ‘*Ajā’ib* Tradition,” in *Middle Eastern Literatures* 13, no. 1 (2010): 29-30.

becoming wild here becomes a generative vision of wonder precisely because it hinges on identification of Majnun with the non-threatening, feminized gazelle.¹⁴³ No longer dehumanized as a beast, Majnun as gazelle allows for an alternative consideration of animals as kin who are more accepting of Majnun than his own people. Yet this vision nevertheless perpetuates Majnun's life on the edge of society, and it is only through his poetry that Majnun becomes fully recognizable as human. Although Majnun's mad behavior finds acceptance amongst animals in ways that can inspire awe, it is this same mad behavior that perpetuates a cycle of exclusion from human society.

VI. Rationality, animality, and the boundaries of belonging

Majnun's life on the edge of society is perpetuated by a fascination with his poetry and fear of his animality, which eventually causes his death. Yet not all of Majnun's non-normative behaviors evoke fear or detract from the perception of him as a member of human society. Throughout the anecdotes, various speakers encounter Majnun in the nude, and when there is an attempt to clothe him, bystanders identify him and state, indifferently, that he does not wear clothes.¹⁴⁴ Majnun likewise engages in other behaviors such as drawing in the sand and talking to

143. The identification of Majnun with a gazelle could also be informed by Nawfal's gaze, which feminizes Majnun as a kind of object of desire.

144. The trope of Majnun's nudity appears in Ibn Qutayba, and can be seen in the following anecdotes in the *Dīwan*:

ثم أمر له أبو عيسى بأثواب سرية ودرهم كثيرة فقلنا أيد الله الأمير إنه لمجنون ما يلبس ثوباً إلا قده ورماه بعد عنه

Then Abū 'Īsā commanded him to get dressed in rare clothes and expensive clothes and we said: may God strengthen you oh Amir, for that is Majnun and he does not wear clothes except his stature and he tossed it far from him....

وقال الوالبي ثم ولي عليهم نوفل بن مساحق قال فبينما نوفل في بعض طريقه إذ مر برجل عريان كأملح ما يكون من الرجال وأجلهم وهو قاعد يلعب بالتراب قد جمع العظام حوله فدنا منه فقال والله ما رأيت شيئاً أعجب من أمر هذا الرجل. يا غلام اطرح عليه ثوباً فقال له بعض أصحابه أتدري من هذا؟ قال لا. قال هذا مجنون بني عامر قال نوفل والله قد كنت أحبه وأحب لقاءه

Al-Walībī said, "Then Nawfal ibn Musāḥiq was befriending us and he said that when he was in some of his territory, he came across a naked man who was the most handsome of what there was of men and the most beautiful of them who was sitting and playing with the dirt. The elders gathered around him and he approached him and said: by God I never saw anything stranger than the affairs of this man! Oh servant, throw him clothes. And some of his companions

animals, which do not seem to bother anyone even if such behavior is associated with madness (*junūn*) or devilish insinuation (*waswasa*).¹⁴⁵ Such affordances are not offered to Layla who is likewise affected by *ishq*, and when she displays mad behavior such as crying and fainting, she is asked if she has forgotten a proper respect of the divine.¹⁴⁶ Majnun's poetry provides something of value to the community, which amplifies an intrinsic tolerance toward mad behavior of

said to him: do you know who that is? He said, no. They said: That is Majnun of the tribe of 'Amir. Nawfal said: by God I love that I came across him. See *Dīwan*, 167 and 198, and Ibn Qutayba, 374.

145.

وقال ذلك بعضهم كان المجنون إذا غلبه لاجع الهوى يمر إلى رمل بآثار المنازل التي كانت ليلي تسكنها مرة يلصق الأحشاء بكثبان الرمل ويتقلب عليه ويبكي

—
And some of them said that whenever the burning of passion would conquer Majnun, he would walk over to sand that had the traces of Layla's temporary stopping places and he would stick his insides to the sand dunes and writhe about in it and cry. *Dīwan*, 266. For more examples of Majnun playing in the sand, see *Dīwan*, 248.

أقول لظبي مرَّ بي وهو راتع
أأنت أخو ليلي فقال يُقالُ

أيا شيبه ليلي إن ليلي مريضة
وأنت صحيح إن ذا لمحال

—
(Majnun says) I say to a gazelle that was passing by me grazing
Are you the brother of Layla and it said: it is said

Oh semblance of Layla, indeed Layla is sick
And you are well, that is indeed impossible

This seems to be the only instance wherein an animal (allegedly) speaks back to Majnun. It notably blurs the boundary further of the gazelle being potentially mistaken by the beloved. In other instances (which I do not quote here for the sake of brevity), Majnun speaks with a crow, doves, sand grouse, spider, and eagle. For the gazelle anecdote, see *Dīwan*, 151. For other instances, see *Dīwan*, 125, 129, 156, 230, 233, 238, 279.

146. One anecdote narrates how a man comes across Layla without knowing her identity. The man relates that he has just come across Majnun's father, who laments his son's state in the wilderness, and then he proceeds to recite some of Majnun's poetry. Layla begins to cry ecstatically, and the man states:

قال فوالله ما أتممت البيتين حتى شهقت شهقة وسقطت على وجهها وجعلت تبكي حتى قلت إن كبدها قد تصدعت فقلت يا هذه أما تتقين الله الذي إليه معادك فسليه أن يجمع بينك وبين ابن عمك فما عقلت ما قلت لها

—
By God I had not finished two lines until she brayed like a donkey and fell upon her face and began crying until I said that her liver was cracking and I said: what is this, do you not fear God? To him is your return. And ask him to bring together you and your cousin. And she did not comprehend what I said to her. *Dīwan*, 291.

masculine actors that stems from popular views of madness in the late antique milieu of the Arabian Peninsula as evidenced by the Qur'an and *sīra*.

However, many anecdotes interpret Majnun's loss of rationality itself as repulsive, an interpretation which connects his loss of rationality with a description of his life amongst wild beasts. Such an interpretation arises as Majnun becomes more permanently accustomed to life in the wilderness after numerous failed attempts of resolving the kinship issues that keep him from Layla. His mad behavior intensifies, as can be seen in the following anecdote:

<p>Then he set out on his way and longing increased in him and he was not wearing any shirt without making holes in it nor any armor without tearing it and he renounced speaking with people and did not comprehend anything. His core had been stolen from him and sorrows and worries seized him and madness permeated him and the abominable matter overcame him. And if Layla was recalled to him his rationality/intellect returned to him and he recovered from his loss of consciousness and his afflictions went far from him and if recollection of her was cut off he returned to his delusions (<i>waswāsi-hi</i>) and his bad condition and he likes the company of the beasts and he becomes calm with them and he breathes the wind coming from the Najd.¹⁴⁷</p>	<p>ثم مضى على وجهه واشتد به الشوق فكان لا يلبس قميصاً إلا خرقة ولا درعاً إلا مزقه وترك محادثة الناس لا يفقه شيئاً، قد اختلس ليه واختطفته الأحزان والكرب وخامرته الجنون وعلاه الأمر الفظيع، فإذا ذكرت ليلى أب إليه عقله وأفاق من غشيته وتجلت عنه غمومه، فإذا قطع ذكرها عاد إلى وسواسه وسوء حاله يأنس بالوحوش ويستريح إليهن ويتنسم الريح من تلقاء نجد</p>
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Majnun's madness is here described as progressing from not wearing clothes to renouncing speaking to becoming accustomed (*ya 'nasu*) to life amongst beasts. The deployment of this verb for beasts—a verb which shares a root with the Arabic word for “human” (*insān*)—signals a reversal of expectations, which is foreshadowed by language that makes value judgements on Majnun's loss of rationality as “an abominable matter” that results in his “bad condition.” This anecdote resonates with contemporary medical knowledge of *'ishq* as a disease of the brain that leads to delusions (*waswās*), and the mention of Layla's name signals a desire to cure him. Majnun's speech acts are heard as delusional or marked by the demonic through associations with

147. *Dīwan*, 198.

devilish whisperings (*waswasa*), which differs from how prophets were heard as supernaturally inspired yet kept from the demonic, as evidenced by the Qur'an and *sīra*. The tolerance for Majnun's mad behavior only went so far, and an othering of Majnun's animality creeps in once there is judgement placed on the dwindling of his rationality.¹⁴⁸

Yet the fact that Layla's name serves as a bridge for Majnun regaining rationality indicates how Majnun's madness wavers prior to his taking up permanent residence amongst the beasts. The community often uses this temporary cure so that they can gather more of Majnun's poetry, which provides them with something of value. Once Majnun recites poetry, the community views him differently, as can be seen in the following anecdote:

<p>Abū Bakr al-Wālibī said that when he was passing by his paternal uncle's tribe, they were coming up to him and mocking him and laughing at him saying: how is Layla? And how is your love for her? And when Layla was recalled to him his rationality returned to him and he sat and conversed with them and recited for them some of what he had said about her in poetry, and they were saying by God there is not madness in him and indeed he is rational.¹⁴⁹</p>	<p>قال أبو بكر الوالبي ثم إنه كان يمر ببني عمه وكانوا معادين له يسخرون منه و يهزؤون به ويقولون له كيف ليلى؟ وكيف حبك لها؟ فإذا ذكرت له ليلى رجع إليه عقله فيجلس إليهم ويحدثهم وينشدهم ما قال فيها من الشعر فيقولون والله ما به جنون وإنه لعاقل.</p>
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Here Majnun is “cured” by recollection of Layla's name, and his rationality results in his ability to be social and speak poetry about her. This ability is likewise facilitated by a shift in treatment by his family who stop mocking and laughing at him and declare, after hearing the poetry, that he

148. This detail of Majnun's loss of rationality coinciding with a negative view of his animality also reaches mythic heights in the *Book of Songs*:

لما قال مجنون بني عامر: قضاها لغيري وابتلاني بحبها / فهلا بشئ غير ليلى ابتلانيا
نودى في الليل أنت المتسخط لقضاء الله والمعترض في أحكامه! واختلس عقله فتوحش منذ تلك الليلة وذهب مع الوحش على وجهه

When Majnūn of Banū 'Āmir said, “He decreed her to other than me and afflicted me with love of her / was there not anything other than Laylā with which to afflict me?” it was called out in the night, “You who are resentful of the decree of God and rebellious of his commands!” And his mind was stolen and he became wild (*yatawahḥasha*) since that night and went about with the wild beasts madly. See al-*Iṣfahānī* vol. 2, 68.

149. *Dīwan*, 185.

is a rational person (*‘āqil*). Rationality ultimately serves as a prerequisite for joining the community, and the perception of Majnun as rational facilitates his ability to speak poems that place his rhetorical skill on display.¹⁵⁰ In these cases, Majnun is seen once again not only as a human, but also as a man whose power can be detected from his rhetorical skill in ways similar to the power afforded to pre-Islamic poets.

Yet this cure is only temporary, and many anecdotes often describe how doctors attempt to cure Majnun, which further places on display resonances with contemporaneous medical knowledge. There are attempts to cure Majnun through other means such as religion, and one of the most poignant scenes that recurs throughout different versions of the legend is Majnun’s father’s attempt to cure his son by bringing him to the Ka‘ba. The *Dīwan* offers an additional extended episode of Majnun’s father bringing his son to Babel in an attempt to find doctors to cure him.¹⁵¹ This episode, which indicates a general understanding of love as a disease rather than a specific focus on *‘ishq*, indicates that the doctors of Babel attempt to cure Majnun by “making him drink potion after potion,” which Majnun eventually rejects by stating that he would rather die of the “disease of ardent longing (*dā‘a al-ṣabāba*).”¹⁵² The fact of love being a disease of the brain

150. Ibn Qutayba offers a similar take:

ثم نشأ وكان يجلس معها ويتحدث في ناس من قومه وكان جميلاً ظريفاً راويةً للاشعار حلو الحديث فكانت تعرض عنه وتقبل على غيره بالحديث حتى شق ذلك عليه... ثم تمادى به الأمر حتى ذهب عقله وهام مع الوحش فكان لا يلبس ثوباً الا خرقه ولا يعقل شيئاً الا ان تذكر له ليلي فاذا ذكرت ثاب وتحدث عنها ولا يسقط حرفاً

When he grew up, he was sitting with her and speaking with her and some of his people. He was handsome and charming as he related poems and sweet conversation, but she was turning from him and choosing to converse with others and he became troubled by this... Then the matter persisted in him until his rationality dwindled (*dhahaba ‘aqli-hi*) and he wandered with the beasts (*hāma ma’ al-wahsh*). He was not wearing clothes without tearing them nor comprehending anything, except when Layla was recalled to him. Then he would come to his senses and speak about her without dropping a letter. Ibn Qutayba, 374.

151. Perhaps Babel is here associated with medicine due to existing associations with magic. In the Qur’an, two fallen angels, Hārūt and Mārūt, teach people magic in the city of Babylon. See Q 2:102.

152.

reverberates throughout the anecdotes, and the figure of the doctor serves as the last chance attempt of restoring Majnun's rationality.

The *Dīwan* further comments on the prerequisite of rationality for human communal belonging by foregrounding Majnun's critiques in poetry of potentially coercive medical practices. One anecdote, for example, interrupts what appears to be forced treatment with a poem from Majnun that criticizes doctors who have attempted to treat him. This anecdote begins with Majnun's father once again seeking treatment for his son:

ذكر أبو بكر أن أباه الملوّح أتاه وحمله إلى بابل ليعالجه وذلك قبل أن نزل به ما نزل من الحب الشديد وسورة العشق فحمله على ناقته فلما أمعنا في السير ذكر المجنون ليلى... قال فبكى أبوه رحمة له وقال يا بني هل لك أن تسلو بغيرها؟ فقال والله ما أهتدي إلى السلو سبيلاً وإنني لفي أعظم الكرب والبلاء... قال أبو بكر الوالبي فبلغني أنه دخل بابل واجتمع عليه المطببون وأقبلوا يسقونه الشربة بعد الشربة

...
وإن ميتاً من داء الصبابة بلّغا
شبيهة ضوء الشمس مني سلامياً

Abū Bakr recalled that his father al-Mulawwaḥ came to him and carried him to Babel to treat him and that was before what befell upon him from love (*al-ḥubb*) and the assault of *ishq*. He brought him on his camel and when they devoted their efforts to going Majnun recalled Layla... Then his father cried out of compassion for him and he said: Oh my dear son, can you take solace in someone other than her? And Majnun said: by God, I am not guided on the path to solace, for in me is the greatest of worries and affliction. Abū Bakr al-Wālibī said: Then it reached me that he entered Babel and gathered doctors around him and they approached making him drink potion after potion...(and Majnun said)

And if I died from the disease of ardent longing send
my regards to the semblance of sunshine. *Dīwan*, 82-90.

Abū Bakr recalled that some doctors passed by their tribe and Majnun’s father asked one of them: what do you treat? He said I treat all of those enchanted or mad. He said to him: Stop, go to my son who wanders in the desert. So they went out to seek him and they were still seeking him until they overpowered him and made him enter into treatment. And one began giving him a drink and treating him and when he thought it was too much Majnun began reciting a poem:

Alas, oh doctor of jinn woe unto you who treats me for indeed my disease defied the doctor of man.

I went to a doctor of men, a medical sheikh in Mecca, where he gave me trustworthy medicine.

And I said to him oh uncle it’s your verdict so proceed whether what you discover oh uncle is what’s in me.

He plunged cold drink in a glass, and flung solace in it and made me drink.

And I said while sick people were gathering around him, “I take refuge in the lord of men from you and your medicine.”

And he said, “The cure of the soul is to for you to attach your insides in the insides of the one you love, then you will be free.”

Then the doctor said that oh god that is a lover (*‘āshiq*) and his medicine is to stick the inside in the insides of one he loves and Majnun was biting his lips and tongue until he left him and went on his way.¹⁵³

وذكر أبو بكر قال مر بعض الأطباء بحيمه فسأله أبو
المجنون ما تعالج قال أعالج كل مسحور ومجنون فقال له
مكانك حتى اتيك بابتن لي يهيم في الصحارى فخرجوا في
طلبه فما زالوا يطلبونه حتى قدروا عليه وأدخلوه إلى
المعالج فأقبل يسقيه ويعالجه فلما أكثر أنشأ المجنون يقول

ألا يا طبيبَ الجنِّ وَبِحَكَ دَاوَنِي
فَإِنَّ طَبِيبَ الْإِنْسِ أَعْيَاهُ دَانِيَا

أَتَيْتُ طَبِيبَ الْإِنْسِ شَيْخًا مُدَاوِيَا
بِمَكَّةَ يُعْطِي فِي الدَّوَاءِ الْأَمَانِيَا

فَقُلْتُ لَهُ يَا عَمَّ حُكْمَكَ فَاحْتَكِمِ
إِذَا مَا كَشَفْتَ الْيَوْمَ يَا عَمُّ مَا بِيَا

فَخَاضَ شَرَابًا بَارِدًا فِي زُجَاجَةٍ
وَطَرَحَ فِيهِ سَلْوَةً وَسَقَانِيَا

فَقُلْتُ وَمَرَضِي النَّاسَ يَسْعَوْنَ حَوْلَهُ
أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ النَّاسِ مِنْكَ مُدَاوِيَا

فَقَالَ شِفَاءُ النَّفْسِ أَنْ تُلْصِقَ الْحَشَا
بِأَحْشَاءِ مَنْ تَهْوَى إِذَا كُنْتَ خَالِيَا

فقال الطبيب هذا وأيم الله عاشق ودواؤه تلصيق الحشا
بأحشاء من يهوى والمجنون يعض شفته ولسانه حتى خلفه
ومضى على وجهه.

As with the *sīra*, this anecdote places on display an association of madness with magic circulating in the early Islamic milieu as the doctor claims that he treats all of those “enchanted or mad (*mashūrūn aw majnūnūn*).” Once the doctors find Majnun in the desert, they overpower him—seemingly through embodied force—and they make him drink a remedy. Majnun’s poem then recounts how a doctor in Mecca had already tried to cure him and failed, portrays this doctor as a

153. *Dīwan*, 300.

figure of authority comparable to a religious leader by referring to him as “a medical sheikh (*sheikhan mudāwīan*),” and then proceeds to undermine this authority by claiming to take refuge from him and his medicine. This specific invocation of taking “refuge in the lord of men” (*aūdhu bi rabbi l-nāss*) recalls the Qur’anic invocation at the beginning of Sura an-Nāss (14) to the prophet Muhammad to take refuge in the divine from satan, and thus implies that the doctor is a kind of satan himself, reversing the directionality of the demonic.¹⁵⁴ The poetic critique ends with a recommendation of the cure of sexual intercourse, which is then rejected by Majnun as he begins to engage in more violent behaviors of self-harm. This shows not only the dynamism with which the anecdotes provide additional information to the poetic snippets as Gruendler has noted in her approach to *akhbār*, but also how the anecdotes offer a different perspective through their illumination of Majnun’s physical state and actions.¹⁵⁵ Rather than only appearing as a defiant madman-critic of medical authority, this anecdote reveals Majnun to simultaneously be afflicted by a refusal to seek help.

Several times the anecdotes note the gravity with which Majnun is afflicted by the disease of *‘ishq*, and the failure to treat it results, eventually, in his permanent relocation to the wilderness. There, Majnun occasionally seeks out help from doctors whose responses indicate the very real threat that *‘ishq* poses.¹⁵⁶ As the attempts to cure him repeatedly fail, Majnun further “becomes wild (*tawahhush*),” and his more serious loss of rationality coincides with an interpretation of him

154. Q 14:1.

155. Gruendler, “Verse and Taxes,” 90-96.

156.

فلما فرغ من شعره مر على وجهه عريانا ما يلوي على شيء فمر بطببيين وهما جاسان على قارة الطريق فدنا منهما وقال هل فيكما من يداويني؟ قالوا ومن أنت؟ قال أنا المجنون المستهام بليلي فقالا والله ما للعشاق عندنا دواء

—
And when he was finished with his poem, Majnun set out on his way naked not paying attention to anything and then he passed by two doctors while they were sitting in the middle of the path and he approached them and said: is there one amongst you who can treat me? They said: and who are you? He said: I am Majnun, the one madly in love with Layla. They said: by God, we do not have medicine for the lovers (*‘ushshāq*). *Dīwan*, 228.

as a kind of beastly animal that should be kept at a distance.¹⁵⁷ Majnun's becoming wild likewise marks the final stage of his separation from human community, revealing how rationality is a constituent factor for membership in his human society. Once he is fully wild, the community nevertheless continues to seek his poetry, which contributes to a vicious cycle that perpetuates Majnun's existence on the edge.

The scene of Majnun's death brings together the various factors that perpetuate Majnun's life on the edge, and it places on display the violence of Majnun's own self-harm as well as the human community's repeated exclusions. The *Dīwan* builds up this moment for several pages as a man who admires Majnun's poetry goes to seek him in the desert and attempts to coerce a particular *qaṣīda* out of Majnun that his community wants.¹⁵⁸ The admiring man recalls poetry of other famous love-poets, which eventually convinces Majnun to be sociable and which shows how poetry remains the bridge through which Majnun both gains communal acceptance and displays power. Yet shortly thereafter, the anecdote reports that Majnun vanishes:

157. See, for example, this anecdote from an episode in the *Dīwan* close to Majnun's death:

ذكر أن المجنون لما تراققت علته إلى صعوبة وعسر علاجه وأعيى الأطباء دواؤه ولم ينجع فيه الدواء وساءت حاله وصار إلى
توحشه في الصحارى

—
It was recalled that Majnun when his illness had made him terribly thin, it became difficult to treat him and his maladies. Doctors tried and no medication was useful for it and his state worsened and he began to become wild (*tawahhush*) in the desert. *Dīwan*, 295.

158. *Dīwan*, 319.

When he had finished this *qaṣīda*, a gazelle appeared before him and he rushed to it and he turned to me and said: greetings to you, I do not see you looking for me after this ever.

The Arab said: Then I went to the tribe and I informed them of his news and I recited for them the *qaṣīda* and they wrote it down. And when the morning came I set out and sought to find him and I was not able to so I went back to the tribe and I informed them and his brothers and the tribe of his paternal uncle and the people of his house came and we searched for him day and night, and when we began to come down to a valley full of stones when we suddenly found him dead in it and we cried for him and raised our voices in tears and wailing and we carried him to the tribe and the estranged ones (*al-gharīb*) and close friends and all who had heard his name cried for him for a day then we washed him and put him in a shroud and buried him next to Layla's tomb may god have mercy on them both and pardon them. And this is all of what has reached us from the reports of Majnun and his poetry, except for that which was left out from what we did not write because it was altered from his *qaṣīda* or report and God the most high knows best.¹⁵⁹

قال الأعرابي: فلما تم هذه القصيدة ظهرت له ظبية فوثب إليها والتفت إلي وقال: السلام عليك فما أراك تراني بعدها أبداً.

قال الأعرابي: ثم مضيت إلى الحي فأخبرتهم خبره وأنشدتهم القصيدة فكتبوها فلما كان من الغد بكرت إليه وطلبتة فلم أقدر عليه فانصرفت إلى الحي وأخبرتهم فقام إخوته وبنو عمه وأهل بيته فطلبناه يومنا وليلتنا فلما أصبحنا هبطنا إلى واد كثير الحجارة فإذا نحن به ميتاً بينه فبكينا عليه وعلت أصواتنا بالبكاء والنحيب وحملناه إلى الحي فبكى عليه الغريب والحميم وكل من سمع باسمه يوماً ثم غسلناه وكفناه ودفناه إلى جانب قبر ليلي رحمهما الله وغفر لهما فهذه جملة ما تناهى إلينا من أخبار المجنون وأشعاره وما كان خارجاً عما لم نكتبه فإنها منحولة عليه من قصيدة أو خبر والله تبارك وتعالى أعلم

The appearance of the gazelle gives a glimpse of the possibility of a final interpretation of Majnun's life amongst animals as one amongst alternative kin, which is affirmed by Majnun's own awe-inspiring final remark.¹⁶⁰ This creates a marvel around Majnun's death that simultaneously insinuates mystical meaning may be attached to his character as the reader is to look beyond the immediacy of death itself. Once again, the image of Majnun as a kind of gazelle allows for animalistic aspects of his character to be understood instead as elegant or graceful, and the reader is left with an imagining of Majnun's communing with animals as generative of a vision of a

159. *Dīwan*, 337.

160. Ibn Qutayba offers a highly similar ending, except it is a group of gazelles and Majnun has no final comment. Similarly, however, Majnun's family finds him dead in a valley full of stones. See Ibn Qutayba, 379. The gazelle could be understood in ways similar to how Boissoron has analyzed the role of a "commensal" animal, with a commensal relationship being defined as when "two organisms mutually benefit without adversely affecting each other." See Boissoron, *Afro-Dog*, xxiii.

different kind of society.¹⁶¹ Yet it would not be until later versions, notably Neẓāmī's *Layli and Majnun*, where details of this different society are given that further invert predator-prey relations and that speculate about interspecies forms of kinship. Having obtained the poem he wanted, the admirer returns to the tribe, yet the peace of this closure is disturbed by the family's subsequent inability to find Majnun and the eventual, horrid sight of his body. It seems likely that Majnun's mad behaviors, behaviors such as biting his lips and tearing at his skin and clothes may have given way to what resembles suicide. This final anecdote, however, resists such a totalizing interpretation by claiming that Majnun is simply "found dead." The neatness of closure of Majnun's life and of the *Dīwan* itself remains haunted by the severity of Majnun's madness, which is linked to the severity of *'ishq*'s effects on him and which gives way to his own animality. Violence lingers, and it is not only the violence of Majnun's self-harm, but also the violence of the human society's repeated exclusion of Majnun when he failed to appear as rational or to abide by societal kinship regulations.

VII. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how Majnun as a literary figure emerges out of a specific context that offered mixed approaches to madness: one view, as evidenced by the Qur'an and *sīra* held that madness, when embodied masculine, was societally acceptable due to associations of madness with prophecy. Yet another view, as evidenced by early Islamic medicine, held the behaviors inspired by *'ishq* as a mental disease that needed to be cured. This backdrop, alongside the backdrop of the prevalence of animals in pre-Islamic poetry, contextualizes the ambivalence of the early literary sources' descriptions of Majnun and his animality. At times Majnun himself

161. I analyze Neẓāmī's depiction of this alternative society in chapter three. On worldbuilding with animals in medieval texts, see Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Inventing with Animals in the Middle Ages," 39-40.

becomes like a gazelle, which creates a sense of awe around his character and which foregrounds the notion of animals as alternative kin. Yet at other times, Majnun appears as more overtly beastly and his self-harming behaviors resemble the violence associated with beastly animals. Whether viewed with intrigue or disgust, Majnun is kept on the edge of human society because he is perceived to lack the ability to behave fully rationally.¹⁶² His life amongst the animals and exclusion from human society underscores the social construction of rationality itself, which he as one affected by *'ishq* and which the animals intrinsically are thought to lack.

Several times throughout this chapter I have noted how various members of Majnun's society continue to admire him for his poetry. As with madness and prophecy, poetry carried a connotation of supernatural inspiration that allowed for acceptance of non-rational behavior. Yet the poet, unlike the madman, did not simultaneously carry associations with the demonic, and Majnun's role as poet differentiates him from his animal companions insofar as he retains the possibility of self-representation through speech. Poetry serves as Majnun's bridge to continued human contact as we have seen throughout the various anecdotes of this chapter. Poetry also serves as the means through which Majnun offers a more thorough critique of the kinship relations that uphold his society, and it is to Majnun's role as a poet that I now turn.

162. Bruce's comments of madness as a "metaphysical zone, a location outside the the gentrified precincts and patrolled borders of Reason," has helped me think through the relationship between spatiality and madness that underlies Majnun's location on the edge of human society. See Bruce, 17.

Chapter 2: Love that binds: Kinship, sacrifice, and conceptualizing *‘ishq*

A popularly cited hadith (saying of the prophet Muhammad) on love states that “one who loves (*‘ashiqa*) and stays chaste, and hides his love and dies, dies a martyr.” This hadith, not found in the generally agreed upon hadith collections and instead preserved by the jurist and litterateur Muḥammad ibn Dāwūd (d. 908-9), offers a window into the severity with which many medieval Muslim authors considered the effects of a particular kind of love associated with the term *‘ishq*.¹ Often translated as radical love, passionate love, mystical/romantic love, or *érōs*, *‘ishq* in this hadith resembles as an embodied practice that requires chastity and secrecy, and that ultimately gives way to death sanctioned as martyrdom.² This hadith’s recourse to martyrdom signals how Ibn Dāwūd and early Abbasid literati like him appealed not only to religious authority, but also to early Arabic poetry as a means of legitimizing their views against the medical opinions that I explored in the last chapter. Indeed, the idea of lovers’ extreme suffering that leads to death resonates with the behavior of a legendary group of poet-lovers associated with the *‘udhrī* style—a group of seventh-century poets whose work was retroactively attributed to just after the arrival of Islam, and whose lyrics speak of longing for an unobtainable beloved that lasts until death.³ As paradigmatic examples, *‘udhrī* poets remain intertextually relevant for Abbasid courtly circles as

1.

من عشق ففعل فكتمه فمات فهو شهيد

Ibn Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-Zahra*, edited by A. R. Nykl and Ibrahim Tuqan (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1932), 66.

2. I leave *‘ishq* untranslated to historicize its usage against premodern Islamic discourses on desire. These discourses, informed by Islamic approaches to asceticism, marriage, and sexual ethics, make different demands on the body than ancient or medieval Christian authors’ deployment of terminology on the erotic.

3. Possible etymologies of the term *‘udhrī* include a relation to the *‘Udhra* family and/or a thematic association with virginity (*‘udhra*). Common names associated with this style are Jamīl Buthayna, Kuthayyir ‘Azza, and Majnun Laylā. Given that there is no historical evidence of these poets’ lives, Ruqayya Khan and Renate Jacobi have detailed the ways in which *al-ḥubb al-‘udhrī* (*‘udhrī* love) represents a later Abbasid imagining of Bedouin society. See Khan, *Bedouin and ‘Abbāsīd Cultural Identities: The Arabic Majnun Laylā Story*, 49-53.

well as for poets from al-Andalus to South Asia and beyond, authoritatively backing an understanding of *‘ishq* as a practice of chaste desire.

As one of these legendary *‘udhrī* poet-lovers, Majnun as a literary figure was eventually valorized by courtly circles as an exemplary poet-lover because his story includes more extreme forms of suffering that lead to madness and death. Given his position as a madman, Majnun embodies the ethos of the above hadith insofar as his devotion lasts unto death, yet the legend that grows around him foregrounds one significant way in which he differs from the hadith’s requirements: instead of hiding it, Majnun speaks and publicly performs his passion at nearly every opportunity. This chapter analyzes Majnun’s heretical performances of passion, arguing that literary depictions of his behavior critique normative expectations of kinship relations. I draw from the work of Eve Sedgwick to unpack Majnun’s poet-lover masculinity within the representation of a society that mandates heterosexuality, which is a system that results in competitive homosocial bonds between men as well as in the traffic in women through its marriage economy.⁴ It is crucial to note, however, that the legend’s representation of such a societal system—namely a prior “Arab” or “Bedouin” society wherein patriarchal structures thrive—is precisely a *representation* and should not be read as historically accurate and certainly not as trans-historically revealing of some kind of essentially “Arab” trait.⁵ The former would be an overstatement at best and the latter relies

4. I follow Eve Sedgwick in relying upon Gayle Rubin’s reformulation of the phrase “traffic in women” towards an understanding of how the subordination of women can be seen as a product of male-dominated kinship systems. As such, obligatory heterosexuality has negative effects on women as well as on men with desires that lie beyond the pail of homosocial bonds that, as Sedgwick demonstrates, are sanctioned as compulsory by the marriage economy of any given society. See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, 3 and 25-27 and Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex,” in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, 175-180.

5. Ruqayya Khan has pointed out the potentially racializing dimensions of this form of representation in the *Book of Songs*, and I build on her approach of reading these anecdotes as portraying a reductive vision of “the Bedouin” and their mores. See Khan, *Bedouin and ‘Abbāsīd Cultural Identities*, 4 and chapter 1.

upon naturalizing orientalist and racializing tropes. In this fictionalized society, Majnun's performance of actual desire for a woman who he is not and cannot be married to critiques a kinship structure that traffics in women by their being, primarily, commodified means through which familial relations are solidified through marriage.⁶ I draw not only from Sedgwick's structural analysis of the role of homosocial desire within obligatory heterosexuality and male-dominated kinship systems, but also from her astute warnings about cultural contingency.⁷ In other words, while I think aspects of the kinship system undergirding the legend of Layla and Majnun such as homosocial bonding through poetic rivalry as well as the detrimental effects of any *actual* desire for a woman resemble what Sedgwick has analyzed as byproducts of societies that traffic in women, I dispense with her engagement with class conflict in industrializing societies and the naming of homosexuality specific to eighteenth and nineteenth century England.⁸ Instead, I ground my literary analysis in a contextualization of historical debates on *'ishq* in order to approach this

6. Such a society is concerned with women primarily as a means for preserving honor and progeny. For example, the anonymous *Dīwan* repeatedly asserts that an unnamed Sultan asks for Majnun's blood on behalf of Layla's family. In one poignant moment where Majnun is close to reuniting with Layla thanks to the help of a local nobleman, Nawfal, the *Dīwan* asserts that Layla's family "met them with pointed swords and they said, 'By God, Majnun will never enter our house ever, and the Sultan has asked for his blood.'" See *Dīwān*, 208-209.

7. Sedgwick defines her approach as both in and beyond historically attuned analysis, declaring that "the structure of homosocial continuums is culturally contingent...nevertheless, we may take as an explicit axiom that the historically differential shapes of male and female homosociality—much as they themselves may vary over time—will always be articulations and mechanisms of the enduring inequality of power between women and men." I find this approach to be helpful for locating a nuanced critique of oppression within feminist analysis. See Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 5.

8. For example, Sedgwick emphasizes a radical disruption between the continuum of homosocial bonds and homosexuality for men in Victorian England and twentieth-century American society that she contrasts to the homoerotic culture of Ancient Greek society. Moreover, Sedgwick admits that her focus on these time periods may "leave the relation of my discussion to non-European cultures and people entirely unspecified." Yet given the work of Khaled El Rouyaheb, Kecia Ali, and others I think it is possible to begin specifying the role of homosocial bonds and the traffic in women in the representation of premodern Islamic society that serves as the backdrop of the legend of Layla and Majnun. These scholars have analyzed the legal constraints of marital practices, and this article aims to add to such analysis by focusing on literature and literary-historical formulations of *'ishq*. See Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 19 and 27, and Khaled El Rouyaheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 13-25.

kinship system and Majnun's role as lover (*'ashiq*) within it with a paradigm more suitable to the medieval Islamic world.

I open this chapter with an overview on historical debates on *'ishq*, pointing to how courtly authors contested medical views as well as the philosophical and mystical underpinnings of *'ishq* becoming such a prominent term in the Persianate world prior to *Layli and Majnun*. Turning to literary analysis, I show how Majnun in Ibn Qutayba's (d. 889) *Book of Poetry and Poets* and the *Dīwan* fits into a larger category of poet-lovers whose masculinity is primarily defined by rhetorical skill alongside suffering undertaken on behalf of a beloved. This poet-lover masculinity reflects how contemporaneous courtly discourse understood *'ishq* as a kind of illness that need not be cured, and Neẓāmī's *Layli and Majnun* inherits and represents such a view in Majnun's speeches in the first half of the work that link his power to his rhetorical abilities. Yet this is only one idiom on *'ishq* that *Layli and Majnun* incorporates, and in the third section I provide a series of close readings from the text that highlight how it is engaged with the fertile terrain of prior debates on the term's polysemy. In this section, I argue that *Layli and Majnun* pulls on these various possibilities as it offers a novel formulation of *'ishq* that foregrounds its propensity to lead to corporeal transformation. I tease out the implications of this conception over three chapters. In this chapter, I first introduce Neẓāmī's historical setting as well as how *Layli and Majnun* wrestles with its inheritances by claiming explicit fictionality and altering the dichotomous relationship between *'ishq* and rationality (*'aql*) embedded in the Arabic material.⁹ I then dive into textual

9. I draw from Julie Orlemanski's "hermeneutic conception of fictionality" that "assumes its determination in encountering the record of past thought and action." In Neẓāmī's case, I maintain that his introductory comments to *Layli and Majnun* serve as a deliberate undermining of his sources in a way akin to Arabic authors' deliberate undermining of the *isnād* (chain of transmission). Though this is not the only marker of *Layli and Majnun*'s fictionality (others might include the perspectives of narratorial onlookers, dream accounts, and character interiority), it highlights inventiveness and indifference to accurate recollection. See Orlemanski, "Who Has Fiction? Modernity, Fictionality, and the Middle Ages," in *New Literary History* Volume 50, Number 2 (Spring 2019): 143-148.

analysis of *Layli and Majnun*, offering a section on passages that show *‘ishq*’s conceptual work through its textual proximity to embodiment, power, and transferability. As a force that transforms bodies, *‘ishq* carries resonances of contemporary mystical discourse that I explore further in chapter three as well as ethical implications that I highlight in chapter four. In other words, unlike the Arabic poetry attributed to Majnun that uses *‘ishq* interchangeably with other words for love, I argue that *Layli and Majnun* explicitly theorizes *‘ishq* as a force that transform bodies, an approach that resonates with contemporaneous Persianate deployment of the term to describe mystical transcendence insofar as *‘ishq* resembles a metaphysical force, and yet the textual emphasis on corporeal transformation indicates simultaneous engagement with medical and courtly resonances.

The textual emphasis on corporeal transformation places on display embodied effects of *‘ishq* on Majnun that include not only pain and suffering, but also laughter and pleasure. I analyze three episodes wherein Majnun’s embodied performance of *‘ishq* is placed on display—on the battlefield while trying to win Layla from her family, a trip to the Ka‘ba with his father who attempts to cure Majnun of *‘ishq*, and Majnun’s placing himself willingly in the ropes and chains of an old woman—wherein Majnun’s performances stall and critique a kinship system based on the traffic in women. In each of these episodes, Majnun performs consent to a kind of bondage that lies beyond his own society’s capacity to imagine kinship ties, namely, through an *actual* desire for a woman beyond the limitations of the marriage economy that lasts until death. Majnun’s performances utilize an Islamic understanding of willing sacrifice and sacrifice serves as the

sanctified means through which he overturns the authority of his father and finds pleasure in stalling the marriage economy.¹⁰

I. Historical Debates on *‘ishq*

‘Ishq as a concept became an important site for physicians, philosophers, poets, and others to negotiate the boundaries of what counts as “sexual,” and, in tandem, as “licit desire” in the medieval Islamic world. Although there is a historical arc to *‘ishq* becoming a widely debated topic by the twelfth century, this section subordinates linear progression to discourse analysis, highlighting how courtly authors respond to and interact with the authoritative, medical definitions of *‘ishq* explored in the last chapter. Often placed in a web of words such as love (*ḥubb*, *maḥabba*), passion (*hawā*), affinity (*mushākala*), intimacy (*ilf*), and yearning desire (*shawq*), *‘ishq* was further marked for poets and courtly authors by their general awareness of contemporaneous medical discourse that defined it as an illness of the brain. This medical classification and its localization in the brain follows ancient Greek medicine, however, the humoral causality of *‘ishq* was fully theorized in Arabic by thinkers such as Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 925 or 935), Ishāq ibn ‘Imrān (d. c. 903-909), Ibn al-Jazzār (d. 979) and Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037).¹¹ The nuance of this theoretical formulation offered an authoritative backdrop by which authors of other discourses recognized the severity of *‘ishq* and began specifying its conceptual difference from other terms for describing love, lust, and desire.

10. Historically, there have been different interpretations of the Qur’ānic version of the Abraham parable. Q 37:100-112 leaves it ambiguous as to which son (Ishmael or Isaac) was to be sacrificed by Abraham. My emphasis on consent is based on Majnun’s appeals to Ishmael (Ismail) as well as the fact that in the Qur’ān, unlike in Genesis 22, Abraham has a conversation with his son about the impending sacrifice. For a comparative discussion, see M. Shahid Alam, “Ishmael and Isaac: An Essay on the Divergent Moral Economies of the Qur’ān and Torah,” in *Islamic Studies* Vol. 51, no. 2 (summer 2012): 139-154.

11. For a fuller exploration of medical views, see chapter one.

Simultaneously, in poetics, a new way of speaking about love can be traced to a group of poets affiliated with the *‘udhrī* style, a purportedly Umayyad-era (661-750) group of poets who spoke *ghazals*, or short, monothematic poems often compared to the lyric. Possible etymologies of the term *‘udhrī* include a relation to the *‘udhra* family living in the Northwestern Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century and/or a thematic association with virginity (*‘udhra*), and common names associated with this style are Jamīl Buthayna, Kuthayyir ‘Azza, and Majnūn Laylā.¹² Each of these poets became retroactively known by a name that places their name in a construct of possession with their beloved’s name (Buthayna’s Jamīl, Layla’s Majnūn)—a practice which reflects the persona of these poets as lovers defined by their lifelong devotion to a single beloved. Renate Jacobi has compared the *‘udhrī* ghazal with the *mu‘allaqāt* (“hanging odes,” associated with the pre-Islamic period) poet’s erotic prelude (*nasīb*), arguing that both depict a sense of love lost, and yet the *mu‘allaqāt* poet’s emotions are located definitively in the past, whereas the *‘udhrī* poet speaks of a present romantic relationship that he carries into the future.¹³ Renate Jacobi’s thematic analysis highlights how *‘udhrī* poetry introduced to the early Islamic milieu an entirely new way of thinking about love as melancholic devotion that need not be overcome and that extends unto death.¹⁴ Bracketing historiographical questions surrounding these

12. See footnote 3.

13. Renate Jacobi, “Time and Reality in *Nasīb* and *Ghazal*,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 16 (1985): 16-17. Certainly, there are exceptions to such generalizations, and poets such as Dhu al-Rūmma (c. 735), dwell in remembering the beloved in ways that Michael Sells has likened to *‘udhrī* poetry, and whose work is in fact cited by Ibn Qutayba as similar to Majnun’s. See Sells, *Desert Tracings*, 68 and Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb al-shi‘r wa al-shu‘arā’*, 380.

14. Historiographical issues continue for poetry retroactively dated to the Umayyad period (661-750) due to a scarcity of texts. On issues of attribution of the *mu‘allaqāt*, see Abdulla el-Tayib, “Pre-Islamic Poetry,” 111-113 and J. Monroe, “Oral Composition in Pre-Islamic Poetry,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 3 (1972): 1-53. On the fragmented reception of Umayyad texts, see Khan, 34.

poets' lives, I follow Suzanne Stetkevych's approach and think of what is known about 'udhrī poets as "personae constructs of a mythic, folkloric, and archetypal nature."¹⁵

Poets and authors at the Abbasid (c. 750-1258) court began conceptualizing 'ishq and its physical ramifications out of examples drawn from the 'udhrī tradition alongside the backdrop of authoritative medical opinions. The litterateur Jāhiz's (d. 868-9) two treatises that elaborate on the subject—*Treatise on 'Ishq and Women (Risāla fi al-'ishq wa al-nisā')* and *Treatise on Songstresses (Risālat al-qiyān)*—draw explicitly and implicitly from the 'udhrī tradition. The latter treatise was written as a defense of owning songstresses (*qiyān*), a practice that was condemned by legal scholars of the time.¹⁶ Defending this practice as licit, Jāhiz cites the story of the 'udhrī poet Jamīl Buthayna as an authoritative source from the past that provides evidence for the permissibility of various kinds of non-sexual relations between the sexes by philologically defining Jamīl as a "visitor (*zīr*)" whose habit of visiting (*zīyara*) his beloved (who was married to another man) as normal for pre-Islamic times.¹⁷ Such a comment resonates with the ways in which

15. Stetkevych highlights how the genre of Arabic literary biography combined anecdotes (*akhbār*) and genealogies (*ansāb*) along with excerpts of poetry to construct these personae. Though debates about authenticity continue to varying degrees, Stetkevych notes how attributions often rely more on the popular and literary imagination as evidenced by the genre of literary biographies. See Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak*, 124-131.

16. Jāhiz refers to a group of legal scholars called the "Ḥashwīya," (from *ḥashw*, common people) who have historically been associated with traditionalists (*ahl al-ḥadīth*) that opposed Mu'tazili doctrine and who share with the Hanbalis an insistence on a literal interpretation of the sacred text. For more on the Ḥashwīya, see A. S. Halkin, "Hashwiya," in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 54, No 1 (Mar 1934), 1-29. Lois Giffen also notes that the *qiyān* were also a popular subject for other ninth-century authors such as al-Washshā' and al-Sarakhsī. See Lois Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love Among the Arabs: The Development of the Genre* (New York: New York University Press, 1971), 4.

17.

ويسمى المولع بذلك من الرجال الزير المشفق من الزيارة.

"Someone mad in love (*mūla'*) as such from amongst men was called a visitor (*zīr*), which is derived from the visit (*zīyara*)." Jāhiz, "Kitāb al-qiyān," in *Rasā'il al-Jāhiz* vol. 1, edited by Muhammad Basil 'Uyun al-Sud and 'Ubayd Allah ibn Hassan (Beirut: Manshūrāt Muḥammad 'Alī Bayḍūn, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 2000), 114. I have at times referenced the translation in Jim Colville, *Sobriety and Mirth: A Selection of the Shorter Writings of al-Jāhiz* (London: Kegan Paul Limited, 2002), 184.

many early Abbasid thinkers drew on a category of pre- and early Islamic ‘*arab*, a term whose usage more likely referred to “Bedouins” than a clearly delineated ethnic category of Arabs, as authoritative sources and underscores how ‘*udhrī* poets were associated with this category.¹⁸ Jāḥiẓ moreover obliquely refers to ‘*udhrī* poets’ melancholic personae by alluding to the “happenings produced in lovers’ affairs in their hearts, livers, and intestines, and their moans, longing, going mad, and being infatuated, and when their tears make them happy or when the eye expresses depression,” all of which he claims to have anecdotally witnessed and about which he pontificates.¹⁹ These details replicate embodied behaviors associated with ‘*udhrī* poet-lovers who serve as the raw material for his further conceptual thinking about ‘*ishq*.

Moreover, agreeing with contemporary medical views that ‘*ishq* is a disease (*dā*’), Jāḥiẓ offers a definition of the term in the *Treatise on Songstresses* that reinforces its power over the body but that nevertheless differs from curative approaches, declaring that “‘*ishq* is a disease that cannot be fully controlled just as one cannot remove the impediments of various diseases except with a rigorous diet (*ḥimya*),”²⁰ and adding two significant conditions that one should not abstain

18. As recalled in chapter one, Ruqayya Khan points to historical conflations between the terms ‘*arab* and *bādiya* (steppe/desert), such as Ibn Khaldūn’s (d. 1406) definition that “the ‘*arab* are a section of... the people of the *bādiya*, characterized by the importance of genealogical relations.” See Khan, 4. For a lengthier discussion of sources on this conflation, see Webb, *Imagining the Arabs*, 294-340.

19. الأحاديث المولدة في شأن العشاق في القلوب والاكباد والاحشاء والزفرات والحنين وفي التدليه والتوليه ومتى تسعد الدمعة ومتى يورب العين الجمود
 Jāḥiẓ, “Risāla fī al-‘*ishq* wa al-*nisā*’,” in *Majmū‘at rasā’il* (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Taqaḍḍum, 1906), 167. Another version of this kind of empirical observation in the *Kitāb al-qiyān*:

فلم نر أحداً منهم يسقم بدنه ولا تتألف روحه من حبّ بلده ولا ولده وإن كان قد يصيبه عند الفراق لوعةً واحتراق. وقد رأينا وبلغنا عن كثير ممن تآلف وطل جُهدِه وضنائه بداء العشق.

“We did not see anyone among them becoming ill in his body nor being destroyed in his spirit from love of his country or son even if lovesickness and burning pierces him at the time of separation. And we have seen and given an account of many of those who are destroyed by the disease of ‘*ishq* after long strife and grief.” Jāḥiẓ, “*Kitāb al-qiyān*,” 128.

20.

والعشق داءٌ لا يملك دفعه كما لا يستطيع دفع عوارض الأدوية إلا بالحمية

Jāḥiẓ, “*Kitāb al-qiyān*,” 127.

from eating entirely and that even if one takes control over one's diet, one cannot be in control of "the harms caused by changes in weather and differences in water."²¹ For Jāḥiẓ, even though *'ishq* is an illness, one should neither abstain from it nor attempt to wholly control it, and this use of medical knowledge shows how for courtly elites the bodily effects of a lover serve instead as proof of a love that need not be cured. Moreover, Jāḥiẓ states that the disease of *'ishq* has a particular pervasiveness because of its home in the heart, and he amplifies the effects of this pervasiveness by making recourse to a proverb, declaring, "the generally known proverb is that passion (*hawā*) makes a man blind and deaf, but *'ishq* kills."²² Such a comment foreshadows the emphasis on martyrdom being one if not the ultimate action of a suffering lover, an emphasis that can be seen in works composed on *'ishq* from a wide range of Abbasid authors including Ḥanbālī jurists, Sufis, and literati such as Jāḥiẓ.²³

Yet the fact that *'ishq* may kill serves, for Jāḥiẓ, as an acknowledgement of *'ishq*'s potency that makes recourse to contemporary medical knowledge to support his overarching argument for

21.

ولو ملك أيضاً صرف الأغذية واحترس بالحمية لم يملك ضرر تغير الهواء ولا اختلاف الماء

"And even if he took control over rationing food and guarded his diet, he still would not be in control of the harms caused by changes in weather and differences of water." Jāḥiẓ, "Kitāb al-qiyaṅ," 127.

22.

والمثل السائر ان الهوى يعمى و يصم فالعشيق يقتل

Jāḥiẓ, "Risāla fī al-'ishq wa al-nisā'," 166.

وداء العشق وعمومه في جميع البدن بحسب منزلة القلب من أعضاء الجسم

"The disease of *'ishq* and its pervasiveness in all of the body is due to the home of the heart in respect to the limbs of the body." See Jāḥiẓ, "Kitāb al-qiyaṅ," 127.

23. Ḥanbālī thinkers such as Ibn al-Jawzī and Ibn Taymīya considered *tatayyūm* (enslavement, thralldom) to be a higher form of love than *'ishq* that is reserved for divine love alone. Despite their interest in *'ishq*, Ḥanbālī treatises retain a sense of ambivalence towards the power of *'ishq* as they claim it risks idolatry by leading to worship of a human beloved. For an overview on Ḥanbālī views on *'ishq*, see Joseph Bell, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam*, 135-161.

the pleasures that come together with its perils. Appealing to excessiveness by way of affirmation, Jāhiz’s two treatises locate in *‘ishq* a kind of pleasure that is not necessarily encapsulated by other terms for love and that make its risks worthwhile. The *Treatise on ‘Ishq and Women* opens with the declarative statement that “love (*ḥubb*) is that which is the root of passion (*hawā*) and passion is that from which branches *‘ishq* and *‘ishq* is that which causes man to wander on his path (*an yahīma lahu ‘ala wajhi-hi*) or die of grief on his bed,” a statement that again intertextually references *‘udhrī* poets’ archetypal behaviors as “wandering” is often the precise words used to describe Majnun’s actions.²⁴ *‘Ishq* is singled out from other ways of describing love by these actions, which underscore subsequent conceptual statements such as “*‘Ishq* is a name for what exceeds the scope of that which is called love (*ḥubb*),” and, in the *Treatise on Songstresses*, that *ḥubb* is an inadequate term to convey *‘ishq*, which is a “compound of love (*ḥubb*), passion (*hawā*), affinity (*mushākala*), and intimacy (*ilf*).”²⁵ As a disease and as excess, Jāhiz declares that “the pleasure of lovers (*muta ‘āshiqīn*) is tranquil unto eternity, persisting without transience,” a pleasure which he compares to listening to music, except that songs are inevitably transient.²⁶ This

24.

الحب الذي هو أصل الهوى والهوى الذي يتفرع منه العشق والعشق الذي يهيم له الانسان على وجهه أو يموت كمدا على فراشه

Khan discusses similarities between *hāma* and the idea of errancy as this phrase is repeatedly deployed in the *Kitāb al-Aghānī*; Jāhiz moreover repeats this sentiment by stating that the “lover is the one who wanders for his beloved (*al-‘āshiq al-hā ‘im bi-‘ashīqatīhi*). See Jāhiz, “Risāla fī al-‘ishq wa al-nisā’,” 161-163 and Khan, 131-133.

25.

وانما العشق اسم لما فضل عن المقدار الذي اسمه حب وليس كل حب يسمى عشقا

“*‘Ishq* is a name for what exceeds the scope of that which is called love and not all kinds of love are called *‘ishq*.” Jāhiz references two comparisons for thinking about *‘ishq*’s excess, stating that the relationship between *‘ishq* and *ḥubb* is similar to that of the relationship between extravagance (*saraf*) and generosity (*jūd*), as well as between avarice (*bukhl*) and thriftiness (*iqtiṣād*). See “Risāla fī al-‘ishq wa al-nisā’,” 161-162.

فالعشق يتركب من الحب والهوى والمشكلة والإلف

Jāhiz, “Kitāb al-qiyān,” 127.

26.

ولذة المتعاشقين راكدة للأبد مقيمة غير طاعنة

pleasure helps explain Jāḥiẓ’s particular recourse to defining ‘*ishq* in treatises on women and songstresses, which are other aspects of courtly life that for him bring pleasure. This emphasis on pleasure also counters the focus on ‘*ishq*’s propensity to lead to suffering and it shows how ‘*ishq*’s corporeal effects can be felt otherwise.²⁷ Even though ‘*ishq* is an illness, Jāḥiẓ’s loose use of medical knowledge shows how for courtly elites it need not be cured and it may nevertheless be desirable.

In fact, this courtly view on ‘*ishq* gave way to a sense of masculinity that finds power in displays of suffering. Though Jāḥiẓ articulates the ways in which ‘*ishq* causes the lover to be submissive and to lose his manliness (*murū’ a*), Ibn Dāwūd’s *Book of the Flower* shows how that submissiveness itself can be seen as a strength of a suffering poet-lover (‘*āshiq*).²⁸ Ruqayya Khan and others have argued that this work served as a kind of manual of behavior for a group of “genteel-savants (*ẓarīf*, pl. *ẓurafā’*)” whose fascination with ‘*udhrī*’ modes of idealizing the beloved likely served as a kind of male bonding.²⁹ Likewise drawing loosely on the medical

Jāḥiẓ, “Risāla fī al-‘*ishq* wa al-nisā’,” 163. This usage of dual active participle to describe lovers (*muta’āshiqīn*) is rare to my knowledge and seems to correspond with Jāḥiẓ’s discussion in “Kitāb al-qiyān” that ‘*ishq* affects the beloved too, but that it rarely affects both parties equally.

27. Although he writes in the defense of women and describes the learned disposition of *qiyān* in particular, Jāḥiẓ nevertheless makes recourse to what he claims as inherent weakness and jealousy of women in ways that further preclude their inclusion from the category of suffering lovers. See Colville, 190.

28.

أول ذلك ادخال الضيم على مروءته و استشعار الذلة لمن أطاف بعشيقته

“The first thing love does is cause damage to a man’s honor (*murū’ a*) and make him feel submissive as he encircles his beloved.” Suzanne Stetkevych, Stefan Sperl, and others have explored the ways in which the *mu’allaqāt* poet’s masculinity hinges upon embodying a communalist ethos of *murū’ a* (manliness)—a term akin to the Latin *virtus* as it combines manliness with the ability to provide for a kinship group, which is often associated with the final boast (*fakhr*) of an ode (*qaṣīda*). See Jāḥiẓ, “Risāla fī al-‘*ishq* wa al-nisā’,” 161 and chapter one.

29. Khan has located the prominence of the ideal of refinement (*ẓarīf*) in a group she calls “genteel savants” (*ẓarīf*), or “elegant, fashionable cliques that took the famous ninth century love treatise *Book of the Flower* (*Kitāb al-Zahra*) as a core manual of their subculture.” Certainly, the historical verifiability of this claim is subject to debate, though the terminology around refinement is repeated in poetry and prose from the period. Khan draws on the work of Willem Raven to further argue for the popularity of this work due to the evidence of Greek inscriptions from it on insignia rings. Giffen moreover records that there are several literary traditions describing how Ibn Dāwūd was asked

knowledge of his time, Ibn Dāwūd cites Galen when defining *‘ishq* as “an activity of the soul hidden in the brain, heart, and liver,” only to follow with the statement that “one cannot entirely be called a lover (*‘āshiq*) unless and until one is separated from the one he loves.”³⁰ Unlike the medical tradition that locates ideal masculinity in rationality and balance, poets and authors in the courtly tradition such as Ibn Dāwūd identified the figure of the lover (*‘āshiq*) with masculine power, and as such validated excessive displays of suffering and irrationality.³¹ Indeed, such an ethos can be seen in the Hadith “one who loves (*‘ashīqa*) and stays chaste, and hides his love and dies, dies a martyr,” preserved and interpreted by Ibn Dāwūd, and explored in the introduction of this chapter. Embedded in early courtly conceptualizations of *‘ishq* is the figure of the suffering lover who nobly endures separation.³² Thus in addition to Khan’s arguments about the masculinity of “genteel-savants,” I would add that the poetic tradition specifically indicates that the figure of the suffering-lover (*‘āshiq*) retains a sense of masculine power.

by someone in the street about a line or verse included in the *Kitāb al-Zahra*. See Khan, *Bedouin and ‘Abbāsīd Cultural Identities*, 14-15; Willem Raven, *Ibn Dawud al-Isbahani and His Kitab al-Zahra* (PhD diss., University of Leiden, 1989), 70 and Giffen. 9.

30.

قال جالينوس العشق من فعل النفس وهي كامنة في الدماغ والقلب والكبد وفي الدماغ ثلاثة مساكن التخيل وهو في مقدم الرأس والفكر وهو في وسطه والذكر وهو في موخره وليس يكمل لأحد اسم عاشق إلا حتى اذا فارق من يعشقه

“Galen said that *‘ishq* is an activity of the soul and it is hidden in the brain, heart, and liver, and in the brain, it has three imaginary homes: in the front of the head, ideas that are in the middle, and memory that is in the back, and one cannot entirely be called an *‘āshiq* unless and until one is separated from the one he loves.” See Ibn Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-Zahra*, 17.

31. See the discussion in the previous chapter on Abū Bakr al-Rāzī’s polemic against “the effeminate men (*khanithūn*), love-poets, dandies, the affluent, and men who are affected by lusts.” Against these groups, al-Rāzī posits a rational masculinity that he locates in philosophers, who are the ones he claims to be characterized by the ideals of refinement (*ẓarf*) and etiquette (*adab*).

32. Ibn Dāwūd’s twenty-sixth chapter, for example, is titled “what is created by separation except for the punishment of the lovers (*mā khuliqa al-firāq ilā li-ta ‘dhīb al-‘ushshāq*). The figure of the suffering lover (*‘āshiq*, pl. *‘ushshāq*) moreover stays relevant in later treatises, such as Ja’far ibn Aḥmad al-Sarraj’s (d. 1106) *Maṣāri‘ al-‘ushshāq* (*The Destruction of the Lovers*) and works modeled on it. See Ibn Dāwūd, 2 and Lois Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love*, 25-27.

Yet the courtly tradition does not seem to have a systematic definition of *‘ishq* itself at this time, and different words for passion, love, and desire continuously surface in ways that mirror the multiplicity of the words used in poetry itself. The title of Ibn Dāwūd’s chapter that defines *‘ishq*—“Rationality is a prisoner to passion (*hawā*) and desire (*shawq*) is ruler of them both”—signals a popular understanding of the proximity between these various terms.³³ The reception of early Abbasid courtly literature in al-Andalus, for example, seems to have placed a greater emphasis on yearning desire (*shawq*), as can be seen in the title of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s famous collection of poems “Translator of Desires (*ashwāq*),” and the poets of al-Andalus likewise made appeals to the *‘udhrī* tradition.³⁴ This shows how the figure of a suffering poet-lover based on *‘udhrī* examples remained an intertextual reference point for various local poetic traditions over and above a technical focus on *‘ishq*.

Yet the debate on *‘ishq* became specifically heightened in the tenth and eleventh century Persianate world due to the rise of a strain of Islamic mysticism that equated *‘ishq* with the divine

33.

العقل عند الهوى أسير والشوق عليهما أمير

Ibn Dāwūd, 2.

34. Khan has discussed how Ibn Ḥazm employs a mixture of words to declare that the only kind of love that lasts is “the love of true passion (*maḥabbat al-‘ishq al-ṣaḥīḥ*).” Ibn al-‘Arabī mentions pairs of *‘udhrī* lovers three times throughout his collection, most notably at the end of poem eleven after a proclamation of universal love that heightens their symbolic value:

أدينُ بدينِ الحبِّ أنِّي توجَّهتُ
ركائبُهُ فالحبُّ ديني وإيماني

لنا أسوة في بشرِ هندٍ وأختِها
وقيسٍ وليلى ثمَّ مي وغيلان

“I profess the religion of love my heart betakes—
wherever love’s caravan turns, that is my religion and my faith.

We have a pattern in Bishr and Hind and her sister

And Qays and Lubnā, Mayya and Ghaylān”

See Khan, 70 and Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Tarjumān Al-ashwāq* (Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Mawlā, 2020).

essence itself. This strain drew from the radical utterances of Ḥallāj (d. 922) whose famous saying “*anā al-ḥaqq* (I am the Real)” affirms the possibility of union (*wiṣāl*) with the divine beloved through annihilation (*fanā*) of the worldly self. This position gave way to the idea of *‘ishq* as the unitary, ontological essence of all being. With the systematization of Sufi theoretical works in the eleventh century, this version of *‘ishq* was gradually adopted as a Sufi technical term as can be seen in the works of Qushayrī (d. 1072), Hujwīrī (c. 1072-7), Abū al-Ḥasan al-Daylamī (d. 1001-2), and Aḥmad Ghazālī (d. 1126). Daylamī’s fame rests on his treatment of divine love (*al-‘ishq al-ilāhī*) in his splendidly titled book, *The Attachment of the Conjoined Alif to the Attached Lām* (*‘Atf al-alif al-ma’lūf ‘alā al-lām al-ma’ṭūf*), which offers a comprehensive treatment of not only mystical views, but also opinions from philosophers, physicians, theologians, astrologers, litterateurs (*adībs*), and the “Bedouins” (*arab*) of pre-Islamic and early Islamic past. The title itself derives from a line of poetry attributed to Ḥallāj:

<p>When the beginning began, He brought out his <i>‘ishq</i> as attribute. In one who appeared, He shined in it a shining.</p> <p>And the <i>lām</i> was intimate with the inclined <i>alif</i>— both of them one, meaning in the beginning.³⁵</p>	<p>لَمَّا بَدَا الْبَدْءُ أَبْدَى عِشْقَهُ صِفَةً فِي مَن بَدَا فَتَلَأَلَا فِيهِ لِأَلِفٍ</p> <p>وَاللَّمُّ بِالْأَلِفِ الْمَعْطُوفِ مُؤْتَلِفٌ كِلَاهِمَا وَاحِدٌ فِي السَّبْقِ مَعْنَاءُ</p>
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This verse’s play with the letters *alif* (ا) and *lām* (ل) yields the negative particle *lā* (لا), which introduces the first part of every Muslim’s statement of faith (*shahada*) of “there is no god but God (*lā ilāha ilā Allāh*).” Together, these two letters signify an apophatic affirmation of the oneness of the divine, which in Ḥallāj’s verse is co-terminous with the beginning of time and the coming forth of *‘ishq* as in and of the divine. As Joeseeph Lumbard has shown, this emphasis on

35. See Daylamī, *Kitāb ‘atf al-alif al-ma’lūf ‘alā al-lām al-ma’ṭūf*, ed. J. C. Vadet (Cairo: Matba‘at al-Ma‘had al-‘Ilmī al-Faransī lil-Āthār al-Sharqīyah, 1962), 44.

Ḥallāj's usage of *'ishq* to describe the divine essence came to fruition in the twelfth-century Persianate world wherein authors such as Daylamī and Aḥmad Ghazālī expand upon these earlier poetic snippets.³⁶ Aḥmad Ghazālī likewise quotes Ḥallāj and expands upon Arabic poetry in Persian explanations that reinforce an ontological meaning of unity.³⁷

Yet unlike his predecessors who admit hesitations about the use of such an erotically loaded term to describe the divine, Aḥmad Ghazālī adopted *'ishq* unapologetically in the *Savānih* (*Happenings*).³⁸ This work provides a cosmogonic backstory to explain the equation of *'ishq* with

36. See Joseph Lumbard, "From Ḥubb to 'Ishq: The Development of Love in Early Sufism," 346-347.

37. For example, Aḥmad Ghazālī explicates the following verse from Ḥallāj:

أَنَا مَنْ أَهْوَى وَمَنْ أَهْوَى أَنَا
نَحْنُ رُوحَانِ حَلَّلْنَا بَدَنًا

فَإِذَا أَبْصَرْتَنِي أَبْصَرْتَهُ
وَإِذَا أَبْصَرْتَهُ أَبْصَرْتَنَا

اشارت هم بدین معنی بود ولیکن دور افتاد در دوم مصراع که نحن روحان حللنا بدنا قدم از یکی در دوی نهاده است اول مصراع قریبترست

"I am the one I love, the one I love is me
we are two souls, incarnate in one body

when you see me, you see him
and when you see Him, you see us

This verse is a sign of this same meaning, but the second hemistich 'we are two souls, incarnate in one body,' fell far from the meaning as it has stepped from oneness towards duplicity. The first hemistich is closer to the meaning."³⁸ See Aḥmad Ghazālī, *Savānih*, ed. by Helmut Ritter (Leipzig: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1942), 7.

38. Abū al-Ḥasan al-Daylamī, for example, indicates that he only accepts *'ishq* because of his own teacher's acceptance of Junayd's deployment of the term:

وممن أجاز أبو يزيد البسطامي وأبو القاسم الجنيد والحسين بن منصور الحلاج وغيرهم. وأما شيخنا أبو عبد الله ابن خفيف رحمة الله عليه فقد كان ينكر ذلك زماناً حتى وقعت إليه مسألة لأبي القاسم الجنيد في العشق ذكر فيها معنى العشق واشتقاقه وماهيته فقال به ورجع عن إنكاره وجوزه وصنف فيه مسألة

"And from among those who permit are Abu Yazid al-Bisṭāmī, Abū Qāsim al-Junayd, and Ḥusayn ibn manṣūr al-Ḥallāj and the likes of them. Yet our shaykh Abu 'Abdallah ibn Khafīf, may God's mercy be upon him, was refusing that for a time until an opinion appeared to him from Junayd on *'ishq* wherein he recalled the meaning of *'ishq* and its

the divine essence, a backstory which eschews questions of matter and multiplicity by illustrating creation as a form of emanation from divine *'ishq*.³⁹ Though he adopts a poetic idiom of lover and beloved that resembles the vocabulary of courtly authors, Ghazālī blunts the sexual connotations of *'ishq* by devaluing human love as overly carnal in light of an overpowering, divine love, insisting that divine *'ishq* “comes from inside to outside, while the *'ishq* of creation goes from outside to inside” and thus can never fully penetrate the heart.⁴⁰ As such, this new mystical idiom sanctioned *'ishq* by detaching its physical connotations from their worldly, sexual undertones in favor of an eroticized metaphysics. Conversely, it was these selfsame physical connotations that caused Ḥanbalī theologians to reject *'ishq* as a term for divine love for fear that the divine beloved, construed as a kind of romantic other, might appear to be needy.⁴¹

derivations and its essence, and he said it and withdrew from his refusal of it and permitted it and composed on it an opinion.” See Daylamī, *Kitāb Atf al-alif al-ma' lūf 'alā al-lām al-ma' tūf*, 5.

39.

روح از عدم بوجود آمد بسر حد وجود عشق منتظر مرکب روح بود در بدو وجود ندانم تا چه مزاج افتاد
اگر ذات روح آمد صفت ذات عشق آمد خانه خالی یافت جای بگرفت

“The Soul came into existence from absence. On the border of existence, *'Ishq* was waiting for the mount of the Soul. In the beginning of existence, I do not know how its disposition was—if the essence of the Soul came, then the attribute of its essence *'Ishq* also came. It found the house empty, and took up its place.” The short, declarative use of the past tense offers a sense of narratorial authority on cosmogonic events: the Soul (*rūh*) comes into the spatial plane of existence whereupon it encounters *'Ishq* somewhere at the edge waiting for it. The subsequent sentence dismisses the philosophical question of *'Ishq*'s being an essence and attribute as less relevant than its existence in pre-eternity. Likewise dismissed is the meaning and role of “the house,” likely the earth or matter, in favor of asserting the existence of *'ishq* in pre-eternity. See Aḥmad Ghazālī, *Savānih*, ed. by Helmut Ritter (Leipzig: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1942) 4.

40.

و اینجا سری بزرگست که عشق این حدیث از درون بیرون آید و عشق خلق از بیرون در درون رود اما پیداست که تا کجا
تواند رفت . نهایت او تا شغاف است... و اگر تمام حجب بر خیزد نفس نیز در کار آید اما عمری ببااید درین حدیث تا نفس
در راه عشق آید مجال دنیا و خلق و شهوات و امانی در پردهای بیرونی دل است نادر بود که بدل رسد و خود هرگز نرسد

“And here is the great secret: that *'ishq* comes from inside to outside, while *'ishq* of creation goes from outside to inside. Yet it is known how far it can go, for its ending point is the membrane that encloses the heart (*shagāf*)... If all of the veils are drawn, the carnal soul (*nafs*) also comes to *'ishq*'s work, but it takes a lifetime before the carnal soul comes to the path of *'ishq*. The powers of the world, creation, lust, desires are in the outermost drapes of the heart; it is rare that it (*'ishq* of creation) reaches the heart, and it itself never can.” Aḥmad Ghazālī, *Savānih*, 34.

41. Joseph Bell has succinctly described the Ḥanbalī position by underscoring how they debated “whether God as a self-sufficient being can be described as loving.” Moreover, Ḥanbalī theologians’ concerns with asceticism and piety brought them into conversation with the mystics, however the former scorned their practice of gazing at beardless

Ghazālī's mystical attitude slightly differs from Ibn Sīnā's (d. 1037) earlier philosophical approach to *'ishq* that deems the desire for physical touch to be a natural result of the fact that *'ishq* permeates all being. In the short treatise on love (*risāla fī al-'ishq*) that I explored in the introduction, Ibn Sīnā writes a section on love for beautiful faces that he deems natural. Ibn Sīnā explicates this type of love of external forms after declaring that love is innate to lesser beings such as mineral and animal souls, which follows a traditional Aristotelian hierarchy of organisms. Love of beauty, he states, is moreover shared between the rational and animal soul, and it leads to a desire to kiss and embrace the love-object, which are actions Ibn Sīnā also deems as natural so long as they are kept separate from the carnality associated with sexual intercourse.⁴² Thus in addition to the emphasis placed on the severity of *'ishq* by the medical tradition, the mystical approach encapsulated by Ghazālī and the philosophical approach articulated by Ibn Sīnā made *'ishq* an especially potent site for debating desire in Persian due to the ontological gravitas associated with the term by the time of the emergence of Nizāmī's *Layli and Majnun*. Now I want to turn briefly to the Arabic material on Majnun to further explore how the courtly register informs Majnun's character. The Arabic poetry associated with Majnun, when juxtaposed to the Persian reformulation in *Layli and Majnun*, allows for an understanding of inheritance and creativity, both of which are at work in Nizāmī's text.

II. Majnun and poet-lover masculinity

youth (*shāhid-bāzī*) as well as their use of *'ishq*. See Joseph Bell, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979), 5 and 21-24.

42. Ibn Sīnā suggests that sexual union is only rational if it is for the purpose of reproduction, but that hugging and kissing are natural byproducts of the *'ishq* of a man of refinement (*ẓarīf*). See Ibn Sīnā, *Risālah fī al-'ishq*, ed. by Ḥusayn Ṣiddīq and Rāwiyah Jāmūs (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 2005), 74 and introduction.

Nezāmi’s text draws from a courtly idiom of valorizing the suffering of poet-lovers and it extends the overall power of Majnun’s rhetorical skill as displayed in the early Arabic material. In chapter one, I explored aspects of Majnun’s madness and animality in Ibn Qutayba’s *Book of Poetry and Poets*—the earliest source of Majnun’s poetry—and in this chapter I turn to depictions of his role as a poet-lover in these early sources. Ibn Qutayba’s entry signals Majnun’s power through the rhetoricity he employs as a poet-lover even as his rationality is threatened. This reflects the nature of the work itself as an anthology, yet the narrative embedded in the entry amplifies the power of his poesy. Detailing Layla and Majnun’s meeting in childhood, the entry offers and explains a few lines attributed to Majnun:

<p>I fell in love with Layla when she was a heedless child, when her breasts had not yet appeared to her companions.</p> <p>Two youths we tended the lambs—would that it were that we had never grown up, nor had the lambs grown old.</p> <p>Then he grew up and he was sitting with her and speaking with some of the people of his family, and he was beautiful and refined (<i>ẓarīf</i>) as he related poems and sweet conversation.⁴³</p>	<p>تَعَلَّقْتُ لَيْلَى وَهِيَ غَرٌّ صَغِيرَةٌ وَلَمْ يَبْدُ لِلْأَثْرَابِ مِنْ ثَدْيِهَا حَجْمٌ</p> <p>صَبِيَّانِ نَرَعَى الْبُهْمَ يَالَيْتَ أَتْنَا إِلَى الْيَوْمِ لَمْ نَكْبُرْ وَلَمْ يَكْبُرِ الْبُهْمُ</p> <p>ثُمَّ نَشَأَ وَكَانَ يَجْلِسُ مَعَهَا وَيَتَحَدَّثُ فِي نَاسٍ مِنْ قَوْمِهِ وَكَانَ جَمِيلًا ظَرِيفًا رَاوِيَةً لِلشَّعَارِ حَلُوهُ الْحَدِيثِ</p>
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Filled with a sense of pastoral nostalgia, these poetic lines dwell on a period already lost that foreshadows the lovers’ inevitable separation. The youthful lambs reinforce the lovers’ own youth as well as a purity that Majnun claims in his love that is not dependent on Layla’s physical qualities and that situates his style within the chaste mandates of the *‘udhrī* tradition. Yet this youthful nostalgia does not seem to threaten his masculinity, a poet-lover’s masculinity that allows him to be both beautiful and refined—or as Khan translates “a genteel-savant” (*ẓarīf*)—as well as

43. Ibn Qutayba, 374. These couplets are relatively consistent across the Arabic material and can be found in the *Dīwan*, 52-53 and in Isfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī* vol. 2, 11.

powerful by way of his rhetorical capacities. After a short poetic citation from Layla, the entry quickly glosses the lovers' separation and Majnun's subsequent wandering with the beasts, a detail that accompanies a repeated mention of the dwindling of his rationality (*dhahaba 'aqlu-hu*), which is further glossed by a comment that he "was not comprehending (*ya 'aqlu*) anything, except when Layla was recalled to him. Then he would come to his senses and speak about her without dropping a letter."⁴⁴ Whenever Layla's name is recalled, Majnun can compose beautiful verses, which reveals a tension between masculine rhetoricity and what is characterized throughout the entry as animalistic behavior that is overcome when Majnun is heard as a poet-lover.

Moreover, the entry situates Majnun within the *'udhrī* tradition by referencing the poetry of Qays b. Darīh in a display of competitive rhetoricity that further underscores Majnun's masculinity. In the final, most extended anecdote of the entry, an anonymous speaker seeks the advice of a friend of Majnun's on how to approach him after he has more permanently relocated to the desert and has become known for his unusual lifestyle.⁴⁵ Majnun's friend warns of Majnun's potential violence and advises this speaker to recite a few lines from Qays b. Darīh to calm Majnun. Following this advice, the speaker recites a few lines, which leads to Majnun's own poetic performance:

44.

ولا يعقل شيئاً الا ان تذكر له ليلي فاذا ذكرت ثاب وتحدث عنها ولا يسقط حرفاً

—
A similar anecdote occurs as the anonymous speaker who meets Layla describes Majnun to her-

—
يهيم في تلك الفيافي ويكون مع الوحش لا يعقل ولا يفهم الا أن تذكر له ليلي فيبكي وينشد أشعاراً يقولها فيها

—
"He wanders in that desert with the beasts not comprehending or understanding anything except when Layla is recalled to him and then he cries and recites poetry recalling her in it." See Ibn Qutayba, 374-375.

45. Majnun's friend is described as "a youth from the tribe (*fatan min al-hayy*)," indicating a similarity in age that likely reflects a similarity in disposition. See Ibn Qutayba, 378.

<p>He wept for a while, then said, “By God, I am a better poet than him (<i>āsh‘ar minhu</i>) when I say</p> <p>You brought me close until you captured me by words that bring the flocks to the plains.</p> <p>You shunned me when I had no way out leaving what you left between the ribs.</p> <p>Then a group of gazelles appeared, and he leapt up and followed them. I went away and when I returned the next morning, I did not find him... Then I returned the morning after with his brothers and family and we searched for him day and night and we still did not find him. When we returned the next morning, we looked down upon a valley full of stones and saw him dead, so we carried him back from the wilderness and buried him.⁴⁶</p>	<p>فبكى طويلا ثم قال انا والله اشعر منه حيث اقول وأدبني حتى إذا ما سببتني بقول يحل العصم سهل الأباطح تجافيت عني حين لا لي حيلة وخليت ما خليت بين الجوانح ثم عنت له ظباء فوثب في طلبها فانصرفت ثم عدت من الغد فلم اصبه... ثم غدوت بعد ذلك وغدا اخوته وأهل بيته فطلبناه يومنا وليتنا فما اصبناه فلما اصبنا اشرفنا على واد كثير الحجارة فإذا هو ميت بينها فاحتملوه ودفنوه.</p>
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Majnun competes with Qays b. Darīh’s poem as he declares his own value through his poetry which is subsequently reinforced by a kind of semi-miraculous event—the appearance of a group of gazelles that brings the anecdote to a close. As Sedgwick has noted, the competitiveness of this bond brings forth how masculinity for ‘*udhrī* poets is constructed primarily through their rhetorical prowess and rivalry even as they take on more gender-fluid forms of embodiment.⁴⁷ Unlike how Nezāmī’s version would expound on Majnun’s death, Majnun is simply found dead and the cause of death here remains muted. This anecdote’s recourse to Majnun’s own claim to a rhetorical prowess that surpasses his fellow poet-lover mirrors the masculine power others see in him when he speaks of Layla “without dropping a letter” and his poetry provides the bridge for a temporary recognition of his masculine power.

46. Ibn Qutayba, 378-379.

47. Eve Sedgwick notes how homosocial bonds, when developed within a world of heterosexuality, often resemble not brotherhood but instead a form of rivalry that results in relationships of mastery and subordination which can be seen the competitiveness of these ‘*udhrī* figures over who is the best poet. See Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 66.

The *Dīwan*, given its length, further fleshes out Majnun’s role as a poet-lover and the ways in which his masculinity is linked to his rhetoricity and capacity to endure suffering. The text recognizes Majnun as a particular kind of lover (*‘āshiq*) that thwarts the marriage economy as Layla’s father, in his rejection of Majnun’s father’s marriage proposal, states “By God, what the Arabs would relate if I married her to a lover (*‘āshiq*).”⁴⁸ This usage of the term *‘āshiq* for this specific kind of lover resembles the courtly deployment of the term in works such as Ibn Dāwūd’s and shows how it encapsulates the persona of *‘udhrī* poets whose love is a kind of melancholic devotion unto death. Turning to the poetry itself, Majnun’s poems use a variety of words for love to engage in a mode of heightening devotion that imagines the lover-beloved relationship in ways similar to a religious understanding of the relationship between a devotee and the divine. This ennobles his suffering, which most poignantly comes through in a poem he recites at the Ka‘ba in order to reject his father’s advice of abandoning his love of Layla:

<p>Pilgrims call to God seeking forgiveness in Mecca, disheveled, so their sins could be erased.</p> <p>And I called out, oh Most Merciful, my first concern is Layla, and since you are the sufferer of my soul,</p> <p>if you give me Layla, there is no repenting of a servant to God that I would not repent.</p> <p>Her nearness cools my eyes and the one who blames my love for her increases in me wonder.</p> <p>And how many speakers were saying, “Repent!” I resisted. That, by my life, is not a trait that I have.</p> <p>The soul did not renounce you, Layla, because it disliked you, but its share of you was lessened.</p>	<p>دَعَا الْمُحْرَمُونَ اللَّهَ يَسْتَغْفِرُونَهُ بِمَكَّةَ شُغْنًا كَيْ نُحْمَى ذُنُوبُهَا</p> <p>وَنَادَيْتُ يَا رَحْمَنُ أَوَّلُ سُؤْلَتِي لِنَفْسِي لَيْلَى ثُمَّ أَنْتَ حَسْبِيهَا</p> <p>فَإِنْ أُعْطِ لَيْلَى فِي حَيَاتِي لَمْ يَنْبُ إِلَى اللَّهِ عَبْدٌ تَوْبَةً لَا أُتُوبُهَا</p> <p>يَقْرُ بِعَيْنِي قُرْبُهَا وَيَزِيدُنِي بِهَا عَجَبًا مَنْ كَانَ عِنْدِي يَعْيبُهَا</p> <p>فَكَمْ قَائِلٍ قَدْ قَالَ تَبُّ فَعَصِيئَةٌ وَتِلْكَ لِعَمْرِي خَلَّةٌ لَا أُصِيبُهَا</p>
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48.

وقال : والله لا حدثت العرب أني زوجت عاشقاً

Oh soul, by God, have patience—you are not the first
to have its lover vanish, so know this.⁴⁹

وما هَجَرْتُكَ النَّفْسُ يَا لَيْلَى أَنْهَا
قَلْبُكَ وَلَكِنْ قَلْبٌ مِنْكَ نَصِيْبُهَا
فِيَا نَفْسٍ صَبْرًا أَسْتَبِ وَاللَّهِ فَاغْلَمِي
بِأَوْلِ نَفْسٍ غَابَ عَنْهَا حَبِيْبُهَا

This poetic prayer compares Majnun’s devotion to Layla with a servant’s (*‘abd*) relationship with the divine. Her nearness offers him solace, as he appeals to a Qur’ānic descriptor of her as cooling his eyes (*yaqarru bi-‘aynī*).⁵⁰ Majnun claims a capacity to repent to a greater extent than a devotee’s repentance, yet the fact that he rejects others’ commands for repentance due to his claim of lifelong devotion comes across as a blasphemous statement. This rejection moreover appears as apostasy given the injunction to repent at the Ka’ba on hajj—an apostasy amplified in a subsequent poem wherein Majnun states he repents of all sins except “from passion of Layla and from my love of visiting her.”⁵¹ Majnun ends this poem by situating his soul within a community of souls who suffer due to separation from their beloveds. Despite its heretical nature, this poem’s appeals to a religious register amplify the suffering Majnun claims in his lifelong devotion.

49. *Dīwān*, 56-57. The first three couplets are also quoted, nearly verbatim, in Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb al-Shi’r wa al-Shu’arā’*, 377.

50. See Q 25:74 and 32:17.

51.

أَتُوبُ إِلَيْكَ يَا رَحْمَنُ مِمَّا
عَمَلْتُ فَقَدْ تَطَاهَرَتِ الدُّنُوبُ
فَأَمَّا مِنْ هَوَى لَيْلَى وَحُبِّي
زِيَارَتِهَا فَإِنِّي لَا أَتُوبُ

“I repent to you oh Rahman from what
I did and my sins are manifest

But from passion of Layla and my love
Of visiting her indeed I do not repent.”

This slightly altered iteration of Majnun’s speech at the Ka’ba likewise shows the various words used for passion (*hawā*) and love (*ḥubb*) in the Arabic materials. See al-Wālibī, *Dīwān*, 67.

As in Ibn Qutayba’s short entry, the *Dīwan* likewise references other ‘*udhrī* poet-lovers as a way of highlighting Majnun’s rhetorical prowess. One remarkable section describes a meeting between the fifth Umayyad Caliph, ‘Abd al-Malik Ibn Marwān, and the legendary ‘*udhrī* poet Kuthayyir. ‘Abd al-Malik prompts Kuthayyir into a tale about his meeting Majnun in the desert by asking the question, “have you seen anyone who had more ‘*ishq* than you (*a‘shaq minka*)?”⁵² Kuthayyir says yes, an affirmation which ‘Abd al-Malik contests by reciting a few of Kuthayyir’s lines on his own endurance of suffering. This leads Kuthayyir into explaining how he allegedly met Majnun in the desert and Majnun’s appearance caused Kuthayyir to question Majnun’s humanity.⁵³ After this questioning, Kuthayyir watches Majnun catch a gazelle and speak poetry to it:

52.

دخل كثير بن عبد الرحمن على عبد الملك بن مروان وقد قعد للشرب فقال له يا كثير هل رأيت أعشق منك

“Kuthayyir ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥman entered ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān’s residence and sat for drinking. ‘Abd al-Malik then said to him, ‘Oh Kuthayyir, have you seen anyone who had more ‘*ishq* than you (*a‘shaq minka*)?’” See *Dīwān*, 93.

53.

فيا عَزُّ لو أَشْكُو الَّذِي قَدْ أَصَابَنِي
إِلَى مَيِّتٍ فِي قَبْرِهِ لَبَكَى لِيَا

ويا عَزُّ لو أَشْكُو الَّذِي قَدْ أَصَابَنِي
إِلَى جَبَلٍ صَعَبٍ الذَّرَى لِإِنْحَى لِيَا

قال أخبرك يا أمير المؤمنين بينما أسير في بعض البوادي في يوم شديد الحر إذ رفع لي شخص في مفازة ليس بها أنيس فذعرت منه ثم دنوت منه فإذا أنا بإنسان حسن الوجه جعد الشعر فقلت له إنسي أنت أم جني؟ فقال بل إنسي

Oh ‘Azza if I complain of that which wounds me
Even a dead man in his grave cries for me

Oh ‘Azza if I complain of that which wounds me
Even a hard mountain would turn to dust to come towards me

Kuthayyir said, “Oh commander of the believers, one day when I was walking at midday on a very hot day, a person appeared to me in the desert who did not seem sociable (*anīs*) and so I was frightened of him. Then I neared him and

<p>So I watched him as he hunted a gazelle that was the most beautiful gazelle, then he grasped its horn and began looking at the beauty of its face and said,</p> <p>“Oh semblance of Layla, do not fear today I am a friend from amongst the beasts</p> <p>your eyes are her eyes and your neck is her neck though her leg is more delicate than yours.”</p> <p>Then he set her free and started looking at her traces and said,</p> <p>“I say as I have released her from her shackles if you say thanks, it is because of Layla you are freed.”⁵⁴</p>	<p>فأقمت عليه حتى اقتنص ظبية كأحسن ما تكون من الطباء ثم قبض على قرنها وأقبل ينظر في محاسن وجهها ويقول</p> <p>أيا شبيهة ليلى لا تُراعي فأبني لَكَ اليوم من بين الوحوش صديقُ</p> <p>فعيناك عيناها وجيدك جيدها سوى أن عظم الساق منك دقيقُ</p> <p>ثم أطلقها وجعل ينظر في أثرها ويقول</p> <p>أقول وقد أطلقتها من وثاقها فأنت لليلى إن شكرت طليقُ</p>
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Majnun’s likening of the gazelle to Layla reflects a porous boundary between humans and animals that I have explored more thoroughly in chapter one.⁵⁵ I raise this anecdote here in order to show how Kuthayyir’s reciting of Majnun’s poetry places him within a coterie of poet-lovers whose intricate ways of describing love underscores their masculine power. The first couplets enter a descriptive mode (*waṣf*) by comparing the gazelle’s individual body parts to Layla’s, only to turn, in the second couplet, to a deployment of bondage imagery that makes use of paronomasia (*jinās*) in order to suggest that Majnun frees the gazelle (*aṭlaqaha*), who is a freed thing (*ṭaliq*) due to its semblance to Layla.⁵⁶ This anecdote repeats this process two more times as Majnun catches and releases two more gazelles, offering further evidence of Majnun’s rhetorical prowess by giving

by god the beauty of his face and curls of his hair! I said to him, “Are you a human or a jinn?” And he said, “I am a man.” See *Dīwān*, 94-95.

54. *Dīwān*, 97-98.

55. See also Allison Kanner-Botan, “Rewriting the wild: Fiction, *adab*, and the making of Majnun’s animal world,” *Postmedieval* 13 (2022): 453-470. On porousness of this boundary in the Arabic material, see Tarek El-Ariss, “Return of the Beast: From Pre-Islamic Ode to Contemporary Novel,” 62-90.

56. *Ṭaliq* also means “divorced woman,” which further adds to the feminization of the gazelle. Description (*waṣf*) is a mode of Arabic poetry that typically served as part of an ode (*qaṣīda*), but that also existed as a genre in its own right. On the usage of *waṣf* in love poetry, see Stephen P. Hopkins, “Extravagant Beholding: Love, Ideal Bodies, and Particularity,” in *History of Religions*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (August 2007), 20-32; as a genre of its own, see Motoyoshi Sumi, *Description in Classical Arabic Poetry: Waṣf, Ekphrasis, and Interarts Theory* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

more examples of his deployment of this simile.⁵⁷ The tale comes to a close when Kuthayyir, hungry, breaks the ankles of the final entrapped gazelle, leading to Majnun’s tears and Kuthayyir’s subsequent declaration to ‘Abd al-Malik that “and that, by god, is someone with more *‘ishq* than me.”⁵⁸ The use of the comparative to describe Majnun’s *‘ishq* (*ā‘shaq minnī*) recalls Majnun’s own usage of it when comparing his poetry to Qays b. Darīh’s in Ibn Qutayba’s entry—“I am a better poet than him” (*āsh‘ar minhu*)—and here Majnun’s non-normative behavior additionally amplifies his *‘ishq*. Kuthayyir continues this anecdote by stating to ‘Abd al-Malik that Majnun is “a better poet than him (*āsh‘ar minnī*)” and reciting five more poems attributed to Majnun.⁵⁹ Together, these early Arabic materials suggest that Majnun not only fits into a masculinity of suffering poet-lovers, but that his poetry was recognized as exemplary of their mode of heightening the level of their suffering and devotion through evermore intricate speech.

Majnun’s framing of *‘ishq* in the first part of Neẓāmī’s *Layli and Majnun* is likewise dominated by intricate displays of speech about the suffering he endures as a poet-lover. These speeches make frequent recourse to bondage vocabulary through references to ropes (*rasan*), chains (*zanjīr*), and shackles (*band*). His descriptions make use of highly defined roles for the lover and beloved, and Majnun’s flights to the wilderness often serve as moments in which he more fully articulates his views, such as in the passage I analyze below from his first flight after Layla’s father has refused Majnun’s father’s request for her in marriage. In a direct appeal to Layla herself, Majnun utilizes the logic of bondage to state his position as a lover:

I am mad in mind and conduct why then are there chains upon your collar?	دیوانه منم به رای و تدبیر در گردن تو چراست زنجیر
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57. *Dīwān*, 98-99.

58. *Dīwān*, 100.

59. *Dīwān*, 101-104.

<p>Do not throw a rope around your own neck I am better with a rope on my neck.</p> <p>Your tresses tore all that the heart had sewn who has taught you this tearing of clothes?</p> <p>Your tresses steal hearts by force they are not Hindu thieves when time is blind.</p> <p>Do something, oh dear sign of my being bring me up from the well where I have gone down.</p> <p>Withdraw your hand from this my lament or give a hand so that I may kiss it.⁶⁰</p>	<p>در گردن خود رسن میفگن من به باشم رسن به گردن</p> <p>زلف تو درید هر چه دل دوخت این جامه دری ورا که آموخت</p> <p>دل ببردن زلف تو به زور است هندو نه که روزگار کور است</p> <p>کاری بکن ای نشان کارم زین چه که فرو شدم برآرم</p> <p>یا دست بگیر ازین فسوسم یا دست بدار تا ببوسم</p>
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Majnun evokes chains and ropes to reimagine the lovers' roles through bondage imagery. Although Layla has been more directly bound to her home by her father by this point in the narrative, Majnun insists that she alone has power and that he is the one who is bound. His own madness serves as a kind of confirmation for his request for the literal constraints of chains. This relies on an idiom that positions the beloved as hierarchically superior and that simultaneously claims power in and through the position of being a suffering lover, which resembles the poet-lover masculinity articulated by courtly authors such as Ibn Dāwūd. Layla's hair (*zolf*) is the locus of her power, and its circularity metonymically confirms his bondage to her. The only way Majnun claims he can be freed from this bondage is with Layla's permission and becoming united with the

60. Neẓāmī Ganjavī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. by Behrouz Sarvatiyan (Tehran: Mu'assasah-e Enteshārāt-e Amir Kabir, 2008), 94-95 / 17 v. 53-58. Zanjani's edition has the last line read "or bring a foot so that I may kiss it," which does not alter the meaning too much. I have relied primarily upon Sarvatiyan's edition throughout this dissertation, however I consult Zanjani's edition at times due to the fact that it claims to be based on an older manuscript at the University of Tehran dating to h. 718 (Sarvatiyan's oldest manuscript is from the National Library of Paris and dates to h. 763), although Zanjani's edition has the pitfall of only referencing five manuscripts in Tehran, whereas Sarvatiyan references twelve, eleven of which are cross-referenced from Babayif's 1965 Moscow edition alongside a manuscript later discovered in Tabriz. See Neẓāmī Ganjavī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Barat Zanjani (Tehran: Mu'assasah-e Chāp va Enteshārāt-e Dāneshgāh-e Tehran, 1990), 29 and 45. My thanks as well to Paul Losensky for help with the complex image of "Hindu thieves" in this passage.

one who holds mastery over his being. By evoking Layla as a sign (*neshān*) of his being, Majnun encapsulates her as the desired object of his speech, and distance from her allows him to perpetuate this logic of bondage.

Notably, this inherited courtly idiom positions Layla solely as beloved in ways that do not allow for recognition of her own suffering. Several times Majnun’s speech articulates power dynamics intrinsic to the courtly understanding of the lover-beloved relationship through the employment of sharp dualities in lines that alternate between detailing his role and hers.⁶¹ In one notable example shortly after Layla’s perspective is introduced in the text, Layla hears someone reciting a poem by Majnun from her date garden. This poem repeatedly construes her role as gleeful in contrast to Majnun’s suffering:

Majnun is amidst a wave of blood how is Layla on account of this affair?	مجنون به میان موج خونست لیلی به حساب کار چونست
Majnun is always tearing at his liver from whom does Layla scrape away the salt?	مجنون جگری همی خراشد لیلی نمک از که می تراشد
Majnun is pierced by the thorn’s arrow, while Layla sleeps, I wonder how pleasantly.	مجنون به خدنگ خار سفته ست لیلی به کدام ناز خفته ست
Majnun weeps and cries in a thousand laments, while Layla contemplates in such cheerfulness.	مجنون به هزار نوحه نالد لیلی چه نشاط می سگالد
Majnun is branded and has only pain, Layla has spring and roses to her name.	مجنون همه داغ و درد دارد لیلی چه بهار و ورد دارد
Majnun girds himself with necessity, Layla has a face that lets loose smiles.	مجنون کمر نیاز بندد لیلی به رخ که باز خندد
Majnun’s heart cowers from separation why does Layla rest so easily? ⁶²	مجنون ز فراق دل رمیده ست لیلی به چه حجت آرمیده ست

61. In other examples, the text uses Majnun’s direct speech and casts this dichotomy in lines that alternate with “me” (*man*) / “you” (*tu*). See Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 166 and 184.

62. Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 119 / 23 v. 59-65.

Majnun’s poem employs a series of images that contrast his brands and pain to Layla’s spring and roses to repeatedly emphasize how she, as beloved, does not suffer as he does. The fact that he chafes from his liver, while she displays a salty wit or spiciness conjures up the idea that perhaps it is she who is pouring salt on his wounds.⁶³ The final line of these harsh contrasts sonically plays with a certain sense of similarity in difference as he describes himself as cowering (*ramīde*) while she is calmed (*ārmīde*), gesturing to the reader something of the construction of such harsh dualities. Layla’s quiet tears in response to hearing this poem signals how the text provides a window into the fact that she does not embody the role of powerful, gleeful beloved that Majnun assigns her.⁶⁴ Notably, the text as a whole differs from such a stance by at times foregrounding Layla’s own capacities as a poet-lover and allowing her entrance into the competitive arena of rhetorical displays of suffering.⁶⁵ Differences such as this indicate that there is a complexity beyond the register that valorizes the inherited idiom of poet-lover (*‘ashiq*) masculinity in the text.

63. Sedgwick repeatedly emphasizes how women are detrimentally affected by relationships in which they do not participate, such as in the homosocial bonds of male-dominated kinship systems. Though this passage may be dismissed simply as Majnun acting like a jealous lover, I think it likewise alludes to the fact that his poetic speech, insofar as it serves as the vehicle for his homosocial bonds with other poet-lovers, harms Layla by reinscribing her position in the marriage economy. See Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 25-26.

64. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 119-120.

65. For example, in a letter to Majnun, Layla writes:

لیلی بودم ولیک اکنون
مجنونترم از هزار مجنون

ز آن شیفته سیه ستاره
من شیفتهتر هزار باره

“I was Layla but now I have become
madder than even a thousand Majnuns

more than that enraptured, black-starred one
I am a thousand times more enraptured!”

III. *Ishq in Layli and Majnun*

In Ganja (modern day Azerbaijan), Neẓāmī completed *Layli and Majnun* (c. 1192) at a time when the Abbasid caliphate was in definite decline, the Seljuks had gained control of much of Anatolia, and small, local dynasties staked their own claims to legitimacy often through the adoption of new Persian as a language of literary prestige. In this fragmented world, the Shirvanshahs rose as a dynasty that maintained local rule as a vassal state over what corresponds largely to modern-day Azerbaijan from the mid-ninth through the early sixteenth centuries.⁶⁶ This dynasty traced its lineage to the Sassanid King Bahrām Chōbīn, a lineage that likely contributed to the preservation of pre-Islamic Iranian lore in the region, and its borders with Georgian and Armenian dynasties led to a rich overlapping of cultural influences. Neẓāmī’s work reflects engagement with this wide range of influences as well as the relative autonomy he enjoyed as a poet who sought patronage from rulers of different dynasties including the Shirvanshahs and Seljuks, seemingly resentful of courtly life and working in a way that we might describe as freelancing.

One of the most significant innovations of Neẓāmī’s works are the lengthy introductions that offer paratextual commentary on the stories themselves. In a stylized account of why he wrote *Layli and Majnun*, Neẓāmī relates that his patron, King Akhistan I of the Shirvanshahs, requested that he write the story after having seen Neẓāmī’s prior work *Khosrow and Shirin*, suggesting that he turn to “the king of love stories.”⁶⁷ Neẓāmī disagrees with the King’s assessment, claiming that

Entering a kind of lover’s contest with Majnun, Layla here declares that she is madder (*majnūn-tar*) and more enraptured (*shīftih-tar*) than him—indicating not only that her suffering is similar in kind but greater in degree. See Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 201 / v. 49-50.

66. Willem Floor and Hasan Javadi, *The Heavenly Rose Garden: A History of Shirvan and Daghestan* (Washington, DC: Mage Publishers, 2009), 78.

67. This is part of a lengthy exchange wherein King Akhistan I purportedly tells Neẓāmī that “Turk-like speech is not agreeable to us (*turkāni sokhan sazā-ye mā nīst*)” and that those who are born of “high lineage (*nasab-e buland*)”

the story is intrinsically depressing, which leads to a conversation with his son on whether or not he should take up the task. Declaring that the story’s setting is narrow (*tang*) and that its exposition might therefore be maimed (*lang*), Neẓāmī further explicates his own aesthetic views:

<p>The arena of poetry should be ample so it displays a skill in horsemanship.</p> <p>Even though this verse is famous it is far from pleasurable exegesis.</p> <p>Poetic speech is pleasure and delight indeed poetry is justified by these two things</p> <p>and as for mania and binds and chains naked speech on these things is pitiful.⁶⁸</p>	<p>میدان سخن فراخ باید تا طبع سواری نماید</p> <p>این آیت اگر چه هست مشهور تفسیر نشاط هست ازو دور</p> <p>آفران سخن نشاط و نازست زین هر دو سخن بهانه سازست</p> <p>بر شیفتگی و بند و زنجیر باشد سخن برهنه دلگیر</p>
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Poetic speech (*sokhan*) according to Neẓāmī is best when it produces pleasure. In contrast, Neẓāmī employs religious vocabulary to describe the story of Layla and Majnun as a verse (*aya*) whose exegesis (*tafsīr*) is far from being pleasurable. Signaling the story’s weightiness, such religious terms not only imply respect for the story’s content, but also how its themes may be unusual for an audience whose expectations were informed by Persian epic poetry of the time. As a forewarning, Neẓāmī lists the story’s themes—mania, binds, and chains—that he seemingly laments, yet the characterization of speech on these themes as “naked” draws precisely from the vocabulary used to describe Majnun and his speech itself. Instead of taking this complaint only at face value, I suggest that it likewise serves to shift readerly expectations by preparing us for the weighty themes to come.

should stick to “high speech (*sokhan-e boland*).” Other than speaking to the Shirvanshah’s local rivalry with the Seljuks, these comments suggest the privileging of *Layli and Majnun* due to its genealogical origins and the desire to connect this small, local dynasty to an Islamic cultural reference point. See Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun* ed. Sarvatiyan, 45.

68. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun* ed. Sarvatiyan, 45 / 5 v. 51-55.

Moreover, Neẓāmī's complaint also signals the ways in which his text alters and plays with the prior Arabic material. Agreeing to write the story, Neẓāmī states that he hopes that it could turn his patron into a lover (*'āshiq*), adding that he inserted into it "a pearl from reason (*'aql*)."⁶⁹ This statement undoes the dichotomy between *'ishq* and rationality (*'aql*) posed by Ibn Qutayba's initial depiction of Majnun and suggests how Neẓāmī's text reframes his character. Instead of recreating a battle between Arabic and Persian aesthetics, I suggest that we read Neẓāmī's prefatory comments as marking fictionality by placing distance from received source-material and using this distance as an opportunity to reimagine the story as well as its central theme, *'ishq*.

Majnun enters Neẓāmī's text with certain predetermined characteristics: he goes mad, dies for love, and is associated with being a suffering lover (*'āshiq*) that I explored in the previous section. Although Neẓāmī's text preserves such inheritances, its thematization of *'ishq* itself suggests something new, which, I maintain, foregrounds corporeal transformation as the result of *'ishq*'s force. This thematization occurs in tandem with the fictionality of Neẓāmī's text, which allows both for direct narratorial commentary on the main action and an open altering of prior motifs.⁷⁰ As a metadiegetic commentator, the narrator occasionally speaks directly in the first-person, drawing attention to both inheritance and active intervention.⁷¹ These first-person asides

69. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun* ed. Sarvatiyan, 47.

70. I draw from Julie Orlemanski's approach to fictionality that highlights various societies' engagements with the fiction-making process by proposing "a *hermeneutic* conception of fictionality... that assumes its determination in encountering the record of past thought." See Julie Orlemanski, "Who Has Fiction? Modernity, Fictionality, and the Middle Ages," 147 and introduction.

71. There is no current consensus on the levels of the text's narratorial discourse, presented in the present tense, and its story, narrated in the past. Julie Scott Meisami argued that Neẓāmī's fictional narrator should generally be viewed as unreliable, acquiring "the status of another character, providing yet another perspective on the action in the poem," while Asghar Seyed-Gohrab asserted that Neẓāmī's narrator is "external," while noting shifts between first and third person as he states "The narrator uses the first and the third person to narrate his story. The commentator's first-person commentaries and monologues give the poem a more direct tenor and dramatic effect, whereas most events are narrated in the third person. To create more attachment between the reader and specific characters such as Majnun, the narrator gives him many chances to express his feelings in direct speech. The narrator has full control of the narrative and directs the reader in whatever direction he wishes." My view is closer to Meisami's as I consider the

typically occur in tandem with explication of the term *‘ishq* itself, such as in this passage that occurs after Layla’s father denies Majnun’s father’s request of marriage between Layla and Majnun:

<p><i>‘Ishq</i> that is not <i>‘ishq</i> of eternity is a plaything of youthful lust.</p> <p>For <i>‘ishq</i> is that which does not decrease as long as it is, it remains steadfast.</p> <p>True <i>‘ishq</i> is not a passing fancy if for it eternity is declining.</p> <p>Majnun, who is the illustrious name of <i>‘ishq</i> who is, in full awareness, all of what <i>‘ishq</i> is</p> <p>bore <i>‘ishq</i> all while he was alive he thrived like a rose by the breeze of <i>‘ishq</i>.</p> <p>And now that his rose has gone on its journey that dew which remains is rosewater from him—</p> <p>me too from that sweet-scented rosewater sweeten my water in this river.⁷²</p>	<p>عشقی که نه عشق جاودانیست بازیچه شهوت جوانیست</p> <p>عشق آن باشد که کم نگردد تا باشد از آن قدم نگردد</p> <p>آن عشق نه سرسری خیالست کاو را ابدالابد زوالست</p> <p>مجنون که بلند نام عشقست از معرفت تمام عشقست</p> <p>تا زنده به عشق بارکش بود چون گل به نسیم عشق خوش بود</p> <p>و اکنون که گلش رحیل یاب است آن قطره که ماند ازو گلاب است</p> <p>من نیز بدان گلاب خوشبوی خوش می کنم آب خود درین جوی</p>
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The beginning of this passage shows how the narrator defines *‘ishq* in proximity to eternality, and contrasts it to lust (*shahwat*), which is associated with youth. This sense of eternality signals some sense of a divine element to *‘ishq* similar to Aḥmad Ghazālī’s approach of providing the term with a cosmogonic backstory, although the looseness with which this reference is made may signal Ibn Sīnā’s philosophical approach instead of being wholeheartedly mystically inflected.⁷³ The text

narrator as a fictional character that has limited omniscience and that offers metadiegetic commentary. See Julie Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 178 and Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnūn: Love, Madness, and Mystic Longing in Nezāmī’s Epic Romance*, 41.

72. Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 96 / 17 v. 88-94.

73. There is likewise no scholarly consensus on to what degree the poem should be considered “mystical.” Overall, Julie Scott Meisami suggests that Majnun serves as a “negative exemplum” of ethical behavior, while Asghar Seyed-Gohrab argues that Majnun epitomizes the exemplary behavior of a mystic. Instead of labeling the poem as

plays with mystical terms such as, in this passage, declaring that Majnun had full awareness (*ma'arifa*), a kind of knowledge that mystics claim supersedes other types of knowledge, while its sense of the eternity of *'ishq* likewise gestures to the overarching Neoplatonic currents of the Persianate world at the time.⁷⁴ Indeed, repeated associations of *'ishq* with a world of forms—signaled through references to the world of *'ishq* (*'ālam-e 'ishq*)—that lies beyond the temporal world affirm Neoplatonic undertones.⁷⁵ Unlike how the prior Arabic material attributed to Majnun often uses *'ishq* as synonymous with other terms for love, the text here clearly encapsulates its meaning and indicates that Majnun is exemplary of it. The image of the rose and rosewater likewise signals a temporal as well as thematic shift—the narrator, though claiming to inherit an aspect of the eternity of *'ishq* from Majnun, speaks of the sweetening of his “own water,” signaling the different material or intellectual circumstances of his own time. Instead of reading this narrator as transparently representing Neẓāmī’s authorial voice, I suggest that the narrator be understood as a character internal to the text, further underscoring *'ishq*’s thematization and its textual centrality.

Though *Layli and Majnun* occasionally employs other terms for love, *'ishq* is by far the most prominent and is often emphasized repetitively in passages that suggest definitional work

either “mystical” (or “secular,” a more dubious category for the premodern period), I focus on how it speaks of *'ishq* in ways that do and do not resemble contemporaneous texts that are more overtly written for Sufis and practitioners of Islamic mysticism. See Mesiami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 162-172 and Seyed-Gohrab, *Layli and Majnūn*, 17-23.

74. For example, Shihāb al-Dīn Yahya Suhrawardī (d. 1191) received and further developed Ibn Sīnā’s neoplatonic cosmology and angelology, as well as rejected his more Peripatetic tendency toward Aristotelian definition. This greatly impacted later philosophical writing in Persianate lands. For careful analysis of how this shift impacts discourse around the imaginal world (*'alām al-mithāl*) see Fazlur Rahman, “Dream, Imagination and 'Ālam al-Mithāl,” *Islamic Studies* 3, no. 2 (1964): 167-80.

75. Majnun himself is described as a captive (*shahrband*) in the world of *'ishq* (*'ālam-i 'ishq*), and the text also plays with Neoplatonic and/or Sufi dimensions by specifying that happiness in *'ishq* is found sleep or in the imaginary (*khayāl*) as well as referencing a school of *'ishq* (*madhdhab-i 'ishq*) that in modern scholarship is more often associated with Sufism. See Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, 68, 169, and 198.

such as the one cited above.⁷⁶ I attempt to encapsulate the eternal, metaphysical aspect by characterizing *'ishq* as a force, a force that may have no beginning or end, although this is only a part of the text's conceptualization. Despite such Neoplatonic associations, *Layli and Majnun* positively associates *'ishq* with embodiment from the beginning of the story onwards. Immediately after the lovers meet at school—a meeting place that itself marks a shift away from the Arabic versions—the text comments upon how their subsequent behavior differs from their classmates. Staging a juxtaposition between these two groups, the text elaborates on how the lovers' subject of study (*'ishq*) differs from that of their classmates (*'ilm*):

Friends were studying to acquire knowledge while they spoke kindly to one another.	یاران به حساب علم خوانی و ایشان به حدیث مهربانی
Friends were creating their speech from language while they wrote in another language.	یاران سخن از لغت سرشتند ایشان لغتی دگر نوشتند
Friends were repeating what others had said while they spoke only about their own lives.	یاران صفت مقال گفتند ایشان همه حسب حال گفتند
Friends were reading from knowledge's pages while they were exhaling a breath in <i>'ishq</i> .	یاران ورقی ز علم خواندند ایشان نفسی به عشق راندند
Friends sat together in great numbers while they numbered only themselves. ⁷⁷	یاران از شمار بیش بودند و ایشان به شمار خویش بودند

Knowledge (*'ilm*) here consists of learning forms of speech and reading from books, modes which differ from the lovers' forms of communication that do not depend on spoken language and instead

76. *'Ishq* is used at the end of the lengthy introduction to *Laylī o Majnūn*, as well as seven times in its concluding section indicating it as a major theme throughout. Other than the passages I have cited here, there is also an emphatic passage that I analyze in chapter three on the narrator's deployment of *'ishq* during the lovers' final meeting. *Havas* (passion) is also occasionally a term of use but seems to be relegated to negative connotations, such as Majnun's father's usage of it against him or the narrator's deployment of it in Majnun's death. Moreover, even though Neẓāmī refers to *Khosrow and Shirin* as a "*havas-nāma*," there is an entire introductory section dedicated to *'ishq*. See Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, 74, 265-266, 297 and *Khosrow va Shīrīn*, ed. by Behrouz Servatiyan (Tehran: Mu'assasah-e Enteshārāt-e Amir Kabir, 2007).

77. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Servatiyan, 79 / 12 v. 77-81.

consist of recalling internal states (*hāl*) and inner feelings through body language. The text affirms ‘*ishq*’s proximity to embodiment by clarifying that lovers primarily communicate through sighs. Notably, these repeatedly apposed lines never contrast ‘*ishq* with rationality (‘*aql*) directly, again signaling the text’s thematic shift away from the inherited Arabic material. Instead, both Layla and Majnun are set up as lovers who express ‘*ishq* through their bodies and who learn it by means other than the knowledge acquired through formal education (‘*ilm*), means which leave a lingering eroticism in place.

Layli and Majnun likewise describes ‘*ishq* with metaphors from natural imagery as well as from forms of bondage associated with love poetics. These metaphors emphasize the role of bodies as the means through which ‘*ishq* finds expression. During the lovers’ time together in youth just as their affection is revealed, the text describes them by mixing these metaphors in a way that shows how it is weaving together multiple registers:

<p>Although they were patient such that they tried to clothe that unconcealed, naked ‘<i>ishq</i></p> <p>what profit can come from patience in ‘<i>ishq</i>? the sun should not be overlaid with clay</p> <p>an eye tells secrets with a thousand glances how can the secret be hidden with a veil?</p> <p>And what’s to be done with a ringlet whose curls are a thousand chains besides being ensnared?⁷⁸</p>	<p>کردند شکیب تا بکوشند و آن عشق برهنه را بپوشند</p> <p>در عشق شکیب کی کند سود خورشید به گل نشاید اندود</p> <p>چشمی به هزار غمزه غماز در پرده نهفته چون بود راز</p> <p>زلفی به هزار حلقه زنجیر جز شیفته بودنش چه تدبیر⁷⁹</p>
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78. Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 81 / 13 v. 14-20.

79. Zanjani has this line as:

جز شیفته دل شدن چه تدبیر

“what’s to be done with a ringlet whose curls are a thousand chains besides be mad, enamored?” See Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Zanjani, 36 / v. 905.

‘Ishq here is equated to a series of objects—the sun, an eye, a secret, a ringlet—that create a sense of it as a kind of amorphous yet tangible thing. The metaphor of a hidden secret is a common trope employed across languages of medieval Islamic love poetry, most commonly known due to Ibn Ḥazm’s (d. 1064) *Ring of the Dove* (*Ṭawq al-ḥamāma*) that some scholars claim contributed to the rise of courtly love in Europe.⁸⁰ Yet the final metaphor shifts from such pleasant, natural imagery as the narrator compares *‘ishq* to a ringlet (*zolf*), a highly conventional feature of the ideal beloved’s hair in the Persianate world, which then is comprised of chains that inevitably ensnare the lover.⁸¹ Appealing directly to mania (*shīfteh*), this passage likewise alludes to the medical understanding of *‘ishq* as illness and gives way to an idea of the raw power of *‘ishq* that overwhelms and ensnares, for better or worse.

This raw power is often exemplified throughout the text by a personification of *‘ishq* as a subject itself in the repeated anaphora, “*‘ishq* came (*‘ishq amād*).” At times, this usage highlights the violence that ensues from *‘ishq*, such as a line from this same section on the lovers’ love being revealed that states, “*‘ishq* came and emptied out the dwelling place / taking up the indiscriminate sword.”⁸² Such sweeping slaughter foreshadows the lovers’ immediate and eventual demise. And

80. For a discussion of this claim, see Lois A. Giffen, “Ibn Ḥazm and the *Ṭawq al-Ḥamāma*,” in *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, edited by Salma Khadra Jayyusi (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 420-442.

81. Annemarie Schimmel has discussed how this feature accompanies the rhetorical reference point in classical Persian poetry for the beloved being the “desirable,” light-skinned Turk whose opposite was the “undesirable” Hindu. See Annemarie Schimmel, “Turk and Hindu: A Poetical Image and Its Application to Historical Fact,” *Islam and Cultural Change in the Middle Ages: 4th Giorgio Levi Della Vida Conference* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1975), 107.

82.

عشق آمد و خانه کرد خالی
برداشته تیغ لالابالی

Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 80 / 13 v. 9. *‘Ishq* is also personified as the *sāqī* (cupbearer):

عشق آمد و خام جام در داد
جامی به دو خوی خام در داد

yet, this sense of *'ishq*'s raw power is also appealed to in order to show its capacity to overturn relational hierarchies, such as a line that quips at the many times Majnun's father attempts to advise him ("advice even when it is quite worthwhile / when *'ishq* came what is the place of advice"), or a line with a slightly altered construction that underscores Layla's reliance upon *'ishq* against patriarchal circumstances ("since *'ishq* was mixed up in her soul's essence / what fear was there of father or husband.")⁸³ Not a feeling, *'ishq*'s personification throughout the text frames it as a kind of force that acts on bodies.

Though this personification may lead to the idea that *'ishq* is wholly external, the last line quoted in parentheses gestures to interiority, as *'ishq* emanates from Layla's soul or essence (*gawhar*). Instead of locating *'ishq* as external or internal to individuals, the text repeatedly alludes to its transferability as seen in the previous section with the image of the rose and rosewater. A significant example of this transferability comes with the introduction of Majnun's character at the beginning of the story, as the narrator explicates that he becomes exemplary of *'ishq* through suckling breastmilk:

<p>In his time under the rule of wet-nursing he was nourished in the milk of affection</p> <p>with each drop of milk they mixed on his lip they wrote a sign of devotion on him</p>	<p>دورانش به حکم دایگانی پرورد به شیر مهربانی</p> <p>هر شیر که در لبش سرشتند حرفی ز وفا برو نوشتند</p>
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"*'ishq* came and gave the raw wine of the glass / gave a glass to the two raw ones." Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 78 / 12 v. 82.

83.

پند ارچه هزار سودمندست
چون عشق آمد چه جای پندست

چون عشق سرشته شد به گوهر
چه بیم پدر چه باک شوهر

The latter citation moreover comes after Layla slaps Ibn Salam after her father marries her to him. See Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 88 / 16 v. 7 and 161 / 33 v. 112.

<p>whatever substance that they gave for his food they filled his heart with loving kindness</p> <p>with each blue line they drew upon his face they blew the magic of the heart on him...</p> <p>'<i>ishq</i> was watering him with both hands making the essence of '<i>ishq</i> glow from him.'⁸⁴</p>	<p>هر مایه که از غذاش دادند دل دوستی درو نهادند</p> <p>هر نیل که بر رخس کشیدند افسون دلی درو دمیدند</p> <p>عشقش به دو دستی آب می داد زو گوهر عشق تاب می داد</p>
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Not only does Majnun have multiple wet-nurses that supply him with the traits of devotion (*vafā*) and loving kindness (*del dūstī-ī*) that come to define his character, but also he is directly nourished by a personified '*ishq*. Through milk kinship (*raḍā*'), Majnun gains the traits that destine him for exemplarity, transferred from both natural and supernatural actors.⁸⁵ It is through such relations that whatever exists of '*ishq* in Majnun's self is cultivated, emanating from his own body as well.

These factors of '*ishq*'s potency and transferability place Majnun in a curious position of limited power as its exemplar. In a dense passage that describes Majnun after he has grown up yet before Layla's father's refusal of him, the narrator indicates how Majnun is both empowered and overpowered by '*ishq* in a series of epithets:

<p>Sultan of the throne of morning risers Commander of the army of weepers</p> <p>Concealed one of the path of kindliness Captive of the alley of fair play</p> <p>Instrument of the singers of Baghdad A buyer mid the merchants of love laments</p> <p>Drummer of the blast of an iron drum</p>	<p>سلطان سریر صبح خیزان سرخیل سپاه اشک ریزان</p> <p>متواری راه دلنوازی زنجیری کوی پاکبازی</p> <p>قانون مغنیان بغداد بیاع معاملان فریاد</p>
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84. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 76-77 /12 v. 34-36 and 43.

85. Rachel Schine has discussed how milk kinship (*raḍā*') appears in many medieval Arabic popular epics as a way of indicating how a hero absorbs specific qualities. It is noteworthy, per her discussion on such scenes as empowering feminine actors, that Majnun has not only multiple wet nurses (perhaps adding to his femininity) and yet their significance is placed within the greater significance of a divine actor. See Rachel Schine, "Nourishing the Noble: Breastfeeding and Hero-Making in Medieval Arabic Popular Literature" in *Al-'Uṣūr al-Wuṣṭā* 27 (2019): 178-180.

Monk of the convent of lamentation	طبال نفیر آهین کوس رهبان کلیسیای افسوس
Hidden magician and apparent <i>dīv</i> Hārūt of those that have mad desires	جادوی نهفته دیو پیدا هاروت مهوسان شیدا
Kay Khosrow without a crown or a throne Delighter of thousands who go without clothes	کیخسرو بی کلاه بی تخت دل خوش کن صد هزار بی رخت
Land-granter to a militia of ants Enthroned upon the back of asses	اقطاع ده سپاه موران اورنگ نشین پشت گوران
Forward guard of the castles of temptations Guard keeper of the unguarded convent ⁸⁶	در اجه قلعه های وسواس دارنده پاس دیر بی پاس

Ironically, these martial metaphors that depict Majnun as commander show how his army of ants and weepers might not be the most successful in waging war. His power has magical qualities that the narrator describes with a certain ambivalence—he is both like the fallen angel Hārūt who falls into temptation and teaches illicit magic, and the monk of a convent.⁸⁷ Both of these senses, however, indicate that Majnun transfers something of the potency of *‘ishq* to others, reinforced through the metaphor of his being an instrument to Baghdad’s singers, such singers who historically transmitted Majnun’s story are fictionally alluded to in *Layli and Majnun* in the character of Salam Baghdadi who seeks to be an apprentice to Majnun and who brings his poems from the wilderness back to Baghdad.⁸⁸ Lacking the typical adornments of sovereignty such as a

86. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 83 / 14 v. 1-8.

87. It is moreover interesting to note these comparisons given the ways in which madness, prophecy, and magic are recognized as proximate categories in the Qur’ān. Riffing on the motif of Moses’ staff transforming into a snake, Sūra al-Dhāriyāt (Q 51:39 and 52) quotes the accusation made by Pharaoh of Moses of being “a magician or a madman (*sāḥirun aw majnūnun*)” before gesturing to Muhammad’s similar situation by stating that “similarly, there came not to those before them any messenger except that they said, ‘a magician or a madman.’” See also G. Vajda, “Hārūt wa Mārūt,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam, second edition*, edited by P. Bearman et al (consulted online on December 6, 2023) http://dx.doi.org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_2750

88. Salam Baghdadi seems to be a character of Neẓāmī’s invention as he is not mentioned in the prior Arabic material. He comes to visit Majnun twice in the desert, the second time just before Majnun’s death which allows him to bring his final poems to Baghdad. See Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 288. Hilary Kilpatrick has discussed the significance of song in the presentation style of the *Book of Songs*, wherein performance indications

crown or throne, Majnun nevertheless exudes power over those who, like him, are susceptible to *‘ishq*’s potency.

These factors of *‘ishq*’s proximity to embodiment, its power, and its transferability lead me to my basic approach to *‘ishq* as a force that transforms bodies in *Layli and Majnun*. Rather than classifying *Layli and Majnun*’s approach to *‘ishq* according to one of the historical discourses of the time, I suggest that the text’s explicit thematization of it plays with multiple registers in order to foreground new effects of its power to lead to corporeal transformation. Moreover, different characters have different perspectives on *‘ishq*, and often the play with multiple historical registers happens through dialogic encounter. Moments of encounter provide a dramatization of debate on *‘ishq*’s meaning, and the narrative itself offers an illustration of the corporeal effects of *‘ishq* on Majnun beyond his speeches that recall a poet-lover masculinity inherited from courtly discourse. In these encounters, Majnun’s embodied performances of bondage allow for a critique of the normative kinship structure that undergirds the legend to come more sharply into view.

IV. Bondage and performance

Throughout *Layli and Majnun*, Majnun not only articulates the ideals of a suffering lover, but also performs them with his body. It is through this embodied performance that the reader gets a glimpse of not only his rhetorical suffering, but also the pleasures he experiences while imagining kinship otherwise. Beyond rhetorical appeals, Majnun’s embodied performance of lifelong devotion signals a willingness to risk emasculation through *actual* desire for a woman, a desire which, as Sedgwick maintains and as the legend itself frequently admits, should be rerouted in

follow the poetic texts. For an overview of musicological scholarship on the *Book of Songs*, see Hilary Kilpatrick, *Making the Great Book of Songs: Compilation and the author craft in Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī’s Kitāb al-aghānī* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003) 11-12.

favor of solidifying powerful kinship ties.⁸⁹ At the end of one of his early speeches, Majnun gestures to how his suffering as a lover has already affected his body by causing it to bend and twist in odd ways:

<p>My foot like two <i>lāms</i> can be bent my hand like two <i>yās</i> can be twisted</p> <p>your name can thus be applied to me for it has two <i>lāms</i> and two <i>yās</i>, Layli.</p> <p>Your <i>‘ishq</i> should not be set aside from my heart and this secret is not to be revealed.</p> <p>With milk this secret came to my body only with my life will it be taken back.”⁹⁰</p>	<p>پایم چو دو لام خم پذیرست دستم چو دو یا شکنج گیرست</p> <p>نام تو مرا چو نام دارد کاو نیز دو یا دو لام دارد</p> <p>عشق تو ز دل نهادنی نیست وین راز به کس گشادنی نیست</p> <p>با شیر به تن در آمد این راز با جان به درآید از تنم باز</p>
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Like the Arabic characters *lām* (ل) and *ye* (ي) that comprise Layla’s name (لیلی), Majnun’s foot and hand are bent by his bondage to her. This lettrist appeal shows how Majnun imagines Layla’s power as literally branding him, and how his appearance as a suffering lover lends him the feminized characteristics typical of *‘udhrī* lovers. Moreover, this passage highlights how Majnun imagines the suffering role of a lover as something that extends until and culminates in death. Death brings the end of Majnun’s body which was initially given *‘ishq*’s power through milk-kinship—an Islamic practice that sanctions ties beyond blood relation—with various wet nurses. Once again, Majnun’s perspective on *‘ishq* culminates in ideas of suffering and martyrdom similar to courtly discourse, yet here the rhetoric is taken to a new level by emphasizing embodied affliction.

89. In systems of obligatory heterosexuality, Sedgwick notes that “to misunderstand the kind of property women are or the kind of transaction in which alone their value is realizable means, for a man, to endanger his own position as a subject in the relationship of exchange: to be permanently feminized or objectified in relation to other men.” This resonates with the fact that Majnun’s family frequently attempts to marry him to other women suitable for him according to kinship regulations. See Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 51.

90. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 96 / 17 v. 82-85.

Majnun’s performances of embodied suffering in the text have larger ramifications for imagining a different kind of society writ large. His embodiment of suffering not only places him at odds with associations of masculinity and strength, but also brings forth the problematic ways that masculine strength undergirds male-dominated kinship structures. A poignant example of this kind of critique-via-performance occurs after the local nobleman Nawfal befriends Majnun in the wilderness and offers to help him win Layla back after she has been betrothed to Ibn Salam. The two new friends subsequently engage in battle with Layla’s family—a classic topos that undergirds the representation of a kinship system in which women are obtained by force—yet Majnun wanders about mourning the losses of the opposing side. When someone asks him about this odd behavior on the battlefield, Majnun explains:

<p>When the enemy is the beloved what need could there be of any sword?</p> <p>With an enemy one can fight in blood with the beloved, how can there be fighting?</p> <p>From battles come wounds and lacerations but here all that comes is a calming scent— when the beloved sends the scent of life the lover in recompense sends the same back.</p> <p>She sends to me kohl made of my dust while I, pounding stones, what courage do I have?</p> <p>She gave honey to me by her promise It is not right to give vinegar back.</p> <p>That side has the hand of the beloved how can anyone go, passing it by?</p> <p>The inclination of my heart is there my heart is there because my life is there.</p> <p>Dying for the beloved is a duty</p>	<p>گفتا که چو خصم یار باشد با تیغ مرا چه کار باشد</p> <p>با خصم نبرد خون توان کرد با یار نبرد چون توان کرد</p> <p>از معرکه ها جراحت آید اینجا همه بوی راحت آید</p> <p>معشوقه چو بوی جان فرستد عاشق به عوض همان فرستد</p> <p>او سرمه فرستد از غبارم من سنگ زدن چه زهره دارم</p> <p>او داده به وعده انگبینم من سرکه دهم روا نبینم</p> <p>آن جانب دست یار دارد کس جانب یار چون گذارد</p> <p>میل دل مهر بانم آنجاست آنجاست دلم که جانم آنجاست</p>
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she is taking life and I am giving.⁹¹

شرطست به پیش یار مردن
زو جان ستدن زمن سپردن

The force of this critique lies not only in Majnun's words, but also in the dramatization of his actions in battle. The idea of winning over the beloved is not only critiqued rhetorically, but also is dismantled through a performance that stalls the progression of a system that traffics in women, a system which is most prominently upheld in the text by Layla's father who subsequently proclaims to Nawfal that he would rather have his daughter put to death than marry a madman who will only hurt his family's honor.⁹² Majnun's perspective underscores a certain absurdity built into

91. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 132 / 26 v. 53-62.

92.

گر دخت مرا بیاوری پیش
بخشی به کمینه بنده خویش

راضی شوم و سپاس دارم
وز حکم تو سر برون نیارم

ور آتش تیز بر فروزی
او را به مثل چو عود سوزی

ور زانکه در افگنی به چاهش
یا تیغ کنی کنی تباهش...

اما ندهم به دیو فرزند
دیوانه به بند به نه دربند

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"If you bring my daughter before you (Nawfal)
You will take my own blessing

I will be content and give thanks
And I will not intervene in your jurisdiction

And if you throw her in a burning fire
In which she would burn for example like wood

Or if you toss her into a well
Or bring a sword down on her corruption

But I will not give her to that demon boy

this system and points instead to an imagining of a different kind of relationship between lover and beloved that implies reciprocity (in this passage through the exchange of good scents and honey) even as his speech gives way to another set of clearly defined roles—the beloved takes life and the lover gives it, and the force of what is required (*shart*) is redirected inwards.

Yet Majnun’s performance on the battlefield not only critiques societal structures, but also inspires others to begin to think otherwise. In response to Majnun’s speech, the questioner cries while Majnun dances, signaling both how Majnun’s performance seriously affects this questioner and how, despite an emphasis on pain, Majnun’s suffering carries an attendant pleasure. This pleasure comes into full view only after Majnun has been questioned, a questioning that shows how his worldview grates against what is normatively expected. This questioner’s response indicates that Majnun’s proclaimed suffering, despite its negative effects on Layla, retains the power to move others especially as his embodied performance forestalls the kinship system and presents the pleasure of a capacity to imagine things otherwise.

V. Consent and Sacrifice: Reimagining kinship through performance

Two later episodes show how Majnun performs the ideals of a suffering lover by appealing to and performing bondage as a way of countering the expectation that he overcome actual desire for a woman in favor of a union that is more beneficial for familial ties. As with the scene on the battlefield, both of these episodes incorporate dialogue as the means through which Majnun solidifies his position against these normative kinship expectations and both point to how various other characters respond to Majnun’s performative critique. Moreover, the dialogic mode of the

A mad one is better off bound in chains.”

Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 138 / v. 42-45 and 48.

narrative poem allows for the reader to see how Majnun consents to bondage, which is significant insofar as Majnun's appeals to bondage do cause him actual pain in the text and make recourse to a vocabulary of enslavement. Yet unlike enslaved people of premodern Islamic contexts, Majnun's consent indicates that his bondage is performative as it heightens his level of commitment to the ideal of sacrifice on behalf of the beloved. Alongside his ability to consent, the reader gets a glimpse of Majnun's laughing and dancing, or, of the pleasures of utilizing sacrifice as a way of serving as an imagined release from the power dynamics of normative social relations.

Bondage serves as the means through which Majnun rejects his own father's advice, which overturns one of the most central relationships in the text, that of father and son.⁹³ Perhaps the most poignant moment of this occurs when Majnun's father takes him to the Ka'ba to cure him of *'ishq*, an episode that also prominently features bondage imagery in the *Dīwan* and is one of the main plot points that recurs across different versions of the story. In *Layli and Majnun*, this episode occurs after Layla's father has refused Majnun's father's marriage proposal. After consulting his family, Majnun's father decides that a visit to the Ka'ba might correct his son's increasingly erratic behavior, and upon their reaching the Ka'ba he states:

93. Dick Davis has discussed the centrality of father-son relationships, typically gone wrong, in the *Shāhnāma*. A similar tension can be seen throughout *Layli and Majnun*, as the story begins with Majnun's father praying (wrongfully, as the narrator underscores his greed) for a son, as well as in their long, extended dialogue before the father's inevitable death. See Dick Davis, *Epic and Sedition: The Case of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh* (Washington DC: Mage Publishers, 2006), 6-15 and Nezāmi, *Layli and Majnun*, 75-77 and 170-185.

<p>He said, “Son, this is not a place of play make haste, this is a place of finding a cure</p> <p>Circle your hand around the Ka’ba’s knocker so that you may escape the circle of grief</p> <p>and say, “Oh god from this extreme behavior grant me the success of your salvation.</p> <p>be merciful and bring me protection from this ravishment, bring me to the path!</p> <p>See how I am afflicted by <i>‘ishq</i> oh God, from the blight of <i>‘ishq</i> make me free!”⁹⁴</p>	<p>گفت ای پسر این نه جای بازیست بشتاب که جای چاره سازیست</p> <p>در حلقه کعبه حلقه کن دست کز حلقه غم بدو توان رست</p> <p>گو یا رب ازین گزاف کاری توفیق دهم به رستگاری</p> <p>رحمت کن و در پناهم آور زین شیفتگی به راهم آور</p> <p>دریاب که مبتلای عشقم آزاد کن از بلای عشقم</p>
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Majnun’s father offers a perspective on *‘ishq* similar to the medical views that I outlined in the first section, with the caveat being that he appeals to religion as the means through which Majnun might be cured of *‘ishq*’s calamity. This request introduces the vocabulary of bondage to the episode through the door knocker (*ḥalqe*) of the Ka’ba around which Majnun is asked to circle his hand, the second action likely serving as a metaphor for comprehending what Majnun’s father perceives as a religious commandment to eschew *‘ishq*. Instructing Majnun with a series of commands, Majnun’s father advises his son according to views that were dominant at the time.

Majnun responds to his father’s demands with laughter, as well as his own, alternative approach. Instead of seeing *‘ishq* as a calamity, Majnun employs the vocabulary of bondage to describe the ways in which *‘ishq* nourishes him:

94. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 98 / 18 v. 18-22.

<p>Majnun when he heard this speech about <i>'ishq</i> at first cried and then he laughed about it.</p> <p>He jumped from his place like a coiled snake hitting the curls of the Ka'ba's ringlet</p> <p>while grasping the ring of the Ka'ba's door he said, "Today I am the door knocker</p> <p>I sell my soul in servitude of <i>'ishq</i> may my ear never be without its ring!</p> <p>They say go, separate yourself from <i>'ishq</i> this is not a familiar path to me</p> <p>I am nourished by <i>'ishq</i> from which I gain strength if <i>'ishq</i> were to die then I die as well.</p> <p>My temperament was nourished by <i>'ishq</i> – may my fortune never be without it!⁹⁵</p>	<p>مجنون چون حدیث عشق بشنید اول بگریست پس بخندید</p> <p>از جای چو مار حلقه بر جست در حلقه زلف کعبه زد دست</p> <p>می گفت گرفته حلقه در بر کامروز منم چو حلقه بر در</p> <p>در حلقه عشق جان فروشم بی حلقه او مباد گوشم</p> <p>گویند از عشق کن جدایی این نیست طریق آشنایی</p> <p>من قوت ز عشق می پذیرم گر میرد عشق من بمیرم</p> <p>پرورده عشق شد سرشتم بی عشق مباد سرنوشتم</p>
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As in the *Dīwan*, Majnun appeals to the similarity between the intense bond of romantic lovers and between a worshipping servant (*'abd*) and the divine, yet here his character clearly articulates *'ishq* as the word used to describe his loving devotion as well as the thing which has nourished him. Inverting his father's command, Majnun likens *'ishq* to the Ka'ba itself in having its own need for circling (*ḥalqe*), which he amplifies through the image of an enslaved person's earring (*ḥalqe-ye gūsh*).⁹⁶ The Ka'ba is likewise compared to a human beloved, signaled through its having a ringlet (*zolf*). These comparisons show how Majnun rejects his father's approach of curing *'ishq* by means of religion by repeatedly gesturing to the similarity between the two as things that bind. The poignance of the moment is further dramatized by being at the Ka'ba, and

95. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 98 / 18 v. 23-29.

96. My thanks to Franklin Lewis for pointing out the context of this image. For more on slavery and material culture in early Islam, see Elizabeth Urban, *Conquered Populations in Early Islam: Non-Arabs, Slaves and the Sons of Slave Mothers* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020).

Majnun’s rhetorical likening of *‘ishq* to the Ka‘ba provides an authoritative backdrop for overturning his father’s view—a view whose curative approach signals the threat of Majnun’s lifelong devotion to existing kinship structures—through reimagining bondage itself.

Majnun then expands upon his own understanding of *‘ishq* in a prayer. Requesting instead that the divine grant him *‘ishq* “at its extremes (*be ghāyatī*),” Majnun appeals to sacrifice on behalf of the beloved as the next logical step of showing his devotion and servitude:

From my life whatever remains of it take all of it and add it to her life.	از عمر من آنچه هست بر جای بستان و به عمر او در افزای
If I have become a hair out of grief I don’t wish even one less hair on her head.	گر چه شده ام چو مویی از غم یک موی نخواهم از سرش کم
May my respectful ear not be freed of her punishing earring in reproach	از حلقه او به گوشمالی گوش ادبم مباد خالی
may my cup never be without her wine may my repute not be without her coin	بی باده او مباد جامم بی سکه او مباد نامم
may my soul be ransomed for her beauty if she drinks my blood may it be halal.	جانم فدی جمال بادش گر خون خوردم حلال بادش
Though from anguish I burn like a candle may my days never be without anguish	گرچه ز غمش چو شمع سوزم هم بی غم او مباد روزم
may <i>‘ishq</i> remain in place just as it is then may it be a hundred times multiplied!” ⁹⁷	عشقی که چنین به جای خود باد چندانکه بود یکی به صد باد

As before, Majnun explicates that as a lowly, suffering lover it is his duty to give on behalf of his powerful beloved who is here likened to a sovereign who has control over material goods such as wine and coinage. Appealing to his own anguish, Majnun again references an enslaved person’s earring as well as the more shocking image of the beloved drinking his own blood that he maintains

97. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 99 / 18 v. 37-43.

is halal, signaling her absolute power over him as well as his own yearning for a kind of suffering that gives way to sacrifice. Such acts entail using his body according to his own understanding of *‘ishq*, which he requests to only be multiplied. Although these appeals clearly gesture towards Majnun’s victimhood, Majnun nevertheless maintains power through regaining rhetorical control of the definition of *‘ishq*. Majnun rejects his father’s curative view—who subsequently proclaims that Majnun is “a chain that has burst its bonds” (*selseleh-e ke band begosast*)—and it is through religious metaphors that Majnun articulates the meaning of his own actions and desires. Sacrifice, here coded as a kind of heightened version of willing submission (*islām*), serves as the sanctified means through which Majnun overturns both the authority of his father and of curative approaches to *‘ishq* itself.

In the second episode that I analyze, Majnun’s ability to consent to a different kind of bondage is further placed on display. This episode begins with Majnun coming across an old woman who parades a poor man about in chains as a way for them both to make money. Much later in the text than the Ka’ba episode, Majnun has by now begun more frequent flights to the wilderness after Nawfal’s attempts to win Layla in battle have failed. Notably, this episode is preceded by two episodes wherein Majnun frees animals from their traps to the chagrin of hunters, which facilitates readerly identification of Majnun with prey as he offers himself as a substitute for the man in chains to the old woman:

<p>Majnun with his completely broken wings fell at the old woman's foot for awhile</p> <p>“This cord of rope on his neck and those chains take from this friend and put them onto me</p> <p>for we are the disturbed and bizarre he is not deserving of shackles, we are</p> <p>make me into one who is disgraced here and everywhere that you wish to pull.</p> <p>Whatever you scrounge up in this way is for your taking without me as partner.”⁹⁸</p>	<p>مجنون ز سر شکسته بالی در پای زن اوفتاد حالی</p> <p>کاین سلسله طناب و زنجیر بر من نه ازین رفیق برگیر</p> <p>کاشفته و مستمند ماییم او نیست سزای بند ماییم</p> <p>می گردانم به روسیاهی اینجا و به هر کجا که خواهی</p> <p>هرچ آن به هم آید از چنین شکاری بی شرکت من تراست بردار</p>
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More than a rhetorical appeal, Majnun sees the old woman's material ropes and chains as an opportunity for embodying the suffering required of a lover according to his views. Through a series of reversals, Majnun's speech encapsulates how this for him is an ennobling act as he claims, in the first-person plural, to be deserving of such shackles.⁹⁹ Embedded within what may look disgraceful Majnun rhetorically claims grandeur, a grandeur that is amplified by his refusal to accept his portion of their earnings. This request likewise highlights reversals in typical social hierarchies, as Majnun, a wealthy, young man, desires to be bound by an old, poor woman, all factors which amplify the degree to which Majnun performs submission.

The text subsequently reveals how the act of binding is pleasurable for Majnun, even if it is not witnessed as such by all:

98. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 153 / 32 v. 19-23.

99. *Mustmand* generally means “poor, empty handed.” I translate it as “bizarre” here both for literary effect, and it bring out the image of Majnun calling attention to the fact that he is visibly mad and “in need of” chains.

<p>When the old woman saw such prey as this she became happy at this accounting</p> <p>and took her hand from that friend quickly and tied the shackle and the rope on Majnun.</p> <p>She caressed him in tying him up as she looped the rope around his neck</p> <p>clasping it, and by the shackles freeing him and then she drove him from place to place.</p> <p>In every place that they reached men saw some cried looking at him, others guffawed –</p> <p>the person who was oblivious laughed the person who was intelligent cried.</p> <p>Majnun consented to being wounded with chain on foot and a fetter on neck</p> <p>When he was reaching the door of a tent he was bringing out a drunken lament and</p> <p>he was saying “Layla,” falling down on rocks and while falling on rocks, he was dancing.¹⁰⁰</p>	<p>چون دید زن این چنین شکاری شد شاد به این چنین شماری</p> <p>ز آن یار بداشت در زمان دست آن بند و رسن همه درو بست</p> <p>بناخت به بند کردن او را می برد رسن به گردن او را</p> <p>می بست و ز بند می رهندش وز حله به حله می دواندش</p> <p>هر جا که رسید مردم ان دید بگریست یکی یکی بخندید</p> <p>خندید کسی که بود غافل بگریست کسی که بود عاقل</p> <p>او داده رضا به زخم خوردن زنجیر به پای و غل به گردن</p> <p>چون بر در خیمه ای رسیدی مستانه سرود بر کشیدی</p> <p>لیلی گفتی و سنگ خوردی در خوردن سنگ رقص کردی</p>
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The old woman sees Majnun as prey, yet the narrator indicates Majnun’s own satisfaction in being shackled—the old woman “caressed” (*navākht*) him with the physical touch of the chains, and these shackles set him free. Despite any pain of the chains and of falling on rocks, Majnun’s dancing signals the attendant pleasure of his state. As with his laughter at his father, this dancing occurs precisely at the moment when there is a temporary shift in normative roles. Unlike, say, the normative expectation to win the beloved in battle with Nawfal, Majnun here actively consents to a passive position, a position which replays over and over the moment of separation. This

100. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 153 / 32 v. 24-32.

positionality leads to pleasure, here in the form of dancing, as Majnun is briefly removed from the pressures of linear time.¹⁰¹ Majnun temporarily alters societal pressures to “grow up” and be otherwise, and experiences pleasure and temporary contentment (*riḏā*) in this performance of embodied critique. Given the kinship constraints that led to the lovers’ separation, Majnun’s temporary pleasure moreover alludes to the promise of a society structured otherwise. The reference to two different groups of onlookers moreover shows how the text pauses and attempts to guide the reader into one response over another. While underscoring a kind of absurdity to Majnun’s appearance, the text urges a sympathetic response through highlighting those who cried in response to this sight as intelligent (*‘āqil*). This response indicates some kind of deeper consideration of Majnun’s performance, similar to the questioner’s response on the battlefield, and it alludes to how the stalling of Majnun’s performative acts might cause others to question what is typically a given, or, the normative kinship regulations that prevented the lovers’ union in the first place.

Still bound, Majnun and the old woman approach Layla’s homeland, a place which inspires a long soliloquy from Majnun about his suffering. This location allows Majnun to perform his embodied bondage in a way that manifests dedication to his ideals before the beloved, and there Majnun expounds on sacrifice and martyrdom as the ultimate and proper manifestation of his ideals. Addressing Layla, he states:

101. I draw loosely from Elizabeth Freeman’s discussion of the body in sadomasochistic ritual as a means of invoking history. Though the kinds of pasts that Freeman discusses differ from that which is invoked in *Layli and Majnun*, her discussion of sadomasochism as a set of practices that “self-consciously manipulates time” especially in it terms of a “future anterior” to imagine what “will have been” has helped me think through the pleasure that ensues from Majnun’s bondage. See Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*, 137-143.

<p>I bear the orders, you command them discipline me, however you see fit</p> <p>Do not recall me with troops, swords, and arrows see, before you I am like a prisoner...</p> <p>In life you did not send me well wishes or lay a hand upon my head in comfort</p> <p>so in my martyrdom my hope is for this – you lay a hand on me for whatever reason.</p> <p>If you bring a sharp sword down on my head you make me a sacrifice by this exit.</p> <p>I will make myself like Ishmael if I cause trouble, I will be an Isma‘īlī</p> <p>Since the candle of my heart is aglow if you behead me there is no sorrow</p> <p>a candle burns its head in utmost pain it is calmed when its head is cut off.¹⁰²</p>	<p>من حکم کش و تو حکم رانی تأدیب کنم چنانک دانی</p> <p>منگر به مصاف و تیغ و تیرم در پیش تو بین که چون اسیرم</p> <p>در زندگیم درود ناری دستی به سرم فرود ناری</p> <p>در کشتگیم امید آن هست کاری به بهانه بر سرم دست</p> <p>گر تیغ روان کنی برین سر قربان خودم کنی بدین در</p> <p>اسماعیلی ز خود بسنجم اسماعیلیم اگر برنجم</p> <p>چون شمع دلم فروغناکست گر باز بری سرم چه پاکست</p> <p>شمع از سر درد سر کشیدن آساید وقت سر بریدن</p>
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Majnun not only speaks of bondage here, but also performs it by drawing a harsh contrast between his embodied state of being in chains and the strength one displays in battle. This contrast references back to the episode a few scenes prior wherein Majnun accompanied Nawfal in a battle after the latter convinced him to try and win Layla back from her tribe in such a manner. Consent undergirds this performance of bondage, which Majnun affirms by referencing an Islamic understanding of Ishmael’s consent to being sacrificed in the Abraham parable. Like Ishmael, Majnun indicates his willingness to use his body by whatever means necessary.¹⁰³ Sacrifice gives

102. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 154-155 / v. 40-42 and 51-56.

103. As noted in the introduction, in the Qur’ān (37: 102), unlike in Genesis 22, Abraham has a conversation with his (unnamed) son about the impending sacrifice after receiving foreknowledge of the event in a dream. This has led many commentators to identify this son with Ishmael. This verses repetition of Isma‘īli (Ishmael) both emphasizes this understanding of the sacrificial event as normative, and portrays the sect of Shia Islam known as Isma‘īlis as non-normative, as noted by Behrouz Sarvatiyan. See Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, 415.

way to martyrdom, which affirms Majnun’s desire to embody his ideals of suffering on behalf of the beloved even in death. Notably, even though Majnun claims to be commanded by Layla, in this passage he commands her on how to act, once again showing how his ideals require a certain behavior from her as well as how he maintains power rhetorically.

This episode concludes with an external attestation to Majnun’s position of power as he tears off the chains and flees back to the Najd wilderness, a shocking conclusion that the text processes through a few different perspectives:

<p>He spoke, then darted forth like an arrow becoming insane, he ripped off the chains</p> <p>He gloried in the swelling of his grief an abounding wave he went to the mountains.</p> <p>He came to the Najd and he was wailing casting upon himself an arrow.</p> <p>His people when they heard the news of him went out and then saw the unseeable.</p> <p>Both mother and father in seeing thus felt hopeless and despaired for him at once.</p> <p>He would not become calm with anyone, so they bid farewell to their cowering son.</p> <p>He, in both broken and blooming places, only remembered Layla’s sign and name.</p> <p>When anyone spoke to him other things he hit himself, fled, or he was fainting.¹⁰⁴</p>	<p>این گفت و ز جای جست چون تیر دیوانه شد و برید زنجیر</p> <p>از کوهه غم شکوه بگرفت چون کوهه گرفت کوه بگرفت</p> <p>بر نجد شد و نفیر می زد بر خود ز طپانچه تیر می زد</p> <p>خویشان که ازو خبر شنیدند رفتند و ندیدنی بدیدند</p> <p>هم مادر و هم پدر در آن کار نومید شدند ازو به یکبار</p> <p>با کس چو نمی شد آرمیده گفتند به ترک آن رمیده</p> <p>او را شده در خراب و آباد جز نام و نشان لیلی از یاد</p> <p>هر کس که جز این سخن بدو گفت یا تن زد یا گریخت یا خفت</p>
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Majnun’s ripping of the chains not only highlights the performative quality of his self-debasing, but also signals the metamorphosis of his character. Instead of living within societal constraints of

104. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 155 / 32 v. 61-68.

a kinship system that does not permit his lifelong desire for Layla, Majnun flees to the wilderness wherein his desire for a different kind of world will be recast amongst the animals. With this metamorphosis, the narrative takes time to comment on a variety of reactions—Majnun’s people stand in awe as they marvel at the wondrous and unseen (*nadīdanī*) whereas his mother and father succumb to a state of more permanent hopelessness for their son who is now beyond the pail of living within their society. The marveling of the general “people” holds out the potential for the reader that there is something yet to learn from Majnun even as his behavior eschews parental concerns, which, as we have seen, are informed by a very different understanding of *‘ishq* than his own. This group’s perspective—like the perspective of the witness on the battlefield and the group of people who deeply consider Majnun’s performance of bondage to the old woman—shows how the text intends for the reader to likewise pause after Majnun’s odd performances and wonder, what has caused this? And what if things were otherwise?

VI. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how Majnun enacts bondage as a way of performing a heightened level of commitment to his ideals. As an inherited figure, Majnun’s initial perspective in *Layli and Majnun* redeploys the gendered dimensions of courtly approaches to love that ascribe highly differentiated roles to a suffering poet-lover and his beloved in his speeches in the first half of the work. Yet simultaneously, *Layli and Majnun* incorporates various historical discourses on *‘ishq* and foregrounds a novel approach to *‘ishq*’s power to lead to corporeal transformation by juxtaposing philosophically inclined meanings with erotic and worldly undertones. The textual focus on *‘ishq*’s capacity to lead to corporeal transformation undergirds the recasting of Majnun’s character whose embodied performances critique normative kinship relations in a way that goes

beyond the inherited, rhetorical idiom of a poet-lover masculinity that focuses on suffering. Laughing and dancing, Majnun evades his father's and his society's expectations that he assimilate to the marriage economy, and instead he enacts embodied forms of bondage that allow for a pause in the expectation for him to "grow up" and be otherwise. Moreover, during these pauses, the text repeatedly gestures to textual onlookers that are moved by Majnun's performances and that gesture to the radical potentiality of a society construed otherwise.

As a force that transforms bodies, *'ishq* continuously transforms Majnun himself as he slides further and further into madness. Ripping the chains, Majnun's escape from the old woman's bondage is mirrored, textually, by his more permanently relocation to the Najd wilderness to pursue a life amongst the animals—a move the text explores by describing Majnun as wild (*wahsh*) and as a loosened rope (*rasan-e gosasteh*). Outside society, Majnun breaks with bondage vocabulary as the primary way of describing *'ishq*, and instead begins to redefine *'ishq* as a substance that lies beyond dualities. This new perspective resonates with contemporary Persianate mystical discourse, and in the next chapter I analyze how *Layli and Majnun* plays with transcendental meanings of *'ishq* only to come back to an emphasis on its significance in the material world. Alongside his animal companions, Majnun creates a society that reimagines kinship relations, yet which marks him as definitively cut-off from human interaction. His self-enacted suffering continues to the point of death, a moment which looms behind the appeals to martyrdom seen in this chapter and which I explore in the next by analyzing what happens to Majnun as his bonds to society loosen and, eventually, snap.

Chapter 3: Tales of Majnun: Asceticism and animality

About halfway into *Layli and Majnun*, Majnun relocates permanently to the wilderness of the Najd as the text informs the reader that day became night, night became day.¹ Having recently lost his father and received news of Layla's marriage, Majnun finds a home in his own being wild (*wahsh*) like the beasts who live there:

He said this and passed along that path, like Rābi'a he set out wandering.	این گفت و گذشت از ان گذرگاه چون رابعه رفت راه و بیراه
He was singing a <i>nasīb</i> like lovers, he was searching for a cure from a doctor.	می خواند چو عاشقان نسیمی می جست علاجی از طبیبی
He became a wild one—having broken the bonds he was freed from the customs of humankind.	وحشی شده و رسن گسسته از جمله خوی خلق رسته
He became accustomed, like the wild beasts, to the roots of green plants and the desert.	خو کرده چو وحشیان به صحرا با بیخ نباتهای خضرا
Neither a tame animal nor a beast with both the tame and wild he was at peace. ²	نه خوی دد و نه خلقت دام با دام و ددش ولیک آرام

From this point onwards, Majnun exists in a liminal state of between being wild (*wahsh*) like the beasts and an ambiguously gendered human, signaled in this passage by a series of references to the famous female mystic Rabi'ā and to an archetypal pre-Islamic poet who sings the prelude

1.

—
He was carrying from his heart aglow
a day into night and a night to day

Following Majnun's perspective, this indicates a shift from normal perception of time, which is so often appealed to through the natural landscape at the beginning of episodes. See Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 186 / 40 v. 71.

2. Neẓāmī, ed. Sarvatiyan, *Layli and Majnun*, 188 / 40 v. 13-17.

می برد ز بهر دل فروزی
روزی به شبی شبی به روزی

(*nasīb*) of a poem on lost love.³ Unlike the appeals to and performances of bondage that I analyzed in the last chapter, Majnun himself is now depicted as a “having broken the bonds,” freed from societal customs. The shift in Majnun’s physical relocation coincides with a shift in his own perspective as he no longer critiques his society from the edge through his poetry, but instead creates an alternative society amongst the beasts. In this chapter, I analyze Majnun’s deepened stage of madness alongside his relationships with the animals, arguing that the illustration of this society represents the utopic, if fleeting, potential of a release from the dichotomous categories of human/animal, man/woman that coincides with Majnun’s own revised perspective on *‘ishq* as an underlying substance that unites all beings. As with the relations with animals that I described in chapter one, this utopic potential is circumscribed within a greater hostile world, and the textual conflict between the two raises questions about how to define unity itself.

Majnun’s perspective from this point in the narrative onwards is based on a kind of radical undoing of the difference between the self and the other, a perspective which resembles medieval Sufi ontological approaches to *‘ishq* as well as resonates with posthumanist approaches to animals.⁴ Scholars such as Susan McHugh and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen have thought alongside

3. Rābi‘a (d. 801) is generally regarded as the most famous Sufi woman. She is known for her absolute devotion to the deity related in intimate and unaffected dialogues. The earliest and lengthiest account of her life was recorded by ‘Attār (d. 1230) in the *Tazkirat al-‘Awliya* (Memorial of the Saints). See Michael Sells and Paul Losensky, “Rabi‘a: Her Words and Life in ‘Attar’s Memorial of the Friends of God,” in *Early Islamic Mysticism* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 151-154.

Jaroslav Stetkevych has likened the classical Arabic *qaṣīdah* (ode) to a sonata, where “in its own return to the tonic key, the structure of the *nasīb* requires that the mood of reverie be followed by an abrupt awakening to the true present of sorrow, and the indulgence in the illusion of a regained past be halted.” This passage doubly locates Majnun in this early poetic tradition by also appealing to the Najd region, which Stetkevych has analyzed as the mythopoetic home of “Bedouin” identity that nostalgically recalls a pre-Islamic past. See Stetkevych, *The Zephyrs of Najd*, 25 and 117-122.

4. Largely stemming from Jacques Derrida’s lucid speculation on religious and philosophical mandates that separate humans from “the animal” sparked by his critique of logocentrism, animal studies today insists upon animals as active interlocutors rather than non-responders. See Jacques Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign*, 2 vols, as well as discussions of animality in chapter one.

posthumanist insights in their readings of premodern texts by insisting on the non-figural presence of animals in many of our cultural narratives in ways that shape how we have come to think of ourselves as human.⁵ In Majnun’s case, not only is he not properly “human,” but also he is not properly “man,” with both his feminization and his animality underscoring his position of living, quite literally, outside societal norms. In this state, Majnun gives many speeches that offer an approach to *‘ishq* that insists that true lovers are not two, but are, ontologically, one. Many scholars who read the text with an eye towards mysticism see this language of symbols and esoteric knowledge surrounding Majnun as proof of the text’s mystical intent.⁶ While I think the text plays with this register through Majnun’s perspective, the depiction of the animals’ protective function and of Majnun’s emaciating body suggests that it is not the only or most dominant idiom. In other words, the animals’ actions underscore ability to Majnun’s ascetically withdraw from society and it is due to their protection that any utopic societal vision can occur. Throughout this chapter, I show how the animals offer better forms of care for Majnun than the kinship structure he left behind, and as an army they protect their ascetic sovereign until his death.⁷ I argue that the animals’

5. Cohen’s remarks on animals offering “possible bodies” for medieval authors to dream “alternate and even inhuman worlds” is particularly relevant to the depiction Majnun’s animal kingdom, while McHugh’s formulation of nonrepresentational ways of reading literary animals informs my approach to the animals’ non-figural presence. See Cohen, “Inventing with Animals in the Middle Ages,” 40 and Susan McHugh, “Literary Animal Agents,” in *PMLA* Vol. 124, No. 2 (2009): 489.

6. Dick Davis has suggested that this tendency towards narratorial intervention signals the mystical undertones of the work, with the conclusion clearly indicating the ways in which Majnun’s beloved melts into being the divine. While Davis distances his reading from Seyed-Gohrab’s claim that the poem is definitively Sufi in orientation, he neither engages with Julie Scott Meisami’s ethical readings of love’s work in Neẓāmi nor offers another alternative. Instead, because there are no “real” love scenes (i.e. sexual), Davis returns to saying that the love of Layla and Majnun should be interpreted in a spiritual, mystical fashion. See Davis, *Layli and Majnun*, xxx-xxxv and Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnūn*, 63-65.

7. Sarah Pierce Taylor has discussed the repurposing of the language of political sovereignty to describe ascetic self-sovereignty in the Digambara Jain context. The notion of ascetic self-sovereignty is relevant to Majnun’s case insofar as the inherited language of epic kingship (stemming from the *Shahnāma*) is the idiom through which Majnun establishes a kingdom amongst the animals, and which underscores the power he claims over his body through ascetic praxis. See Sarah Pierce Taylor, “The King Never Dies: Royal Renunciation and the Fiction of Jain Sovereignty,” in *Religions* 12 (2021): 14-15.

protective function underscores Majnun's ascetic break from society, which reveals how the text puts forth a vision of unity through embodied relationships that differs from Majnun's focus on ontological unification.

Thinking with the valences on *'ishq* I have explored in the previous chapters, I suggest that Nezāmi's text is wrestling not only with philosophical and mystical resonances of *'ishq* at the time, but also with depicting a medical madness in Majnun that keeps getting worse. Instead of wholeheartedly endorsing Majnun's perspective as the only or ultimate view on *'ishq*, a narratorial voice persistently intervenes throughout the last half of the text in homilies and tales (*ḥikāyāt*) that place on display a discomfort with Majnun's actions in his deepened stage of madness, actions which include severe bodily disfigurement. The tale in medieval Islamic literature typically offers a moral lesson by way of a sub-narrative that often involves animal speakers or supernatural events.⁸ I analyze a tale and a homily in *Layli and Majnun* that comment upon Majnun's actions by introducing another dialogic level of interpretation. The text explores Majnun's unraveling as an opportunity for reflection on the importance of accepting mortality even as it raises critiques about Majnun's ascetic lifestyle. Reading such narratorial asides alongside the depiction of Majnun's death, I suggest that the text critiques an ontological view on *'ishq* that gives way to solitary ascetic praxis, insisting that unity in *'ishq* is instead obtained through embodied relationships, which leads to a way of being in the world that engages its social and material dimensions.

I. Majnun the ascetic

8. Ibn al-Muqaffa's (d. 759) *Kalīla wa Dimna*, the Arabic translation of a Middle Persian version based primarily on tales of the *Panchatantra*, set the standard for medieval Islamic authors to use animals to explore themes of friendship, eloquence, generosity, and cooperation. For *Kalīla wa Dimna*'s vast and multilayered reception history, see Robert Irwin, "The Arabic Beast Fable," in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 55 (1992): 36-50.

The shift in Majnun's way of articulating *'ishq* coincides with the intensification of his ascetic practices, and after key plot points such as the death of his father and Layla's marriage to Ibn Salam. The text compares Majnun to early ascetics such as Rabi'ā, yet Majnun's vocabulary around oneness and unity suggests some intertextual reference with ontological understandings of *'ishq* circulating in the Persianate world at the time.⁹ As Majnun becomes increasingly mad, his character further articulates how an ontological approach to *'ishq* gives rise to liberatory potential even as it requires an ascetic withdrawal from sexuality, which was not a dominant strain in later Sufi praxis.¹⁰ In this section, I thus look to how Majnun's revised perspective coincides with his intensified asceticism and how it colludes with mystical approaches to *'ishq*, approaches which aim to overcome the mundane, erotic connotations of the term and which give rise to utopian societal visions.

The text builds a climactic moment around the death of Majnun's father for an extended four episodes, a plot point which offers a window into how Majnun's madness intensifies in the latter half of the work. Unlike Majnun's performances of bondage and the mad super-strength he retains in the first half of the text, in the latter half Majnun's body weakens. When Majnun's father seeks out his son in the wilderness to inform him of his own worsening health, the text pauses on the father's odd vision of his son:

9. Alexander Knysh's historical periodization provides a helpful framework for considering Sufism's shifting emphases: early pietistic movements after the arrival of Islam, the consolidation of apologetic and hagiographic literature about Sufis and Sufism in the tenth and eleventh centuries, the growth of literary and philosophical works that speculate about Sufism in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and the rise of Sufi orders (*ṭarīqat*) thereafter. Though *Layli and Majnun* falls into the third phase, its play with earlier figures shows how it is engaged with its own process of filtering diverse ascetic and mystical traditions. See Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 5-8.

10. Thinking with Knysh's periodization, there seems to be a focus on ascetic praxis in the earliest periods with figures such as Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728) and Rabi'ā in Basra, as well as with Ibn Karrām's (d. 869) preaching movement stemming from Khorasan. However, with the systematization of Sufism in the tenth century, ascetic practice was only one option amongst many for adhering to intensified piety. See Knysh, 36-42 and 83-115.

<p>He saw what his eyes did not want to see When the father saw his son his heart leapt—</p> <p>a wandering soul without a human a bone being dragged about in its skin</p> <p>an outcast from the world of existence withdrawn to the way of idol worship</p> <p>a piece of wood bound up by the puppeteer¹¹ a hair escaped from the mouth of death.</p> <p>More straying than dogs are on the earth's face, more hidden than those underneath the ground.</p> <p>The pot of his body had stopped boiling fallen, his consciousness went from his head.</p> <p>He looked like a snake coiled up on the ground bareheaded, from cap and turban unbound.</p> <p>A leather strap made from beasts' fat was cuffed covering his navel like a loincloth.¹²</p>	<p>دیدش نه چنانک دیده می خواست کان دید دلش ز جای برخاست</p> <p>بی شخص رونده دید جانی در پوست کشیده استخوانی</p> <p>آواره ای از جهان هستی متواری راه بت پرستی</p> <p>جویی به خیال باز بسته مویی ز دهان مرگ رسته</p> <p>بر روی زمین ز سگ دوانتر وز زیر زمینیان نهانتر</p> <p>دیگ جسدش ز جوش رفته افتاده ز مغز هوش رفته</p> <p>ماننده مار پیچ بر پیچ پیچیده سر از کلاه و سرپیچ</p> <p>از چرم ددان به دستواری بر ناف کشیده چون ازاری</p>
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The text dwells on how Majnun's father nearly almost cannot recognize his son—he sees him like an animal, one who is more straying than dogs and like a curled up snake. His body is depleted to the point of near death, and he appears like skin on bones in a small loincloth. Notably, the text appeals to the boiling of the interior of Majnun's body—an appeal which gestures to the background medical view of *'ishq* as a disease that leads to the boiling of humors and an excess of black bile—that results in his loss of consciousness. To his father, Majnun appears like a

11. My thanks to Paul Losensky for help with this challenging line. Zanjani has this line as:

خویی بخیال باز بسته

This would read, "A disposition that was bound to the imaginary," which could make the metaphor of the line—that Majnun is no longer in this world but in the world of the imaginary (*khayyāl*) more apparent. Neither Babayif nor Sarvatiyan lists this as options. See Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Zanjani, 92 / v. 2321 and Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Babayif, 288 / v. 22.

12. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 171 / 36 v. 20-27.

writhing snake on the ground and this passage overall signals the physical ways in which Majnun's body has been altered by *'ishq*.

The subsequent exchange between father and son then opens out onto an examination of Majnun's loss of memory, which accompanies the shift that is occurring in his perspective on *'ishq*. Majnun stands back in fear as he does not recognize his father, and the text once again reveals an empathetic concern with the actual madness he may be experiencing by declaring, "the person who has forgotten himself / how can he expect to recall others?"¹³ This concern, however, is not shared by Majnun's father who tells his son to be like a man and to stop acting like a dog, *dīv*, or *ghūl*, which shows how Majnun's father views animality negatively in describing his son's

13.

مجنون چو گشاد دیده را باز
شخصی بر خویش دید دمساز
در روی پدر نظاره می کرد
نشناخت وزو کناره می کرد
آن کاو خود را کند فراموش
یاد دگران کجا کند گوش
گفتا چه کسی ز من چه خواهی
ای من رهی تو از چه راهی

Majnun, when he opened his eyes again,
he saw someone, a companion of his.

He looked upon the face of the father
he did not recognize him and drew back—

the person who has forgotten himself
how can he expect to recall others?

“Who are you and what do you want from me?
Am I somehow obliged to you?” he said.

Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 171 / 36 v. 30-33.

loss of rationality.¹⁴ Their conversation is dramatized as Majnun's father continues to seek his son's support in the moment of his death, recalling how the text positions Majnun's father from the beginning as overly desirous of an heir (*bī khalafī*).¹⁵ Majnun, however, does not understand this concern as his character eventually declares that *'ishq* has taken his memory:

14.

سگ را وطن و ترا وطن نیست
تو آدمیی درین سخن نیست

گر آدمیی چو آدمی باش
گر دیو چو دیو در زمی باش

غولی که سپنج در زمی کرد
خود را به تکلف آدمی کرد

نه آدمیی بدین شریفی
با غول چرا کنی حریفی

—
The dog has a home and you do not
you are one of mankind, there is no question about it.

If you are one of mankind, be a man
and if you are a *dīv*, be like a *dīv* dead.

A *ghūl* whose home is briefly on the earth
appears with difficulty as a human,

you are not one of mankind with honor
why do you companion with a *ghūl*?

Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 174 / 36 v. 76-79.

15.

هر چند خلیفه وار مشهور
از بی خلفی چو شمع بی نور

محتاجتر از صدف به فرزند
چون خوشه به دانه آرزومند

—
However much like a famous caliph,
with no heir he was like a dim candle

needier than a pearl shell for a son
like how a tall husk wishes for a seed.

<p>In my mind that is worked over by <i>ishq</i> all of the world is not worth a seed.</p> <p>Is not my fortune so gone with the wind that nothing but forgetfulness remains?</p> <p>Every memory that was went with the wind nothing remains in memory except forgetfulness.</p> <p>Today even what I ate yesterday is itself a forgotten discourse.</p> <p>If you ask of what I do with my time saying, "What do you do?" I do not know.</p> <p>I know you are my father, I your servant but I am not aware, what is your name?</p> <p>Not only did father go from my memory memory itself went from my nature.</p> <p>It's my error that I know not my name beloved, lover, which one am I?</p> <p>Since the lightning bolt of my heart was lit aglow the warmth of my heart burned up my existence.¹⁶</p>	<p>در خاطر من که عشق ورزد عالم همه حبه ای نیرزد</p> <p>بختم نه چنان به باد داده ست کز هیچ شنیده ایم یادست</p> <p>هر یاد که بود رفت بر باد جز فرموشی نماند بر یاد</p> <p>امروز مگر چه خورده ای دوش کآن خود سخنی بود فراموش</p> <p>گر ز آنچه رود درین زمانم پرسی که چه می کنی ندانم</p> <p>دانم پدری تو من غلامت و آگاه نیم که چیست نامت</p> <p>تنها نه پدر ز یاد من رفت خود یاد من از نهاد من رفت</p> <p>در خود غلطم که من چه نامم معشوقم عاشقم کدامم</p> <p>چون برق دلم ز گرمی افروخت دلگرمی من وجود من سوخت</p>
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Majnun here appeals to how *ishq* has made him forget seeds and forget the material world itself, which is quite unlike Layla's usage of seeds as a metaphor for the world's material resources that I will explore in the next chapter. The emphasis on forgetting food reminds the reader that *ishq*'s maddening potential leads to emaciation and has the mental effect of memory loss. The fact that Majnun forgets his father's name carries both literal and metaphorical connotations as Majnun has, just prior, failed to recognize his father and has by now forsaken his role of upholding his father's

Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 75 / 12 v. 8-9. I read this textual tone as likewise critiquing a kind of hereditary form of kinship, which seems to resonate with Majnun's performances of a different kind of bondage that I analyze in chapter two.

16. Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 177 / 37 v. 13-21.

honor as his progeny. Majnun’s subsequent emphasis on forgetting his own name leads to confusion of the self and other in the lover-beloved relationship, which resonates with how mystics such as Ahmad Ghazālī interpret ontological unity to be the ultimate end of love poetics.¹⁷ Moreover, this line sonically affirms the presence of a speaking voice in the first-person—there is an internal repetition of the first-person singular, Persian suffix “-am,” *dar khūd ghalaṭam ke man che nāmam / ma ‘shūqam ‘āsheqam kodāmam*—even as difference is undone. This recalls the early mystic Ḥallāj’s use of the first-person in his famous saying “I am the truth,” which led to his execution and which underscores the later Persianate view of *‘ishq* that I explored in the last chapter. The text further plays with ontological vocabulary in the last line as Majnun declares that his existence (*wujūd*), not only his memory, has been taken. Although his character continues to emphasize bondage at times, this emphasis on loss of selfhood marks a deepened stage of his madness.

17. Consider, for example, Ghazālī’s commentary on Ḥallāj’s poetry:

أَنَا مَنْ أَهْوَى وَمَنْ أَهْوَى أَنَا
نَحْنُ رُوحَانٌ حَلَلْنَا بَدَنًا

فَإِذَا أَبْصَرْتَنِي أَبْصَرْتَهُ
وَإِذَا أَبْصَرْتَهُ أَبْصَرْتَنَا

اشارت هم بدین معنی بود ولیکن دور افتاد در دوم مصراع که نحن روحان حللنا بدنا قدم از یکی در دوی نهاده است اول مصراع قریبترست

—
“I am the one I love, the one I love is me
we are two souls, incarnate in one body

when you see me, you see him
and when you see Him, you see us.

This verse is a sign of this same meaning, but the second hemistich “we are two souls, incarnate in one body,” fell far from the meaning as it has stepped from oneness towards duplicity. The first hemistich is closer to the meaning.” The commentary here intends to reinforce the idea of oneness—even Hallaj’s line that evokes the idea of incarnation (*hulul*) is too mired by duplicity. The commentator instead suggests that Hallaj did not go far enough in affirming unity and thereby places poetry that leaves ambiguous its love-object into a hermeneutic that affirms the existence of only one, ultimate, love-object. Ghazālī, *Savānih*, 7.

Majnun’s actions from the establishment of his animal kingdom onwards show a collusion with this ontological understanding of unity in *‘ishq*. Having effaced his human beloved, Majnun conceptualizes union as already always present, which sets the backdrop for his view of his relationship with other others, such as the animals. This can be seen in a later encounter that Majnun has with his uncle, which likewise leads to a misrecognition scene and then Majnun’s uncle, Salim, then asks why Majnun is no longer eating, to which Majnun replies:

<p>I am each night fallen upon the rocks my day short and daily portions little</p> <p>out of my hunger since I am chafing a bit of gum from trees I am scraping.</p> <p>Just this is my nourishment or a plant and it is not a weeks’ worth but a months’</p> <p>I have cut the habit of feeding I am emptied from a need of nourishment.</p> <p>Bread does not fit down my throat and if I swallow it hurts.</p> <p>Because in this way I am so thin I have no need to eat food.</p> <p>I do not let my hand touch nourishments though I withhold, there are others who eat.</p> <p>The food that the stag or the lion eats, they munch and they chew and I become full.¹⁸</p>	<p>هستم همه شب افتاده بر سنگ روزم شده تنگ و روزیم تنگ</p> <p>از گرسنگی چو می خراشم صمغی ز درخت می تراشم</p> <p>اینست غذام یا گیاهی و آنهم نه به هفته ای به ماهی</p> <p>خوباز بریدم از خورشها فارغ شده ام ز پرورشها</p> <p>در نای گلوم نان ننگند گر زانکه فرو برم برنجد</p> <p>زینسان که منم بدین نزاری مستغنیم از طعام خواری</p> <p>اما نگذارم از خورش دست گر من نخورم خورندگان هست</p> <p>خوردی که خورد گوزن یا شیر ایشان خایند و من شوم سیر</p>
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Majnun here appeals to the vocabulary of feeding and nurturing only to assert that he no longer has a need (*mustaghni*) for food. His choice to not eat signals his higher, more enriched state of willing detachment that is beyond nourishment itself. Through his speech, Majnun proceeds to

18. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 216-217 / 46 v. 33-40.

reimagine the literal process of nourishment by articulating his dependence on the animals and displacing his own need for food onto them.¹⁹ According to Majnun, the animals' chewing actually feeds him, giving evidence of an ontological view that underscores Majnun's ascetic practice that is similar to those of the Persianate world at the time. The emphasis on unity of all beings complements the speeches where Majnun declares a loss of selfhood by bringing forth a complete breakdown of boundaries between the self and the other.

Majnun's revised perspective likewise gives way to an ascetic renunciation of any physical need for Layla herself. Alongside the textual exploration of Majnun's life amongst animals, the text in the latter half of the work includes an epistolary exchange that offers a fuller representation of Layla's perspective. Majnun, in his letters, expounds upon his own perspective on *'ishq*, which fluctuates—as a mad person's perspective might—between the vocabulary of bondage that I explored in the last chapter and a new emphasis on utter loss of self and of desire for anything but *'ishq* itself:²⁰

19. Nourishment is likewise a key theme in Ghāzālī's approach to *'ishq*:

کمال حسن خود را در نتواند یافت الا در آینه عشق عاشق. لا جرم ازین روی جمال را عاشقی در باید تا معشوق از حسن خود در آینه عشق و طلب عاشق قوت تواند خورد و این سری عظیمست و مفتاح بسیار اسرارست پس خود عاشق بحسن معشوق از معشوق نزدیکتر است که معشوق بواسطه او قوت میخورد از حسن و جمال خود. لا جرم عاشق معشوق را از خودی خودش خودتر است و برای اینست که برو از دیده او غیرت برد

“The beloved cannot know the perfection of his beauty except for in the mirror of the lover's (*'ashiq*) *'ishq*. Certainly, in this way a lover knows divine beauty (*jamāl*), and the beloved, from its own beauty in the mirror of *'ishq* and the effort of the lover, can take nourishment. This is a great thing and the key to many secrets. So, the lover himself is closer to the beloved due to the beloved's beauty such that the beloved can take nourishment through the lover from his own divine beauty. Certainly, the lover is more of himself due to the selfness of the beloved and it is for this reason that he becomes jealous from his glance.” See Ghāzālī, *Savānih*, 29.

20. The letter opens with harsh contrasts between self and other, as well as usage of bondage vocabulary such as:

من در ره بندگی کشم بار
تو پایه خواجگی نگهدار

“I carry a load in the path of servitude
You keep the pillar of nobility.”

<p>I am more distraught than that which you have seen madder than what you have heard</p> <p>my selfhood with you has disappeared this path to selflessness can be taken.</p> <p>An <i>'ishq</i> that does not work the heart this much is not worth a grain in <i>'ishq</i>'s religion...</p> <p>All of this which I have said is a tall tale it is an excuse for speech with you.</p> <p>If not, and I am not amongst those who speak I am jealous of my own seeing you.</p> <p>I have placed a chain on the fount of coveting you and I am content with tales of you.</p> <p>If I sit with you for a thousand nights from envy of you I do not see you.</p> <p>Since <i>'ishq</i> for you is steadfast in me, what use do I have for your face?</p> <p>It is idolatry for me to be partnered with you either my own <i>'ishq</i> is my companion or you.</p> <p>Since <i>'ishq</i> of you shows its face it's fine for your face to be absent.</p> <p>May <i>'ishq</i> of you be my secret guardian may your wound be comfort to my liver.²¹</p>	<p>شوریده ترم از آنچه دیدی مجنونتر از آنکه می شنیدی</p> <p>با تو خودیم چو از میان رفت این راه به بیخودی توان رفت</p> <p>عشقی که دل این چنین نوزد در مذهب عشق جو نیرزد...</p> <p>این جمله که گفته ام فسانه ست با تو سخن مرا بهانه ست</p> <p>گر نه من ازین حساب دورم دیدار ترا ز خود غیورم</p> <p>بر پای طمع نهاده ام بند از تو به حکایت تو خرسند</p> <p>گر با تو هزار شب نشینم از رشک تو در تو هم نیینم</p> <p>چون عشق تو درمن استوارست با صورت تو مرا چه کارست</p> <p>شرک است مرا شریک با تو یا عشق مرا حریف یا تو</p> <p>چون عشق تو روی می نماید گر روی تو غایبست شاید</p> <p>عشق تو رقیب راز من باد زخم تو جگر نواز من باد</p>
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This passage opens with an indication of Majnun's metamorphosis as he declares to be more distraught (*shurīdeh-tar*) and madder (*majnūn-tar*), and emphasizes that all of what he has said up to this point is a tall tale (*afsāneh*). Through words to Layla, Majnun transforms his desires as a jealous lover into something else—contentment with tales (*hikāyat*) and *'ishq* itself—which

Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 209-210 / 45 v. 27.

21. Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 213 / 45 v. 88-85 and 103-111.

likewise leads to his renunciation of her physical face.²² Unlike the erotic connotation of *‘ishq* that is temporary, Majnun declares that *‘ishq* is steadfast (*ostovār*) in him and doubles down on religious vocabulary by insinuating that physical *‘ishq* is idolatry (*shirk*) in light of the one, true *‘ishq*. Moreover, this passage shows how Majnun’s perspective resembles mystical understandings of *‘ishq* in the early medieval Persianate world as he declares himself a part of *‘ishq*’s religion (*mazhab-e ‘ishq*), which was a term that resonates with Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī’s usage and with a mystically inclined approach that was taking off in Persian poetics.²³

22. Ghazālī likewise affirms that physical love is inferior:

بارگاه عشق ایوان جانست که در ازل ارواح را داغ الست بر بکم آنجا بار نهاده است اگر پردها شفافند او نیز از درون حجب
بتابد

و اینجا سری بزرگست که عشق این حدیث از درون
بیرون آید و عشق خلق از بیرون در درون رود اما پیداست که تا کجا تواند رفت . نهایت او تا شغاف است... و اگر تمام
حجب بر خیزد نفس نیز در کار آید اما عمری بیاید درین حدیث تا نفس در راه عشق آید مجال دنیا و خلق و شهوات و امانی
در پردهای بیرونی دل است نادر بود که بدل رسد و خود هرگز نرسد

“The court of *‘ishq* is the courtyard of the soul for in pre-eternity souls were stamped with the stamp of “*Am I not your Lord?*” There, the curtain is drawn, and if the drapes are transparent, He too shines from inside the veil.

And here is the great secret: that *‘ishq* comes from inside to outside, while *‘ishq* of creation goes from outside to inside. Yet it is known how far it can go, for it’s ending point is the membrane that encloses the heart (*shagāf*)... If all of the veils are drawn, the carnal soul (*nafs*) also comes to *‘ishq*’s work, but it takes a lifetime before the carnal soul comes to the path of *‘ishq*. The powers of the world, creation, lust, desires are in the outermost drapes of the heart; it is rare that it (*‘ishq* of creation) reaches the heart, and it itself never can.” Ghazālī here references two different Qur’anic narratives to explicate the differences between divine and human love. The first recalls an account of the day of resurrection where all souls respond in affirmation to the divine question, “Am I not your Lord?”—a statement that in this passage brings them into enlightened unity with the divine in the pre-eternal realm of *‘ishq* (Q 7:172). The second references the Qur’anic story of Zulaykha whose passionate love for the prophet Yusuf goes into the outer membrane (*shagāf*) of her heart. (Q 12:30). Using spatial terms, divine love is described as moving from inside to outside as opposed to human love, which can only move into the outermost part of the heart. Notably, the text waffles with whether or not the carnal soul (*nafs*) can be put to work for the higher, divine love, yet ultimately describes that human love is encumbered by its directional movement. See Ghazālī, *Savāniḥ*, 34.

23. Omid Safī has discussed key tenets and thinkers who fall broadly within the *mazhab-e ‘ishq*, including Aḥmad Ghazālī, Rūmī, and ‘Aṭṭār. Although this is not a formal “sect,” Safī discusses how such thinkers provide similar views on interpreting the earliest Islamic sources as a mingling of divine love amidst the human realm. Neẓāmī’s text plays with similar vocabulary, yet it does not offer a cosmogonic backstory like those I explored in chapter two. See Omid Safī, *Radical Love* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), xix-xxxvi.

Further dialogic interactions in the latter half of the text give evidence to Majnun’s revised perspective as he increasingly articulates his utter loss of selfhood. Towards the end of the narrative, several fellow poet-lovers come to visit Majnun in the wilderness. Salam Baghdadi, a poet-lover whose *nisba* (the part of his name that connects him to his birthplace of Baghdad) reveals his role as the transmitter who brings Majnun’s poems from the wilderness to the Abbasid capital Baghdad, is one such poet-lover who seeks to be Majnun’s apprentice.²⁴ Majnun refuses, claiming to be incapable of such a form of socialization due to the fact that *‘ishq* has burnt away his entire existence:

<p>He said, “Why do you assume that I’m drunk? Or an enraptured one, worshipping lust?</p> <p>I’m the king of kings of <i>‘ishq</i> in its grandeur I suffer no shame from my lower soul.</p> <p>From the lust of such earthly pretexts I am guiltless by my pure ablutions.</p>	<p>گفتا چه گمان بری که مستم یا شیفته ای هوا پرستم</p> <p>شاهنشاه عشقم از جلالت نا برده ز نفس خود خجالت</p> <p>از شهوت عذرهای خاکی</p>
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24. Having come from Baghdad, Salam declares to Majnun:

زین پس من و خاکبوس پایت
گردن نکشم ز حکم و رایت

در بی نفس تو بر نیارم
در خدمت تو نفس شمارم

هر شعر که افکنی تو بنیاد
گیرم منش از میان جان یاد

—
“and from now on I will kiss your foot’s dust
I will not take my neck from your command

I will not bring forth a breath without yours
I count breaths in your service evermore

and every poem that you compose
I will commit it to my memory.”

This resembles the kind of homosocial bonding between male poet-lovers that I examined in the last chapter, and here the competitiveness of that bond is refracted as submission to mastery. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 237 / 51 v. 29-31.

<p>Escaped from the comfort of the lower soul the market of my lust is broken.</p> <p>'<i>Ishq</i> is the sum of my own existence '<i>ishq</i> is the fire and I am like wood aloes.</p> <p>'<i>Ishq</i> came and claimed the house for itself I moved my goods out of there.</p> <p>Who can account for my existence? I am not, what is, is the beloved.</p> <p>My '<i>ishq</i> only becomes less in this grief if the stars become less in the heavens.</p> <p>'<i>Ishq</i> can only be effaced from my heart if the sand grains of the earth can be counted.²⁵</p>	<p>معصوم شده به غسل پاکی ز آسایش نفس باز رسته بازار هوای خود شکسته</p> <p>عشق است خلاصه وجودم عشق آتش گشت و من چو عودم</p> <p>عشق آمد و خاص کرد خانه من رخت کشیدم از میانه</p> <p>با هستی من که را شمارست من نیستم آنچه هست یارست</p> <p>کم گردد عشق من درین غم گر آنجم از آسمان شود کم</p> <p>عشق از دل من توان ستردن گر ریگ زمین توان شمردن</p>
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Unlike earthly lust (*shahwat*), '*ishq* for Majnun is now the entirety of his existence (*wujūd*), which he declares is one and the same as the beloved's existence. Once again, this passage shows how Majnun appeals to a religious vocabulary by claiming that his purity is obtained via ablutions, as well as by gesturing to the eternity of '*ishq* through a series of natural metaphors to countless stars and grains of sand. The loss of self that resonates with a mystical perspective is moreover resonant with a medical view of '*ishq*'s severity, which the text continuously reinforces by stating that, for example, Majnun's blood was entering his brain.²⁶ From Majnun's perspective, however,

25. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 240 / 51 v. 84-93.

26. Just prior to this episode with Salam Baghdadi, the text describes Majnun's movement back to the wilderness after saying a poem in Layla's presence as such:

این گفت و گرفت راه صحرا
خون در دل و در دماغ سودا

—
"He said this and took up the path to the
desert, blood in heart and black bile in head."

the medical effects of *‘ishq* have empowered him as he declares to be “the king of kings of *‘ishq*.” Having declared control over his lower soul (*nafs*), Majnun reinforces his position as an ascetic by emphasizing the self-sovereignty he gains from now being beyond lust.

This notion of sovereignty through *‘ishq* is textually endorsed by a dream that Majnun has just after his permanent relocation to live amongst the animals. There, Majnun prays to the divine in the midst of the night, and his prayer is answered by a curious dream:

<p>In sleep his fate appeared as though its tree sprouted from the earth near him.</p> <p>A bird flew from one of its branches and went towards him boldly.</p> <p>It cast a gem from its mouth onto him and set it upon the top of his crown.</p> <p>When he opened his eyes from sleep morning had come from the heaven’s horizon.</p> <p>Like morning with the freshness of its face, he enjoyed the gaiety of seeking kindness.</p> <p>Because of that dream his temperament was uplifted because of that bird like a bird he took flight—</p> <p>in <i>‘ishq</i> since union is difficult to find happiness is in dreams and imagination.²⁷</p>	<p>در خواب چنان نمود بختش کز خاک بر اوج شد درختش</p> <p>مرغی بپریدی از سر شاخ رفتی سوی او به طبع گستاخ</p> <p>گوهر ز دهن فرو فشاندی بر تارک تاج او نشانیدی</p> <p>بیننده ز خواب چون درآمد صبح از افق فلک بر آمد</p> <p>چون صبح ز روی تازه رویی می کرد نشاط مهرجویی</p> <p>زان خواب مزاج بر گرفته زان مرغ چو مرغ پر گرفته</p> <p>در عشق که وصل تنگ یابست شادی به خیال یا به خوابست</p>
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This bird that crowns Majnun provides him (and the morning) with a good temperament (*mizāj*, a word that references restoration of health) and the textual commentary at the end endorses a kind of *‘ishq* that is imaginary (*khayāl*). Earlier in the text, Majnun’s father considered Majnun’s ascetic experience to likewise be imaginary (*khayal*), and Majnun in fact claims that his own revised

Zanjani has yellow bile (*ṣafrā*) in the place of black bile, which according to humoral theory would be less severe but nevertheless the overall point signals Majnun’s worsening medical condition. See Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 235 / 50 v. 96 and Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Zanjani, 134 / 50 v. 3410.

27. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 198 / 42 v. 94-100.

perspective is based on an imaginary tale (*afsāneh*). This revised perspective leads to his claims of sovereignty, and the text here illustrates Majnun’s claims with a dream of a bird that crowns Majnun. Shortly thereafter, the text delves into a fascinating part of the love-story that likewise flirts with the imaginary—Majnun’s life amongst the animals—in a way that inscribes further meaning into this inherited motif as a space for building a utopic, if fleeting, world.

II. King of the animals

As with some of the Arabic material that I analyzed in chapter one, Neẓāmī’s text depicts Majnun’s relationship with animals as a marvelous feat. As alternative kin, the animals offer Majnun forms of care that are denied to him in human society, yet Neẓāmī’s text dwells on this scene for an entire episode that extends its imagined possibilities while playing with the vocabulary of sovereignty. This episode opens with Majnun insisting on absolute claims of unity with the beloved. Majnun stumbles upon a sheet of paper with the lovers’ names written together in Layla’s homeland on his way to the wilderness, which leads to his erasure of her presence:

<p>One day, among the abandoned places of that plain, he passed by the land of the beloved</p> <p>he saw recorded from a loyal pen the names, “Layla Majnun,” together written.</p> <p>He scraped away on that page his name remained, the friend’s name he scratched off.</p> <p>Those who were watching said, “What is the thought, that from these two but one remains in place?”</p> <p>He said, “It is better if one line falls away From our two signs, one is sufficient,</p> <p>for when someone digs into a lover, from within him exudes the beloved.”</p> <p>They said, “Why is it that in doing this, you remain a sign and she became less?”</p> <p>He said, “For me, it is not good</p>	<p>روزی ز طریدهگاه آن دشت بر خاک دیار یار بگذشت</p> <p>دید از قلم وفا سرشته لیلی مجنون به هم نوشته</p> <p>ناخن زد و آن ورق خراشید خود ماند و رفیق را تراشید</p> <p>گفتند نظارگان چه رایست کز هر دو رقم یکی به جایست</p> <p>گفتا رقمی به ار پس افتد کز ما دو نشان یکی بس افتد</p> <p>چون عاشق را کسی بکاود معشوقه ازو برون تراود</p> <p>گفتند چراست در میانه</p>
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<p>that this lovelorn be the core, she the skin.</p> <p>It is better for me to be the veil of the friend, or for me to be the skin on the core.”²⁸</p>	<p>او کم شده و تو بر نشانه گفتا که به پیش من نه نیکوست کین دلشده مغز باشد او پوست</p> <p>من به که نقاب دوست باشم یا بر سر مغز پوست باشم</p>
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Majnun’s response to these anonymous people’s questioning of his action backs up a perspective on *‘ishq* that highlights ontological unification—the lover already contains within him the beloved, and as such he is both in one body. This process relies upon a negating of physical duality, even as a gendered division lingers in Majnun’s insistence on his being the external skin.²⁹ The text’s inclusion of these anonymous people’s questioning shows how Majnun’s actions inspire a mixture of reactions, and the question of whether this is an act of effacement or erasure is introduced through dialogic interaction.

What follows as Majnun slips into the wilderness is a detailed depiction of a kingdom that alters natural laws, and the text explores Majnun’s relationship with animals as an opportunity to reflect on alternative societal arrangements. This altering flows outwards from Majnun himself who, as I described in the introduction of this chapter, is both ambiguously gendered and seemingly non-human as his habits resemble those of the beasts:

28. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, 187 / 40 v. 4-12.

29. Sachiko Murata has discussed the dualistic framework of an external masculinity and internal femininity of many Sufi thinkers in terms of an opposition that has social reality that can be perceived and thus overcome. Sadiyya Shaikh critiques Murata’s approach as one that “disassociates the realm of spirituality from social and legal equality.” See Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 9 and Sadiyya Shaikh, “In Search of ‘Al-Insān’: Sufism, Islamic Law, and Gender,” in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* Vol. 77, No. 4 (2009): 789.

<p>He said this and passed along that path, like Rābi‘a he set out wandering.</p> <p>He was singing a <i>nasīb</i> like lovers, he was searching for a cure from a doctor.</p> <p>He became a wild one—having broken the bonds he was freed from the customs of humankind.</p> <p>He became accustomed, like the wild beasts, to the roots of green plants and the desert.</p> <p>Neither a tame animal nor a beast with both the tame and wild he was at peace.³⁰</p>	<p>این گفت و گذشت از ان گذرگاه چون رابعه رفت راه و بیراه</p> <p>می خواند چو عاشقان نسیمی می جست علاجی از طبییی</p> <p>وحشی شده و رسن گسسته از جمله خوی خلق رسته</p> <p>خو کرده چو وحشیان به صحرا با بیخ نباتهای خضرا</p> <p>نه خوی دد و نه خلقت دام با دام و ددش ولیک آرام</p>
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Like a beast himself (*waḥshī*), Majnun wanders about an imagined desert, both singing a *nasīb*, the standard amatory prelude of pre-Islamic odes, and acting like the famous female mystic Rābi‘a (d. 801). His habits are depicted as a liberation from social customs, signaled through his being unbound like a loosened rope—an image which counters the ropes and shackles featured in the first half of the text. Instead of being bound by his society’s views on kinship, this depiction of Majnun positively portrays him as a kind of animal. Species boundaries are further complicated by a differentiation between tame animals (*dām*, a category for domestic livestock) and wild beasts (*dad*), of which Majnun is both and neither. This suggests a spectrum between wildness and tameness that enables a radical reimagining of beings that themselves are neither tame nor wild and that create the conditions for building a different kind of world.

The text subsequently describes this world in great detail, indicating a pause that affords the reader a moment to visualize individual animals and to consider their unusual actions. Some predatory animals such as wolves suspend attacks on their prey, while others such as leopards willingly offer themselves in service to Majnun:

30. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, 188 / 40 v. 13-17.

<p>From among the lion, stag, wolf, and fox an army-camp was formed there in the path</p> <p>they all went about under his command and he was king of all like Solomon.</p> <p>He found shade underneath the eagle's wing his bones rested beneath the vulture's shade</p> <p>his kingdom reached to such a great extent that he took wildness from the wild beasts</p> <p>The wolf fell from its attack on the ewe the lion kept claws from the onager</p> <p>the dog made peace with the rabbit the gazelle drank milk of the lioness</p> <p>he was going with his life in his hands, while they lined up before and behind him.</p> <p>Around the place in which he was sleeping the fox was sweeping the ground with its tail</p> <p>the gazelle ran about capriciously rubbing against his foot caressingly</p> <p>and he reclined on the onager's neck, while resting his head upon the stag's thigh.</p> <p>The lion knelt down by his buttocks like royal guards with swords drawn</p> <p>the wolf was guarding him from the side becoming a vanguard offering his life</p> <p>the rapacious leopard, one born wild lay down beneath him like a rug.</p> <p>These lost ones who traverse the plains gathered around him in two or three ranks</p> <p>he like kings closed off by the army's wing was there in the center of their ranks, sitting.³¹</p>	<p>از شیر و گوزن و گرگ و روباه لشکرگاهی کشیده در راه</p> <p>ایشان همه گشته بنده فرمان او بر همه شاه چون سلیمان</p> <p>از پر عقاب سایه باننش در سایه کرکس استخوانش</p> <p>شاهیش به غایتی رسیده کز خوی ددان ددی بریده</p> <p>افتاده ز میش گرگ را زور برداشته شیر پنجه از گور</p> <p>سگ با خرگوش صلح کرده آهو بره شیر شیر خورده</p> <p>او می شد و جان به کف گرفته ایشان پس و پیش صف گرفته</p> <p>در خوابگهی که او بختی روباه به دم زمین برفتی</p> <p>آهو به مغزی دویدی پایش به کنار در کشیدی</p> <p>بر گردن گور تکیه دادی بر ران گوزن سر نهادی</p> <p>زانو زده بر سرین او شیر چون جانداران کشیده شمشیر</p> <p>گرگ از جهت یناق داری رفته به یزک به جان سپاری</p> <p>درنده پلنگ وحش زاده زیرش چو پلنگی افتاده</p> <p>زین یاوگیان دشت پیمای گردش دو سه صف کشیده بر پای</p> <p>او چون ملکان جناح بسته در قلبگه میان نشسته</p>
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31. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 188/ 40 v. 20-34.

Playing with the vocabulary of sovereignty, this passage references the Qur'ānic prophet Solomon's kingship over the animals, and yet Majnun's relationship with animals is inverted insofar as it is only through resemblance to them that he gains control. The fact that the lioness nourishes the gazelle demonstrates the extent of this inversion by playing with interspecies milk kinship, going beyond the Qur'anic account in Q 27:15-44 of peacefulness between species in Solomon's kingdom. Rachel Schine has discussed how interspecies milk kinship (*radā'*) appears in many Arabic popular epics as a way of indicating how a hero absorbs specific animals' qualities.³² Here, a gazelle, typically regarded as a symbol of feminine grace, nurses from a strong lioness, a match that signals how such reimagined forms of kinship can be strengthening. The text continues to blur boundaries by both personifying the lion as carrying a sword and stating that this action is undertaken royal guards (*jāndārān*). Each of these descriptions contribute to the creation of a marvel in the text, a marvel which excites the onlookers' and the reader's imagination precisely because of its play with what could be real. Yet simultaneously, there remains a sense of tangible power in Majnun's animal army—an army whose intrinsic violence ('the rapacious leopard') remains in full view—as they line up before and behind him and prop up this image of an internally peaceful yet powerful world. Such power indicates the need to protect this space from outside forces such as the human society that eventually and perhaps inevitably disturbs it, indicating this alternative world's own transience. Nevertheless, this blurring of boundaries through a spectrum of tame and wild creatures opens a space for relations that are beyond predator-prey dyads and puts forth a vision, if fleeting, of a society construed otherwise.

From this point in the narrative onwards, Majnun's animal compatriots stay with him and their capacity for violence haunts even the most tranquil points of the text. Such textual play with

32. See Rachel Schine, "Nourishing the Noble," 178-180.

the vocabulary of kingship alongside an animal army recalls the depiction of Kayumars in Ferdowsī's *Shahnāma*.³³ Both the first man and the first king, Kayumars, like Majnun, commands the animals from a wilderness setting. Together, under the command of his grandson Hushang, the animals overcome the malignant forces of a black demon (*dīv*).³⁴ Unlike Majnun, Kayumars retains contact with his people who learn from him the ability to prepare food and clothing.³⁵ Both create a new society alongside the animal's recognized power, yet Majnun never actually wages war. Instead, the animals in their army formations follow Majnun and serve as his protection in a way that highlights his need for not only companionship but also defense in his weakening bodily state.

After setting the stage of Majnun's animal kingdom, the text subsequently offers several perspectives on how to interpret it. From nearby onlookers' points of view, Majnūn's animal kingdom appears as an uncanny reality wherein Majnūn lives with "bloodthirsty beasts" as a lesser substitute to human sociality.³⁶ Yet internally, from Majnun's perspective, this separation is not to

33. Dick Davis has discussed at length the ways in which the stories of the *Shahnāma* are "very largely about kingship; but being *about* kingship is a very different thing from *uncritically celebrating* kingship." Although what *Layli and Majnun* does with animals may be new, the critiques of kingship can be said to be embedded into Persian narrative literature. See Dick Davis, *Epic and Sediton: The Case of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh*, xiv-xviii.

34.

پری و پلنگ انجمن کرد و شیر
ز درندگان گرگ و ببر دلیر

سپاهی دد و دام و مرغ و پری
سپهدار با گیر و کنداوری

"He (Hushang) gathered together fairies, leopards, and lions, as well as tearing wolves and brave tigers. Soldiers, they were beasts and livestock, birds, and fairies. Their commander was brave and conquering." See Djalal Khaleqi-Motlaq, *Shahnāma* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), 24 and Davis, *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings*, 3.

35. Davis, 1.

36.

از بیم درندگان خونخوار
با صحبت او نداشت کس کار

Yet from fear of the bloodthirsty wild beasts

be lamented. Zooming in on his relationship with a particular gazelle, the text plays even further with the blurring of boundaries as the reader gets a glimpse of how there is a slippage for Majnun between identifying the beloved with Layla and with other creatures:

From among all of the agile gazelles there was one wondrously alluring	زان جمله آهوان چالاک ³⁸ بود آهوکی عجب شغبناک
playful and agile and making merry polished rump and a neck that was lofty.	بازی کن و چابک و طربساز مالیده سرین و گردن افراز
When Majnun looked upon these gazelles he looked upon her more thoroughly	مجنون که بر آهوان نظر داشت با او نظری تمامتر داشت
he regularly called her before him each hour rubbing a hand on her dear head	او را برخویش خواند پیوست هر ساعت سود بر سرش دست
he kissed her eye every day the eye where he saw the beloved's trace. ³⁷	چشمش همه روز بوسه می داد می کرد ز چشم دلستان یاد

Notably, as the text leans into Majnun's perspective, not only does a particular gazelle come into view but also this gazelle's sexuality, clarifying that this slippage of identifying the beloved does not sublimate physical attraction. Unlike the perspectives of nearby onlookers, Majnun's internal view indicates a lack of division between humans and animals and a tendency to associate the beloved with other beings, due to an ontologically inflected worldview. Alongside the altered natural laws of his animal kingdom, Majnun expresses his desires for the gazelle by stroking her head in a way that he cannot with Layla within human society.

no one sought out his companionship

From this point of view, Majnun is also seen as having lost the property of intimacy or acquaintance (*āshnā'ī*). See Neẓāmī, ed. Sarvatiyan, *Layli and Majnun*, 189 / 40 v. 41-45.

37. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, 189 / 40 v. 41-45.

38. Zanjani has this line as:

زان جمله وحشیان ناباک
بود آهوکی عجب شغبناک

From amongst the unfearful wild ones / there was a gazelle of wondrous eminence. This further draws a distinction between the gazelle and other wild beasts in ways that resonates with the Arabic material examined in chapter one.

Zooming out in both time and space, the episode concludes with a general perspective of “the people” who are not the nearby onlookers mentioned above nor the questioning members of Layla’s family, but rather everyday travelers whose amazement at Majnun’s lifestyle filters the previous perspectives and suggests hospitality as an overriding response. Their hospitality, moreover, is mirrored by Majnun’s own actions of sharing food with his animal compatriots:

<p>People became amazed on his account and at the beasts following behind him</p> <p>wherever anyone was affected by passion they would not calm until they had seen him.</p> <p>Every day travelers from the way were setting up a resting place near him</p> <p>and they were bringing food so that perhaps they could offer him daily sustenance.</p> <p>And he went mounted and with lion’s skin making all of the fearless ones frightened</p> <p>just one morsel of that food he would eat, the rest he entrusted to the wild beasts.</p> <p>Spring and summer, so much did he give to the beasts their daily portions</p> <p>that every beast he saw bowed before him counting him as their giver of sustenance.</p> <p>Kindly, he caressed all of creation making the free the servants of his kingdom.³⁹</p>	<p>مردم به تعجب از حسایش وز رفتن وحش در رکابش</p> <p>هرجا که هوس رسیده ای بود تا دیده بدو نزد نیاسود</p> <p>هر روز مسافری ز راهی کردی بر او قرارگاهی</p> <p>آوردی ازان خورش که شاید تا روزه به نذر او گشاید</p> <p>وان چرمه نشین چرم شیران بد دل کن جمله دلیران</p> <p>یک ذره ازان نواله خوردی باقی به ددان حواله کردی</p> <p>از بس که ربیعی و تموزی دادی به ددان برات روزی</p> <p>هر دد که بدید سجده بردش روزی ده خویشتن شمرش</p> <p>احسان همه خلق را نوازد آزادان را به بنده سازد</p>
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These people’s amazement (*ta ‘ajjub*) models a readerly response to the representation of Majnun’s life amongst animals, a response which is then transformed into generous acts of providing sustenance. Lara Harb has argued that wonder was considered in early Abbasid criticism to be a

39. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, 189 / 40 v. 46-55.

defining element of aesthetic experience that yields mental discovery.⁴⁰ Yet beyond cognitive experience, these people's amazement results in an embodied action, which makes use of their passion by channeling it towards acts of generosity. The fact that the people's desires to see Majnun are motivated by passion (*havas*)—a term that carries heftier connotations associated with sexuality than *'ishq*—resembles the more unruly parts of Majnun's going wild. Yet this passion is then folded into their acts of generosity. This resembles Majnun's hospitable actions towards the animals themselves—he is described as “giver of sustenance” (*rūzī-deh*), an epithet that recalls the divine—as well as their interactions with one another, which conveys an implicit critique of the forms of human sociability that led to Majnun's exclusion. Mentioning passionate desires in passing, the text folds them into acts of generosity and hospitality as they share their food.

If the animals are the free ones (*āzādān*) alluded to in the last line above, then it follows that their willingness to submit is a precondition for imagining this kingdom. As Cohen suggests, the animals in this section can be considered as “possible bodies” for inventing another kind of world.⁴¹ Not only is Majnun's animality positively depicted, but forms of animal sociability are also detailed that suspend predator-prey relations and that open the possibility of interspecies kinship. Although we cannot definitively know the effects of this depiction on any given reader/listener, the text makes use of a general people's response in a way that models how Majnun's animal world might affect embodied actions that could contribute to changing forms of human social relations as well. While this appears to be the overarching lesson, the employment

40. Lara Harb delineates how this rhetorical figure of amazement (*ta'ajjub*) served as merely one element of a more generalizable aesthetic that she identifies with wonder. Rather than locating this aesthetic in the deployment of this specific rhetorical device alone, Harb identifies a host of devices such as *isti'rāf* (finding something strange, novel), *badī'* (innovative, original marvelous) and *gharīb* or *ighrāb* (the evocation of strangeness and of the unfamiliar). Harb maintains that the proliferation of these devices as well as the logic of explanations of rhetoricians in the later Abbasid period signals this overarching aesthetic. See Lara Harb, *Arabic Poetics*, 5-11.

41. Cohen, 40.

of multiple perspectives throughout this episode allows for ambivalence about Majnun's life amongst animals, wild animals, to persist. Rather than immediately resolving this ambivalence, the text shifts to the level of a short tale within the overarching narrative to further sift through possible meanings of this utopic society.

III. The animals' protecting function

The intervention of short tales (*hikāyāt*) into the narrative sets the stage for further narratorial interventions around Majnun, the animals, and his ascetic lifestyle in the wilderness. Although this interpretive register is increasingly present, I maintain that the text never really lets go of the base level of the story, and that the moves between levels do not wholeheartedly endorse Majnun's mystically informed perspective. The text plays with the interpretive and literal meanings of asceticism and animality from this point in the narrative onwards in a way that shows how the utopic society of Majnun and the animals is a powerful vision, but that it is the animals' protective function that upholds it.

The first tale immediately follows the episode just analyzed, further marking Majnun's life amongst the animals as a site for interpretation by pausing the overarching plot. The story begins with a ruthless king from Marv who keeps a pack of bloodthirsty dogs to devour anyone that upsets him. Amongst the king's boon-companions, there is a young man who is sympathetically portrayed as beautiful, or gazelle-like (*āhū-ī*), and cunning.⁴² Aware of the king's reputation, this young man

42.

بود از ندمای شه جوانی
در هر هنری تمام دانی

Amongst the king's mates there was a young man
Who was knowledgeable of all the arts

Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 190 / 41 v. 6.

decides to befriend the dogs by visiting them daily and feeding them sheep's meat. When one day the king on a whim decides to throw this young man to the dogs, the dogs respond with quite a different reaction:

And those lion dogs with their iron claws directed themselves foremost toward him.	و آن شیر سگان آهنین چنگ کردند نخست بر وی آهنگ
Since they knew him as their benefactor, they rubbed against him sweetly in supplication.	چون منعم خود شناختندش دم لابه کنان نواختندش
They all formed a circle around him they sat with their heads on their paws.	گردش همه دستبند بستند سر بر سر دستها نشستند
They were like a compassionate wet nurse with him they passed one night and day like this. ⁴³	بودند برو چو دایه دلسوز تارفت برین یکی شبانروز

Although the text depicts dogs as intrinsically violent, the dogs here respond to the young man's generosity not only by not eating him, but also by forming a ring around him—an act of love and protection that resembles the binding force of *'ishq* explored in chapter two and that lends further subjectivity to the animals.⁴⁴ Moreover, the text depicts the dogs to be “like a compassionate wet nurse,” which anthropomorphizes them as nurturing figures in a way similar to the anthropomorphizing of *'ishq* itself as Majnun's wet-nurse in his childhood.⁴⁵ Generosity links the dogs' behavior to the young man's actions, and the dogs here act as lovers of someone the tale depicts as deserving of love.

43. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 191 / 41 v. 17-20.

44 Richard C. Foltz has pointed out that the commonly known hostility towards dogs in the Middle East predates Islam and that references to dogs in the Bible, the rabbinic tradition, and patristic writings are all generally negative. This is likely because dogs were considered as potentially carriers of rabies. For an overview of dogs in Islamic texts, see Richard C. Foltz, *Animals in the Islamic Tradition and Muslim Cultures* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006), 129-140.

45.

عشقش به دو دستی آب می داد
زو گوهر عشق تاب می داد

“*'ishq* was watering him with both hands Making the essence of *'ishq* glow from him.” See chapter two.

In the rest of the tale, the violence associated with bloodthirsty dogs is reimagined as the text plays with the vocabulary of consumption. When the king learns of the young man’s fate and questions it, the young man responds with logical reasoning that suspends the illogical conclusion of his not being eaten while in a pit of bloodthirsty dogs:

<p>“The reason is that before this bondage I offered to the dogs a few morsels.</p> <p>They with the morsels that they ingested kissed me out of a kindness with their lips.</p> <p>For ten years I have served you as your slave this was the fruit I got from you</p> <p>you gave me to dogs for one offense this was why they did not eat their friend.</p> <p>The dog’s a friend, you are no intimate the dog deserves respect and you don’t.”</p> <p>A dog makes peace for a bone while men are not faithful to any soul.⁴⁶</p>	<p>گفتا سبب آنکه پیش ازین بند دادم به سگان نواله ای چند</p> <p>ایشان به نواله ای که خوردند با من لب خود به مهر کردند</p> <p>ده سال غلامی تو کردم این بود بری که از تو خوردم</p> <p>دادی به سگانم از یک آزار این بد که نبد سگ آشناخوار</p> <p>سگ دوست شد و تو آشنا نه سگ را حق حرمت و ترا نه</p> <p>سگ صلح کند به استخوانی مردم نکند وفا به جانی</p>
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The young man, playfully describing the way in which he fed the dogs sheep’s meat, articulates the dogs’ kindness as an act of licking and kissing him, which is juxtaposed to the king’s tyrannical behavior that has caused him, as his servant, great pain (literally to eat the fruit, *barī khūrdan*, of his being a slave). This causes the young man to describe the dogs as being friendly, whereas the king lacks the intimacy or sociability (*āshnā*) that the text repeatedly signals as a desirable quality. Though the dogs are still marked as other due to their proclivities towards violence, the emphasis on actions of generosity and respect results in a recalibration of this view through their protective function. The last line shifts to the present tense, as the narrator offers a general lesson to be taken

46. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 191-192 / 41 v. 34-40.

from the story: contentment or reconciliation (*solh kardan*) and devotion (*vafā*) are virtues whether practiced by human or beast. Moreover, the narrator offers a gloss on the king's response to this young man's reasoning—he becomes “a dog and a dog-worshipper”—that further inverts hierarchies and shows how the moral might still be lost on the king.⁴⁷ Though the young man remains central to the tale, the dogs and their actions likewise emerge as the actors central to the moral.

The narrator's justification of this tale further reveals the protective function of Majnun's animals as central to what is exemplary about his character. Although the text quite explicitly addresses the reader to follow Majnun's example, the narratorial explanation nevertheless appeals to the animals' actions as creating the conditions for Majnun's own generosity:

My purpose from telling this tale is that giving and alms are the soul's fortresses.	مقصودم ازین حکایت آنست کاحسان و دهش حصار جانست
Majnun since he gave his food to the beasts made for himself an eternal fortress.	مجنون که بدان ددان خورش داد کرد از پی خود حصاری آباد
They who were at the ready, fully armed they were the fortress around him.	ایشان که سلاح کار بودند پیرامن او حصار بودند
If he got up or sat down for a while that army remained at his side.	گر خاست و گر نشست حالی آن موکب ازو نبود خالی
You too if you do that which he did, you will not have to drink the world's bloody tears.	تو نیز گر آن کنی که او کرد خوناب جهان نبایدت خورد
If your fellow mate is a caliph in name, since from you he ate, he will be your slave. ⁴⁸	همخوان تو گر خلیفه نام است چون از تو خورد ترا غلام است

47.

هشیار شد از خمار مستی
بگذاشت سگی و سگ پرستی

He sobered up from the drowsiness of drunkenness
He became a dog and a dog worshipper
Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, Sarvatiyan, 192 / 41 v. 42.

48. Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 192 / 41 v. 43-48.

Though Majnun is described here as making his own eternal fortress, it is the animals who constitute this fortress. The tale serves as another narrative level that not only makes figural what is exemplary about Majnun, but also references the presence of animals as enabling the perpetuation of Majnun's exemplary acts. Similarly, the subsequent two lines play on the caliph-slave (*ghūlam*) relationship by way of revaluing the loyalty of a *ghūlam* as what makes someone caliphal in the first place.⁴⁹ While making recourse to implied hierarchies, these inversions show a recognition of not only the value of devotion (*vafā*), but also of the worldly awareness of those on the lower end of the hierarchy who must make preparations against the inevitable suffering in the world, here denoted by bloody tears shed on its behalf. The text continues to make recourse to the animals' protective function in the latter half of the text as Majnun's ascetic praxis continues to intensify, and their presence enables his continued existence by serving as his shelter up to the moment of his death.

IV. Death of an ascetic king

As the moment of Majnun's death arrives, the text waffles between praising and lamenting the final stages of his life. This waffling illustrates a critique of Majnun's way of living even as it expresses an overriding admiration for Majnun's acceptance of mortality. Rewriting this most famous love-story of the past, Neẓāmī inscribes a critique into Majnun's persona by insisting that the madness of *'ishq* be redirected towards finding contentment in the material world. This

49. Elizabeth Urban deploys the terminology of "unfreedom" in her analysis of enslaved persons in early Islam that may be helpful for unpacking this analogy. Urban states that "unfreedom highlights the personal, relational nature of enslavement, servitude, and other forms of coercion; one is "unfree" in relation to another person or entity. Unfreedom allows scholars to analyze those social bonds that limit personal freedom but also provide 'social life', bonds that embed people in unequal but mutually beneficial social networks. Put otherwise, unfreedom allows us to see the relationship between conquerors and conquered as reciprocal, if unequal." Though this sits quite uncomfortably from a post-chattel slavery perspective, this emphasis on the personal and the unequal allows for more closely approximating what is implied by the bond of the caliph-*ghūlam* relationship mentioned here. See Urban, *Conquered Populations in Early Islam*, 8.

contrasts with Majnun’s character’s emphases on suffering, as explored in the last chapter, and on ascetic self-sovereignty, as explored in this chapter. This contrast is partially resolved by locating in Majnun an admirable acceptance of mortality as Majnun’s own and perhaps the ultimate form of contentment.

As Majnun’s madness continues to take the form of bodily disfigurement, the text concretely locates Majnun in the past in a way that differentiates him from potentially recognizable “mad” people in the present. The narrator intervenes and insists that the reader not see Majnun like any mad individual that they might encounter in their day-to-day life and instead offers Majnun’s speech as proof of his greater knowledge:

<p>Do not think that Majnun was one of those enraptured ones that you see nowadays</p> <p>those without fasting or praying or light foreign to justice and far from polite.</p> <p>More knowledgeable, ahead of the times knower of the traces of the cycle</p> <p>the most knowledgeable of the times in his time one with deep knowledge of the ways of the heavens</p> <p>his beautiful speech was like golden coins his verse and ghazal were like glistening pearls.</p> <p>Everyone knows that without reflection one who is mad cannot scatter such pearls.⁵⁰</p>	<p>تا ظن نبری که بود مجنون زان شیفتگان که بینی اکنون</p> <p>بی روزه و بی نماز و بی نور بیگانه ز عدل⁵¹ و از ادب دور</p> <p>داناتر دور بود در دور دانسته رسوم چرخ را غور</p> <p>داننده دانش نهانی حل کرده رموز آسمانی</p> <p>زیبا سخنی چو سکه زر بیت و غزلی چو لولو تر</p> <p>داند همه کس که بی تفکر دیوانه نریزد آن چنان در</p>
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Several times in this passage the narrator emphasizes that Majnun possesses hidden knowledge, whether this knowledge be the traces of time or the signs and symbols of the heavens, and the text upholds him as an exemplary figure. Unlike “those enraptured ones” of the text’s present—a

50. Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 242 / 52 v. 1-6.

51. Zanjani and Babayif have this as ‘*aql*, which would make the defense of Majnun even stronger. See Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Zanjani 139 / v. 3527 and Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Babayif 237 / v. 2.

reference likely alluding to the growth and spread of antinomian strands of Sufism in the twelfth century such as the *malāmatiyya*—Majnun, according to the narrator, does not forgo obligatory fasting or praying in the interest of this hidden knowledge.⁵² Instead, the narrator rewrites the past to declare that Majnun possessed *adab* (a term that weds polite manners with poetic refinement) and draws on the earlier Arabic tradition of poetry attributed to him to show how his poetic speech serves as proof of his greater wisdom. Indeed, as with the utopic vision of Majnun’s lifestyle amongst animals, the text here points to something about his character that should be inspiring to the reader even as we take his madness seriously.

Having concretely located Majnun in the past, the narrator offers further commentary on what exactly Majnun’s hidden knowledge consists of—a preparedness for death:

<p>Cognizant of the bitterness of death he prepared provisions for the journey</p> <p>even if his living was difficult from that work, he sought the ease of death.</p> <p>All who are not acquainted with the journey find exiting from this convent arduous</p> <p>a person who takes this house too hard at the journey’s time dies too hard.</p> <p>Majnun, by not seeking a companion on the path, was loosening the bond to companionship.⁵³</p>	<p>آگاه شده ز تلخی مرگ می کرد بسیج راه را برگ</p> <p>گر زیستنیش بود دشوار آسانی مرگ جست از آن کار</p> <p>هر شخص که خو نکرد با سیر دشوار شود برون ازین دیر</p> <p>این خانه کسی که سخت گیرد در وقت رحیل سخت میرد</p> <p>مجنون که رفیق ره نمی جست می کرد به رفیق بند را سست</p>
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52. The *malāmatiyya* movement whose *malāmatī* (blameworthy, or blame inducing) sense of piety avoided ostentatious shows of asceticism out of the fear that this would lead to hypocrisy. This led many followers of this movement to refuse life in seclusion and instead take up relations with people of the bazaar. Often in tandem with or in addition to *malāmatī* practice, *qalandarī* tendencies extended this refusal of asceticism by actively engaging in antinomian practices such as the public drinking of alcohol, gambling, and association with people in the *kharābāt*, or dodgy places on the outskirts of towns. See Hamid Algar et. al., “Malāmatiyya,” in *The Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition*, eds. P. Bearman et. al. Consulted online October 10, 2021 http://dx.doi.org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0643

53. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 242-243 / 52 v. 8-12.

Here the narrator makes Majnun’s ease towards death exemplary by suggesting to the reader the ways in which this attitude towards mortality allows one to not take the earthly world (here described as a house or convent) too seriously. The allusion to Majnun’s living being difficult, by contrast, draws on his ascetic practices of living apart from society and refusing food and locates Majnun within an earlier tradition of exemplary figures such as Rabi‘ā or Ḥallāj that retroactively became classified as mystics.⁵⁴ Like them, Majnun has an ease about death that allows him to “loosen the bond” and to adopt an attitude towards mortality that approaches the Sufi maxim “die before you die.”⁵⁵ As with the image of Majnun breaking the bonds, which I explored at the beginning of this chapter, this loosening shows how Majnun is now not only beyond the bounds of human society but also beyond the bonds that tie him to earthly life.

Yet at the time of Majnun’s actual death, the text depicts his bodily suffering in fairly graphic detail. His head is beaten and his hair is torn out, and the text alludes to his physical appearance as “mixed with resurrection.”⁵⁶ The text counterbalances its admiration for Majnun’s acceptance of mortality with an illustrative description of Majnun’s bloody disintegration:

54. Knysh historically locates the construction of a “Sufi science (*‘ilm al-taṣawwuf*) to the tenth century with the rise of apologetic works that systematized Sufi ideas and led to the growth of biographical literature. See Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History*, 116-118.

55.

موتوا قبل ان تموتوا

A hadith whose chain of transmission is unknown to me but is cited by Rūmī amongst others. See Nicholson, *The Mathnawī of Jalālu’ddīn Rūmī*, Vol. VI (London: Messrs. Luzac & Co., 1925-1940). For an exploration on reflections on death in the Islamic tradition writ large and in particular in the thought of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, see Todd LeRoy Perreira, “‘Die before You Die’: Death Meditation as Spiritual Technology of the Self in Islam and Buddhism,” *Muslim World* 100, no. 2/3 (April 2010): 250–255.

56.

سر کوفته و جگر دریده
موی از بن گوش در بریده

قامت زده و شکسته قامت
انگیخته از جهان قیامت

Head beaten and insides torn to pieces

<p>In the journey's dance he rode a camel reciting a verse on separation</p> <p>while describing the state of separateness not a word on devotion remained</p> <p>by crying he gave color to the rock banging his head on the rocks in despair.</p> <p>And on the narrow path no flint remained that he did not give a spark to with lament</p> <p>and on no path did a thorn remain that he did not dye with his blood.⁵⁷</p>	<p>در رقص رحیل ناقه می راند بر حسب فراق بیت می خواند</p> <p>در گفتن حالت فراقی حرفی ز وفا نماند باقی</p> <p>می داد به گریه سنگ را رنگ می زد سری از دریغ بر سنگ</p> <p>بر رهگذری نماند خاری کز ناله درو نزد شراری</p> <p>در هیچ رهی نماند خاری کز خون خودش نداد رنگی</p>
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Majnun again resembles the pre-Islamic poet who rides a camel out into the wilderness and speaks of separation (*farāqī*). Playing on a double meaning of the journey (*raḥīl*), the text alludes both to this past poetic tradition and to Majnun's impending death. His closeness to death is moreover marked by his release from devotion (*vafā*), which indicates to the reader how Majnun's ascetic sovereignty has taken him beyond the pale of this most crucial value shared between earthly lovers. Like Majnun's animal kingdom, Majnun is described as having a deep interconnection with other worldly beings as the text animates his bloody disintegration alongside the pain and bloodiness of thorns and rocks. Nature suffers along with him, yet the depiction of this connection is not one of ontological sameness, as with Majnun's reimagining of nourishment with the animals, but of mutuality.

Hair from behind his earlobes taken out

Born of high stature, his stature now curled
Mixed with resurrection, leaving this world

See Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 275 / 58 v. 83.
57. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 284 / 59 v. 88-92.

At this crucial moment of Majnun’s death, the text brings the animal’s protecting function back into view. While Majnun’s body further slips away in his suffering, the animals act as his guardians, protecting him from the outside world:

<p>He was caught up with his own misery while those flocks and beasts were protecting him</p>	<p>او بر سر شغل محنت خویش و آن دام و دد ایستاده در پیش</p>
<p>he became a fountain from his eye’s waters and they formed a sacred space around him.</p>	<p>او زمزم گشته ز آب دیده و ایشان حرمی درو کشیده</p>
<p>They did not separate eyes from his path not allowing anyone to approach</p>	<p>چشم از ره او جدا نکردند کس را بر او رها نکردند</p>
<p>and so from fear of the beasts of that path the road was cut off from all creation.⁵⁸</p>	<p>از بیم ددان بر آن گذرگاه بر جمله خلق بسته شد راه</p>

It is through the animals’ actions that Majnun’s disintegration is transformed into something greater. His tears become a well, here specifically the holy well of *zamzam*, and with the animals’ protection, this well is transformed into a sacred space (*haram*).⁵⁹ Recalling their utopic society, this sacred space between the animals and Majnun serves as a temporary, utopic space where violence is suspended. Moreover, the animals’ protection reminds the reader of the text’s persistent indications of the wretchedness of the world—although the animals act in a way that creates a peaceful place, this action is undermined by not only the implied violence of the exterior world but also these animals’ own potentials for violence. Unlike Majnun, the animals are not and cannot be detached from their own bodily existence, and the text’s recollection of them here at the painful

58. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, 284-285 / 59 v. 97-100.

59. Zāmzām is a well near Mecca where, according to Islamic tradition, Hajar (the prophet Abraham’s second wife) found water for her thirsty son Ismail, who created the well by scratching the ground with his feet. The image here appeals to Majnun’s intrinsic worth, while still making recourse to the animals’ protecting function that creates a shelter, or sanctuary (*haram*) around the well. See Jacqueline Chabbi, “Zamzam,” in *The Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Accessed online October 14, 2020. http://dx.doi.org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_8112

moment of Majnun’s death signals the ways in which their protective function underscores Majnun’s own acceptance of mortality in his state of ascetic renunciation and self-sovereignty.

What emerges is a characterization of Majnun’s death that brings forth the lowliness of his condition. Unlike his self-presentation as “the king of kings of *‘ishq*,” the text does not hesitate to include attributes that indicate Majnun’s fallen status:

<p>In this way he was blackening the page he destroyed a life in lustful passion.</p> <p>Two or three days he was living with the dogs of that village, death is better than that.</p> <p>Sometimes he made her tomb like a <i>qibla</i> other times he was running behind wild onagers</p> <p>his place was as small as an ant’s eye his foot was going from her tomb to his.</p> <p>When at last his affairs were stalled he too read the letter announcing death.⁶⁰</p>	<p>زینسان ورقی سیاه می کرد عمری به هوس تباہ می کرد</p> <p>روزی دو سه با سگان آن ده می زیست چنانکه مرگ از آن به</p> <p>گه قبله ز گور یار می ساخت گاه از پی گور دشت می تاخت</p> <p>در دیده مور بود جایش کز گور به گور بود پایش</p> <p>و آخر چو کار خویش در ماند او نیز رحیل نامه بر خواند</p>
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Having blackened his page and destroyed his life in passion (*havas*), Majnun here resembles a tragic figure, and the text reverts to likening him to the despicableness of a dog.⁶¹ No longer thriving in the utopic world amongst the animals, Majnun’s animality carries a textual resonance with aspects of the Arabic material that likewise pass judgement upon his wildness. The statement that “he was living, death is better than that,” is pregnant with irony insofar as Majnun’s own embrace of death and the textual admiration for this embrace has led his character into such a state. This leaves the reader with a lingering sense of uncertainty about what to think of this martyr of *‘ishq*, whose linking of *‘ishq* with death is praised yet whose actual death reveals the pain of the intensification of his ascetic lifestyle.

60. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 285 / 59 v. 102-106.

61. This is similar to Neẓāmī’s description of Farhad’s love as *havas-karī*.

When the moment of Majnun’s death arrives, the text pivots to a homily. After one last speech about his love, Majnun embraces Layla’s tomb and dies, a plot point that the narrator utilizes as an opportunity for a reflection on mortality:

<p>He said this and put on the ground his face and he took that tomb into his embrace</p> <p>when he brought the friend’s tomb into his grasp he said “oh friend” and cast out his life.</p> <p>He too passed through this passageway who is it that does not go in this way?</p> <p>It’s a path of absence for all who exist no one escapes from the curse of its cut</p> <p>with this trying mountain pass that time keeps when will its accounting be finished?⁶²</p>	<p>این گفت و نهاد بر زمین سر و آن تربت را گرفت در بر</p> <p>چون تربت دوست دربر آورد ای دوست بگفت و جان بر آورد</p> <p>او نیز گذشت ازین گذرگاه و آن کیست که نگذرد درین راه</p> <p>راهیست عدم که هر که هستند از آفت قطع او نرسند</p> <p>با این عقبه که دارد ایام انجام که می کند سرانجام</p>
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Much ink has been spilt on who exactly is implied by Majnun’s last appeal to a “friend (*dūst*)—” a term that in the semiotics of Persian poetry is often used for both a lover or the divine.⁶³ As in many ghazals, this usage is intentionally ambiguous, and its ambiguity is amplified by Majnun’s clutching Layla’s tomb while also offering what may be a prayer in his last moments of life. Leaving that ambiguity in place, the narrator instead pivots to a discussion of the inevitability of death coupled with a reflection on time. Mirroring what the narrator finds admirable about

62. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 290 / 61 v. 14-18. Zanjani has a different second line, but which in my mind does not much alter the meaning:

آهی بزد و فغان بر آورد
ای دوست بگفت و جان بر آورد

He sighed and wailed / and said “oh friend” and cast out his life.

63. Davis suggests that since the term “*dūst*” is a common Persian Sufi word for God that this dying remark suggests the ways that “‘illusory’ (human) love leads to ‘real’ (divine) love.” Much of my analysis in this chapter shows the ways in which this is forcing a dichotomy between human and divine love, and that even as there is a spiritual register to the poem, the physical is never fully sublimated. See Davis, *Layli and Majnun*, xxxiv.

Majnun's character, this passage begins a reflection that takes over the description of actual event.⁶⁴

This homily likewise diverts attention from the cause of death. As I have shown throughout this chapter, Majnun's actions of refusing food and inflicting bodily injury on himself waver between resembling ascetic praxis and self-harm, depending on the hermeneutic comportment of any given reader. M.W. Dols reads Majnun's death as suicide, arguing that it is ultimately self-inflicted, a view that resonates with Julie Scott Meisami's reading of Majnun's actions as "perverse."⁶⁵ Such claims do not take seriously the poem's discourse on *'ishq* as an external force that itself has the potential to inflict madness and that is not willfully chosen. Moreover, such an interpretation in my view overly medicalizes Majnun's actions and sanitizes this probing of death and dying for the modern reader.⁶⁶ Though the narrator laments Majnun's physical state, the text refuses to grant Majnun the full agency implied by terms such as martyrdom or, conversely, suicide. Instead, it depicts his eventual collapse as a result of a lifetime of effects on his body, moving onto another, broader point about the importance of reflecting on death itself.

The homily ends by offering quite a different recommendation for living. Adopting a second-person direct address to the reader, the homily offers a series of direct commands that give

64. There is a textual tendency towards homily after the death of major characters, such as Majnun's father, mother, and interestingly Ibn Salam, Layla's husband, a character who ostensibly stands in the lovers' way. This tendency reinforces the general point of the necessity to reflect on mortality and signals death as a major theme of the poem. See Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 179-187, 223-226, and 251-256.

65. Dols states that "Qays the savage would appear as the negator of Muslim social values. Indeed, the denial of life itself. For Neẓāmī tells us that, soon after entering the wilderness, Qays desired to destroy himself out of despair. In the end, one can plausibly argue that Majnūn's death was suicide," while Meisami argues that Majnun's perfection was "accomplished at the cost of his own humanity." See M.W. Dols, *Majnūn: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society*, 332-335, and Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 130.

66. Ascetic practices in other traditions have likewise been medicalized by modern scholars whose views are often critiqued by other scholars for this impulse to medicalize. A good example is the debates around female spirituality in medieval Europe as resembling anorexia, and the pushback by scholars such as Caroline Walker Bynum and Amy Hollywood to think of the dynamics of embodiment and control that underlie these practices. For a brief summary, see Amy Hollywood, *Acute Melancholia and Other Essays: Mysticism, History, and the Study of Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 97-107.

this portion of the text a sense of heightened urgency. These commands demand that the reader know that the earthly world is internally wretched:

<p>Go far away from this revolving mill for it is far from the salvation of men</p> <p>do not sit in the house of raging floods flood after flood came, rise, do not sit!</p> <p>Before heaven destroys this bridge for you, make the camel jump from this bridge.</p> <p>In the world's navel that is twist, twisted is a wind, what a nothing wind it is</p> <p>but do not be rude towards its natural constitution for it does not live except on winds.</p> <p>Hurry for ease from the world went adrift do not ride slow for the caravan's left!⁶⁷</p>	<p>دوری کن ازین خراس گردان کاو دور شد از خلاص مردان</p> <p>در خانه سیل ریز منشین سیل آمد سیل خیز منشین</p> <p>تا پل نشکست بر تو گردون از پل بجهان جمازه بیرون</p> <p>در ناف جهان که پیچ پیچ است بادیست چه باد هیچ هیچ است</p> <p>گستاخ مباش بر نهادی کاو زنده نشد مگر به بادی</p> <p>بشتاب که راحت از جهان رفت آهسته مران که کاروان رفت</p>
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The earthly world here is depicted through a series of metaphors that show its crushing force—it is both a revolving mill that continuously grinds mankind and a house of pouring floods. The text reinforces this sentiment through rhyming words that wrap inside one another, describing the world's navel as “twist, twisted (*pīch pīch ast*)” and within it is “a wind of nothingness” (*bād-i hīch hīch ast*.)” Given these facts, the text commands the reader to “hurry,” indicating a tacit embrace of the Sufi axiom to “die before you die,” while also suggesting that this hurrying be done in a way that is “not rude.”

As in the tale following Majnun's utopic society amongst the animals, the text recommends contentment in the face of these facts, yet it adds that the reader recognize their own powerlessness.

67. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 290 / 61 v. 22-27.

Using death as an ultimate end, the narrator suggests an attitude towards living that is both sustainable and humble:

<p>As far as you can, don't play out of tune, every note you play out of tune leaves you behind.</p>	<p>کژ زخم مباش تا توانی هر زخم که کژ زنی بمانی</p>
<p>Make the heart right, do not think of the blights consume rubies, do not think of the plague.</p>	<p>دل راست کن از بلا میندیش یاقوت خور از وبا میندیش</p>
<p>From mastery's mount get down and descend show your own falling into impotence</p>	<p>از مرکب خواجگی فرود آی افتادن خود به عجز بنمای</p>
<p>then when the lion of death brings its pain it brings mercy to your powerlessness.⁶⁸</p>	<p>تا شیر اجل چو رحمت آرد بر عاجزی تو رحمت آرد</p>

Rather than dismiss the material goods of the world, the narrator suggests taking them for what they are, commanding the reader to “consume rubies” (*yāqūt khōr*), an attitude whose play on the vocabulary of kissing and consumption differs drastically from Majnun’s withholding. This recommendation is not, however, a kind of *carpe diem* emphasis on immediate pleasure; instead the reflection on death allows the narrator to speak about mastery and powerlessness. Significantly, the narrator tells the reader to know their own impotence (*‘ajz*)—a term that can also be translated as incapacity or disability and which allows for an empathy with Majnun’s madness to come through. Yet unlike Majnun’s declarations of self-sovereignty, this passage expands on the narrator’s recommendations about contentment that I explored in the previous section by suggesting that true contentment comes in tandem with a kind of humility that results from a recognition of one’s dependence on other beings in the earthly world. Expanding on this sentiment for around forty-five lines, the narrator pivots the focus from Majnun’s death to a discourse on the actions that reflecting on death enable.⁶⁹ Though the narrator elevates Majnun as a character

68. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 291 / 61 v. 32-35.

69. Other metaphors include a recommendation to be “like flowing water (*āb-e ravandī*) that is “well-bridled” (*khosh ‘anān*) and “brings favor” (*loṭf rizān*). In direct contrast to Majnun’s actions of slithering like a snake, the

through his attitude towards mortality, the tone of these passages suggest a way of living that drastically differs from Majnun’s emphasis on the endurance of personal suffering and on a kind of ascetic praxis that is underscored by an ontological approach to *‘ishq* that negates materiality. Instead of making Majnun alone exemplary of *‘ishq*, the text persistently makes recourse to the animals as part of his exemplarity, a recourse which reveals how the text offers an alternative to the idea of ontological unity through an emphasis on unity obtainable through embodied relationality.

V. Return of the animals: Registers of embodied relationality

I now want to turn to the scene of the lovers’ final meeting, which comes after the establishment of Majnun’s animal kingdom but before his death. This scene highlights the animals’ protective function as well as conceptual links between animality, violence, and sexuality. As when the animals protect Majnun at the moment of his death, in this scene the animals encircle the lovers who have fainted upon meeting. Unconscious, the lovers are vulnerable to outside forces, and the animals’ protection is what allows for this temporary moment of relief from separation:

<p>Then the lovers fainted unconscious the echo of the world ceased being heard</p> <p>and those bloodthirsty beasts gathered around sharpening claws for death and destruction.</p> <p>They encircled those two wounded lovers like the periphery of a mountain</p> <p>from fear of the hordes of beasts in that path an onlooker did not find a way into their midst</p> <p>among those who ran into their midst the beasts tore up two or three of them.⁷⁰</p>	<p>افتاده دو یار هوش رفته آواز جهان ز گوش رفته</p> <p>گرد آمده آن ددان خونریز کرده به هلاک چنگ را تیز</p> <p>پیرامن آن دو یار خسته چون چنبر کوه حلقه بسته</p> <p>زانبوه ددان بدان گذرگاه نظاره نیافت در میان راه</p> <p>ز آنان که در آن میان دویدند شخصی دو سه را ددان دریدند</p>
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narrator also suggests that the reader not twist (*mapīch*) on the earth. See Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 291-292.

70. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 264-265 / 57 v. 53-57.

This time, the animals' act of encircling creates a bond of protection surrounding both lovers, which once again draws on the vocabulary of encircling (*halqe bastan*) that contrasts to the references to Majnun as one who has cut the bond and that creates, once more, an internally peaceful space. Yet accompanying this act of protection is the animals' own bloodthirsty qualities—not only their potentiality for violence as seen in the descriptions of predatory animals in Majnun's animal kingdom, but also the actual violence that they inflict upon onlookers who attempt to disrupt the lovers' meeting. As a culmination of the martial imagery surrounding the animals throughout the text, this violence reinforces the notion that acts of love may not be separated from violence especially within the intrinsically hostile world of the text.⁷¹ Their protective function gives way to a more threatening register of embodied relationality that includes violence.

During their tryst, the narrator again intervenes by using the lovers' example as an opportunity for delimiting *'ishq's* meaning. As if aware of potential backlash to the sexual implications of this scene, the narrator at first eschews this interpretation by appealing to a figural sense of animality and declaring Majnun to be beyond its influence. And yet, the literal presence of the beasts remains:

71.

عشق آمد و خانه کرد خالی
برداشته تیغ لالابالی

'Ishq came and emptied out the dwelling place
Taking up the indiscriminate sword

This is one example of how *'ishq* is frequently depicted as wielding a sword, here after the lovers' initial meeting. See Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 80 / 13 v. 9.

<p>This is the real <i>‘ishq</i>, not an accident for it is not polluted by lust and motives.</p> <p><i>‘Ishq</i> to its extremity is so full that for it beasts are domesticated</p> <p>and so from the beasts no evil came upon him for beastly pollution was not in him</p> <p>and he because he threw off his own beast these few beasts obeyed him.</p> <p>Clearly the <i>‘ishq</i> of those two worldly ones would not be manifest except if pure.⁷²</p>	<p>کاین عشق حقیقتی عرض نیست کآلوده شهوت و غرض نیست</p> <p>هم عشق به غایت تمامست کاو را دده درنده رامست</p> <p>ز آن از ددگان بدی برو نیست کآلایشی از ددی درو نیست</p> <p>او چون دد خویش را سرافگند فرمانبر او شد این ددی چند</p> <p>پیداست که عشق آن دو خاکی سر بر نزند مگر به پاکی</p>
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The narrator’s declares this scene to be an example of “real *‘ishq*” (*‘ishq-e haqīqatī*) by way of dismissing its association with motives (*gharaz*), accidents (*‘araz*), and lust/desire (*shahwat*). Yet before even mentioning the lovers, the narrator makes recourse to the relationship between Majnun and the animals, attempting to absolve both of any of these factors that threaten “real *‘ishq*.” The violence of the beasts—specifically wild beasts (*dad*), here declared to be domesticated except for the fact that they just mauled a few onlookers—is displaced onto *‘ishq* itself through its being full, complete, or overwhelming (*tamām*). While the text likewise displaces implied sexuality, hauntings of it remain that mirror the lingering violence of predatory animals as a part of the creation of this peaceful meeting place.

In fact, the text plays further with the sexual implications of the lovers’ meeting in a way that suggests a tacit admittance of *‘ishq*’s inextricably erotic dimensions. Layla proceeds to invite Majnun into her tent and embraces him. I explore the physicality associated with the feminine in the next chapter, and here I want to draw attention to how the text heightens this moment through the vocabulary of unity:

72. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, 265 / 57 v. 71-75.

<p>She embraced him in such a tight grasp that you would say two roses sprouted from one stem</p> <p>without the wound of a glance, she held him tight without wine or kisses, she made him drunk.</p> <p><i>Lām</i> and <i>alif</i> were loosened from the bond and became <i>alif-lām</i> linked together</p> <p>two curved lines flowing together they became a complete circle.</p> <p>It's no strange thing if a bird has two wings or that the beam of a scale has two pans</p> <p>two candles melted into one bowl becoming one soul and one body</p> <p>two strands became one in burning two flasks became filled with one water</p> <p>in oneness they filled each other's eyes two eyes grew from one head.</p> <p>The revolving from path of two poles grew distant the mirror of two mornings became one light</p> <p>entwined together the compassionate lovers remained as one until the morning.⁷³</p>	<p>در سینه کشیدش آن چنان چست گفتی دو گل از یکی گره رست</p> <p>بی زخم کرشمه بست کردش بی باده و بوسه مست کردش</p> <p>لام والفی گسسته از بند شد لام و الف ز روی پیوند</p> <p>دو خط مقوس روانه شد دایره تمام خانه</p> <p>مرغی نه شکفت اگر دو پریافت یا عدل ترازوی دو سر یافت</p> <p>دو شمع گداخت در یکی طشت جان بود یکی جسد یکی گشت</p> <p>افتاد دو رشته در یکی تاب پر شد دو صراحی از یکی آب</p> <p>بستند دو سفته بر یکی در رستند دو دیده در یکی سر</p> <p>دوری ز ره در قطب شد دور گشت آینه دو صبح یک نور</p> <p>پیچیده به هم در یار دلسوز ماندند چنین یکی شبا روز</p>
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The text lends Layla's embrace a metaphorical valence—the lack of wine and wounds points to how the text steers an interpretation of this moment away from a courtly register of love poetics and towards something that is philosophically, if not mystically, inflected. One and oneness (*yekī*) becomes the focal point, and the metaphor of the Arabic letters *alif* and *lām* coming together carries resonance with mystical texts that I explored in the last chapter.⁷⁴ There seems to be some kind of

73. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 265 / 57 v. 87-95.

74. See, for example, the verse of Ḥallāj that serves as the example for in Daylamī's splendidly titled book, *The Attachment of the Conjoined Alif to the Attached Lām* ('*Atf al-alif al-ma'lūf 'alā al-lām al-ma'tūf*), which yields the negative particle (لا), which I explored as an apophatic form of ontological unity. Sarvatiyan is moreover insistent

play with ontological union as the lovers become like two eyes in one head. Through a series of natural metaphors (candles burning, water in flasks), the text alludes to how the duality of embodiment (and of elements such as fire and water) is overcome, leaving whatever sexual implications this could have in place even as it repeatedly turns to ontological metaphor. There is, however, a temporal element that limits this union as this passage ends with the coming of morning.

Notably, just prior to this description, the narrator offers an aside that dwells upon his own imagining of what this meaning would be like:

<p>Just today when I heard their moans and their cries, I saw into both with my own eye—</p> <p>from one unconsumed goblet in their hands this one laid waste and that other one drunk</p> <p>and when their arms embraced this one slipped from hand and that one from sense.</p> <p>This <i>‘ishq</i> is not a superficial sign for this rare thing is a lesson for the world</p> <p>every grief-stricken one in this house is with their partner on this pretext.⁷⁵</p>	<p>امروز که ناله شان شنیدم در هر دو به چشم خویش دیدم</p> <p>کز یک قدح نخورده بردست این گشت خراب و آن دگر مست</p> <p>تا دست در آمدن به آغوش از دست شد این و آن شد از هوش</p> <p>این عشق نه سرسری نشان نیست کاین نادره عبرت جهان نیست</p> <p>هر غمزده ای درون خانه با همسر خود بدین بهانه</p>
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Employing affective language, the narrator leaps across time to describe the touching and moaning of the lovers even as it is left somewhat vague as to what is happening. This first-person slip allows for a readerly pause and perhaps identification with a desire to touch this moment in the past. Subsequently, the text brings this moment of the past further to bear on the present by extrapolating the lovers’ meeting as exemplary of *‘ishq*’s rarity. Instead of offering an ontological view like the

that these verses be interpreted mystically, which he interprets as Layla becoming absorbed in Majnun. See Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 499.

75. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 265 / 57 v. 76-80.

ones I explored at the beginning of this chapter and which Majnun subsequently reinforces through his own speech on oneness, the text makes use of this poetic example in order to appeal to the everyday experience of fellow “grief-stricken ones” in the reader’s own present in a way that connects *‘ishq* to a profane understanding of love.⁷⁶ Implied eroticism lingers as any given reader is left to read between the lines of assurances against it.

Jumping to the end of this episode, one last textual intervention shows how the text subdues registers of violence and sexuality by defining *‘ishq* in contrast to lust. After the lovers’ embrace,

76. Unlike the textual depiction of unity that is temporally bound, Majnun’s speech to Layla in this episode reinforces an idea of ontological sameness:

از جان خودت جدا ندارم
جان بی تو من این روا ندارم

چون آتشم ار بجوشی از تاب
از تو نبرم چو ماهی از آب

تو چشم منی نه چشم بی نور
بیننده ز چشم کی شود دور

کی دور شوم درین ره از تو
دوری و نعوذ بالله از تو

اینجا منی و تویی نباشد
در مذهب ما دویی نباشد

I have no separation your soul
I do not accept life separate from you.

I am like fire if you boil with water,
I cannot take myself from you like a fish cannot take itself from water.

You are my eye not an eye without light,
how can a seer be far from his eye?

How can I become far from you in this path?
Respectfulness and refuge is from you.

Here let I-ness and you-ness not be
in our religion let two selves not be.” Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 269 / 57 v. 146-150.

Majnun eventually rejects Layla and subsequently flees back to the wilderness. Zayd follows Majnun, recording his poetry. Praising its beauty, Zayd reflects on *'ishq's* power, which in turn leads to further textual attempts to define *'ishq* in relation to other forms of desire:

<p>An <i>'ishq</i> that is separate from chastity is not <i>'ishq</i>, but instead desire and lust.</p> <p><i>'Ishq</i> is a lofty mirror of light lust is far from the reckoning of <i>'ishq</i>.</p> <p>An <i>'ishq</i> of self-interest does not survive no one considers accidental <i>'ishq</i> proper.</p> <p>With <i>'ishq</i> how could self-interest prove to be true? When motive sat down, <i>'ishq</i> arose and left.</p> <p>Except for you all the <i>'ashiqs</i> that exist are all worshipping motives unlike you.</p> <p><i>'Ishq</i> is this, that other one is which? Verity is this, the other one unlawfulness.</p> <p>Since <i>'ishq</i> shows the path to sincerity one act of goodness by the friend counts for ten.⁷⁷</p>	<p>عشقی که ز عصمتش جدا بیست آن عشق نه شهوت و هوا بیست</p> <p>عشق آینه بلند نور است شهوت ز حساب عشق دور است</p> <p>عشق غرضی بقا ندارد کس عشق عرض روا ندارد</p> <p>با عشق کجا غرض بود راست عشقی که غرض نشست بر خاست</p> <p>جز تو همه عاشقان که هستند دور از تو همه غرض پرستند</p> <p>عشق این بود آن دگر کدامست صدق این بود آن دگر حرامست</p> <p>چون عشق به صدق ره نماید یک خوبی دوست ده نماید</p>
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Adopting a defensive posture, the text's repetitive assertions about *'ishq* in this passage attempt to separate it from desire (*shahwat*) and lust (*hawā*) by demarcating it from containing "motives," (*gharaz*). The recommendation of chastity (*'ismat*) resembles what Ruqayya Khan has discussed as more of a mode of masculine honor than a prescription of virginity per se.⁷⁸ As in the ontological approaches explored at the beginning of this chapter, *'ishq* here is a mirror that the text insists reflects light that is more luminous than whatever desire can offer—a gesture that indicates *Layli and Majnun's* association of *'ishq* with eternity as well. However, instead of dwelling on this

77. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 271-272 / 57 v. 195-204.

78. Ruqayya Khan argues that the popularity of the Majnun cycle in the 'Abbasid period attests to chastity as a fashionable trend in terms of embodying a "code of behavior" or a "persona and performance," rather than necessarily implying bodily virginity. See Khan, *Bedouin and 'Abbasid Cultural Identities*, 44-50.

eternal home, this passage instead ends with detailing earthly behaviors such as sincerity and generosity that it suggests more closely resemble actions inspired by *‘ishq* than desire and lust. Though this passage puts forth a kind of defensive posturing against overt sexuality, even generosity, as I explored in the tale of the king from Marv and the dogs, admits to a kind of embodied relationality.

Turning back to the scene of Majnun’s death, *Layli and Majnun* offers reflections on the meaning of Majnun’s life from a few different perspectives as his skeleton rots away. These perspectives offer windows into the affordances of time, as well as into overlaps between Majnun’s animal and human compatriots:

<p>One year passed and those beasts and animals became wanderers, whether they wished to or not.</p>	<p>شد سال گذشته آن دد و دام آواره شدند کام و ناکام</p>
<p>Some took with them a scent of attachment others out of agreement died with him.</p>	<p>برخی ز علاقه بوی بردند برخی به موافقت بمردند</p>
<p>Time like a talisman took the treasure eroding the bond on the treasure’s lock</p>	<p>دوران چو طلسم گنج بر بود وز قفل خزانه بند فرسود</p>
<p>and then the brazen ones of that crossing carved out a path into that sacred space.</p>	<p>گستاخ روان آن گذرگاه کردند درون آن حرم راه</p>
<p>There they saw a loving, kind one fallen his marrow was gone and just bones remained</p>	<p>دیدند فتاده مهربانی مغزش شده مانده استخوانی</p>
<p>when they looked at him intimately they recognized him from the path of devotion.⁷⁹</p>	<p>چون محرم دیده ساختندش از راه وفا شناختندش</p>

Like the humans, the animals have different responses to Majnun’s death. Moreover, the text further points to an animalistic quality of the humans who as “brazen ones” initially encounter Majnun’s bones and replace his animal compatriots. Though these brazen ones also respond with

79. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan 293 / 61 v. 79-84.

a sense of protection, they arrive too late. Unlike the animals' lifelong protection of Majnun, these people only understand the severity of Majnun's *'ishq* after some time has passed and his body has disintegrated and rotted away.

Following their brazen forerunners, all of the Arabs subsequently learn of Majnun's death, a death whose significance reverberates through tales of his astonishing life. Their care for his skeleton enacts an embodied register similar to those of generosity encountered throughout this chapter:

<p>An echo spread to all regions this tale became known amongst the Arabs</p> <p>their families and elders and pure ones all the pained ones came together.</p> <p>They went to him and looked upon him heart-torn and they too tore their clothes</p> <p>and then on that skeleton they cast pearls such that he remained white like the oyster shell.</p> <p>They removed the dust from his shell with pearls rubbing ambergris on his open shell</p> <p>he himself had an ambergris musk-like scent from <i>'ishq</i>'s musk-sack his scent was still pleasant.⁸⁰</p>	<p>آوازه روانه شد به هر بوم شد در عرب این فسانه معلوم</p> <p>خویشان و گزیدگان و پاکان جمع آمده جمله دردناکان</p> <p>رفتند درو نظاره کردند دل خسته و جامه پاره کردند</p> <p>و آن کالبد گهر فشانده همچون صدف سپید مانده</p> <p>گرد صدفش به در زدودند بازش چو صدف عبیر سودند</p> <p>او خود که عبیر مشک وش داشت از نافه عشق بوی خوش داشت</p>
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These more noble humans who come from the families, elders, and pure ones of the Arabs initially encounter Majnun's body with the sense that they are too late. Their washing and cleaning of his remaining body again indicates how the text retains an interest in corporeality different from Majnun's. The interest in corporeality is hauntingly present in Majnun's skeleton, which emits a musk-like scent from *'ishq* itself. This final line again suggests some collusion of the text with the

80. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 293-294 / 61 v. 85-90.

ontological meaning of *'ishq* as being in and of the essence of Majnun's body, and yet the focus remains on the generous acts of Majnun's family members. Like the animals' protective function throughout his life, it is their preservation of his remains in his death that allows for tales of his exemplary life to resound. Embodiment lingers as Majnun's skeleton is not sublimated but instead transformed through natural and cultural processes, which resemble the transformation of the story of his life as it passes from one teller to the next.

Transformation likewise sums up the textual interventions that I have explored in this chapter. Instead of wholeheartedly endorsing Majnun's perspective, the text offers a perspective that indicates that Majnun's attitude towards mortality as the main aspect of his life that is noteworthy. This narratorial attitude agrees with an acceptance of death that is in the mainstream to Sufi thought, yet the narrator diverges from Majnun's own way of life that emphasizes ascetic praxis as a comportment that culminates in absolute ontological unity with an overpowering beloved. Instead, these narratorial interventions suggest a different way of living that focuses on embodied relationships as themselves a form of unity. Though certain comments reveal a belief in *'ishq* as having an eternal home, exemplified by the mystical undertones that I explored at the beginning of this chapter, the focus is on how *'ishq* operates in the temporal world, which is linked not to a sublimation of the body but rather its transformation through natural processes. Locating Majnun's story in the past moreover allows the text to transform what is admirable about it.

VI. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how the text makes recourse to the animals and their protecting actions as central to Majnun's exemplary life. Their presence includes more violent actions that are not allegorized into anything else and that underscore Majnun's own ability to embrace mortality to the extent that he does. Though the narrator at times attempts to subdue this

form of animality, the text nevertheless reveals how it is never fully cleansed from Majnun's story and character. The animals' violence is instead woven into an overarching motive of protection, which is part of their devotion. Similarly, the narrator at times attempts to subdue the implied sexuality of the lovers themselves, yet the text never fully cleanses the lovers' meeting of erotic implications. Leaving these more overt registers of animality and sexuality tacitly acknowledged, the textual depiction of Majnun's relationship with animals foregrounds other registers of embodied relationality such as generosity, hospitality, and ultimately devotion, which is likewise affirmed by the care that Majnun's family offers just a bit too late.

Given the centrality of the animals' actions to Majnun's own, what can be made of their violence? J.J. Cohen has suggested that reading animals beyond allegory leads to a sense of multiple agencies, or what he terms "intercorporeality."⁸¹ What I aim to have shown in my reading of the animals in *Layli and Majnun* in this way is that although there are attempts of subduing more troublesome parts of animal agency, they nevertheless appear in ways that challenge us to recognize the more violent registers of human animality. While predator-prey relations are suspended in Majnun's world, they are not in the greater, hostile world within which it is situated. The utopic peace of Majnun's society amongst animals and the safe space (*haram*) it creates is ultimately disturbed, and it is the animals' protection of Majnun that allows for his existence to continue up to the point of his death. This persistent textual focus on the protective function of the animals brings forth a form of unity as something obtained through embodied relationships, which differs from Majnun's ontologically inflected approach in the latter half of the work that accompanies his declarations of ascetic self-sovereignty. Although these animal agents take up a

81. Cohen describes intercorporeality as "a place of dispersal, multiple agency," that invites "us to see what happens when the species line fades, when the inhuman inside us invites us toward unknown horizons." See Cohen, 57.

significant portion of textual space, the representation of their subjectivity in the text is nevertheless limited by not only their inability to speak, but also by the residue of discourses on animality that mark them as intrinsically violent. Yet another character who, like the animals, is inextricably tied to Majnun yet whose perspective on unity likewise differs is afforded the opportunity to speak (or to write) back, and it is to Layla's critiques that I now turn.

Chapter 4: Letters from Layla: Ethics and Embodiment

In a letter addressed to Majnun after they have faced many trials of separation, Layla offers some advice. Identifying herself as a fellow, suffering lover, Layla suggests to Majnun a different way of dealing with their shared pain than wandering and erratic movements, which have driven him by this point in the narrative into a life amongst animals in the wilderness:

I too have that same wandering desire but I keep my foot fixed, stationary — it is better if the wise close their eyes than that weeping that brings the foe's laughter. It is better if the knowing do not recall the grief that makes an enemy happy. And regarding yourself as you are, you should be happy in this situation.	من نیز همان عیار دارم لیکن قدم استوار دارم عاقل به اگر نظر ببندد زان گریه که دشمنی بخندد دانا به اگر نیاورد یاد زان غم که مخالفی شود شاد ای در حق خود چنانکه هستی خوش باش درین میان که هستی ¹
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Describing herself as having the same desire for wandering (*'ayyār*), Layla comments in this passage that she keeps herself still due to the mockery that would ensue if she were to act as Majnun does. While the reader can immediately detect a gendered difference that informs Layla's actions, her subsequent advice instead invokes a more generalizable wisdom—public grief makes Majnun vulnerable before potential enemies. Layla positions herself as an internal critic of Majnun's perspective, granting Majnun the truth of suffering that comes with being a lover in their

1. Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 207 / 44 v. 49-52. Zanjani has this final line as:

خوش باش در این جهان که هستی

“Still you should be happy in this world,” which would further underscore Layla's character's connection to the material world. See Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Zanjani 115 / v. 2919.

society, yet nevertheless recommending that he adopt a more cheerful attitude because she sees their social surroundings differently.

Layla’s comments in her letter on potential enemies resonate with the text’s overarching critiques on the ills of the world, and her advice to Majnun continues by offering a way of living not only through the circumstances of their separation, but also through the suffering that ensues from living in a world that falls short:

<p>Do not be affected if the world turns for this wheel turns time and time again.</p>	<p>در خط مشو ار جهان بگردد کاین چرخ زمان زمان بگردد</p>
<p>Do not look at the lords who sprinkle seeds see instead how seeds arise from seeds.</p>	<p>دهقان منگر که دانه ریزد آن بین که ز دانه دانه خیزد²</p>

Here Layla’s character takes a strikingly realist position for the medieval text, articulating that the world is wretched because the lords of the day (*dehqāns*)—a landholding class that signals those with access to material wealth—will sprinkle seeds where they will.³ Yet instead of apathy or disengagement, Layla underscores her recognition of lurking enemies and misguided lords with a recommendation that Majnun should instead pay attention to what arises from seeds themselves. These seeds signal Layla’s engagement with the world’s material resources to arrive at something greater. In this chapter, I explore how Layla’s character, unlike Majnun’s emphases on suffering and transcendence, focuses on action and engagement in the material world.

Given that *‘ishq* does not just affect Majnun in Neẓāmī’s *Layli and Majnun*, what happens when we view Layla not only as a love object, but as a lover? What is her approach to *‘ishq*, and

2. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, 207 / 44 v. 53-54.

3. *Dehqān* can roughly be translated to landed gentry, definable at Neẓāmī’s time through ancestral appointments and/or lineal connections to Iranian aristocracy. For more on *dehqān* identity, see Edmund Hayes, “The Death of Kings: Group Identity and the Tragedy of Nezhād in Ferdowsi’s *Shahnameh*,” in *Iranian Studies* 48, no. 3 (2015): 369-393.

how does this affect what Neẓāmī’s text says about *‘ishq* as a whole?⁴ Drawing attention not only to *what* Layla says as a lover, but also *how* she says it, I analyze the ways in which Neẓāmī’s text makes use of epistolary form, which further incorporates her perspective. I address a central motif—a series of disputations between lovers—that allows us to see the ways in which *Layli and Majnun* resembles other Islamic romantic epics and that signals the fictionality embedded within the form itself.⁵ This motif opens the space for elaboration on Layla’s perspective, who, through reported speech and a letter, enters into a poet-lover’s contest with Majnun wherein she critiques his way of approaching *‘ishq* and offers an alternative view.

I argue that reading Layla as a lover entails reading her as a subject and that the representation of her subjectivity in the text signals an engagement with corporeality that adds to the valences of *‘ishq* that I have explored throughout this project by emphasizing action. When Layla speaks about *‘ishq*, she continuously draws attention to bodies both by critiquing the ways in which Majnun’s discourse harms her as an embodied woman and by elaborating on embodied

4. As discussed in the introduction, I leave *‘ishq* (a term that has often been rendered as *érōs*) untranslated to historicize its usage against premodern Islamic discourses on desire. These discourses, informed by Islamic approaches to asceticism, marriage, and sexual ethics, make different demands on the body than ancient or medieval Christian authors’ deployment of terminology on the erotic.

5. Other Islamic romantic epics that make use of epistolary form include Neẓāmī’s *Khosrow and Shirin* and Gorgānī’s *Vis and Ramin*. As detailed in chapters one and two, I draw from Julie Orlemanski’s theorization of “a hermeneutic conception of fictionality... that assumes its determination in encountering the record of past thought.” Orlemanski’s approach to fictionality highlights various premodern societies’ engagements with the fiction-making process, which I maintain has payoffs for reconsidering the Islamic literary landscape. In Persian literary studies, the conversation on fictionality seems to have reached a stalemate, as J. T. P. de Bruijn has offered a position similar to the universalist view whereby all premodern Persian narratives (*dāstāns*) can be read as fictional, while Bo Utas has argued that there was “no indigenous term for fiction” and that premodern Persian literature thus lacks this facet of what makes “our modern concept of literature.” While the former remains vague as to how we are to assess individual texts, the latter risks portraying all premodern Persian readers as lacking with respect to us moderns. For a more complete list of Islamic romantic epics with epistolary form, see T. Gandjei, “The Genesis and Definition of a Literary Composition: The Dah-nāma (‘Ten love-letters),” in *Der Islam* Vol. 47 (1971), 65. See also Julie Orlemanski, “Who Has Fiction? Modernity, Fictionality, and the Middle Ages,” 147; Bo Utas, “Classical Persian Literature: Fiction, Didactics, or Intuitive Truth?,” 169-171; J. T. P. de Bruijn, “Fiction, I,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*.

registers of *‘ishq* as a form of care and as an expression of sexual desire. The text captures this fuller representation of her perspective through lengthy passages of reported speech as well as the experiment with epistolary form—literary devices that draw attention to writing and to the act of representation itself. Through the inclusion of Layla’s perspective on *‘ishq*, *Layli and Majnun* adds an ethical dimension to understandings of *‘ishq* at the time by articulating love as an action that approaches unity as something attained in and through embodied relationships. This ethical dimension critiques the ontological meaning of unity associated with mystical love that I explored in the last chapter and challenges the power dynamics of the lover-beloved relationship in medieval courtly discourse explored in chapter two by suggesting that caring and being cared for are interconnected and shifting roles.

Although Layla draws attention to her body in her reported speech, I want to caution against reifying these hyper-appeals to femininity with any biological certitude or as representative of an essentially “feminine perspective” on *‘ishq*. It is clear from the text that Layla points to the societal constraints placed upon her as an embodied woman, calling attention to how the category is constructed from without even if it is ultimately left intact. Though Layla’s speech contains philosophical import, it is not somehow outside the logical confines of the text, as Luce Irigaray has suggested in regards to feminine speech.⁶ Rather than locating Layla’s speech as lover as

6. Luce Irigaray, for example, has suggested a dialectic wherein feminine speech as fluid challenges the logical economy of signification of dominant, masculine (what she terms phallogocentric) discourse. Responding to Jacques Lacan’s assertion that the “woman does not exist” as a signifier, Irigaray insists that the feminine has its own way of signifying, which is tied to “fluidity” and non-linear modalities that challenge the primacy of the phallus. While Irigaray, like Lacan, speaks on the level of language, her economy of signification relies on a polarity of masculine and feminine ways of speaking that reinforces a binary and overdetermines the range of signifiers possible. Judith Butler has critiqued both the ways in which Irigaray’s conception of feminine speech has the potential to reify sexual difference, as well as subsumes “the multiplicity of cultural, social, and political intersections” underlying the category “women” through a universalization of the feminine. Taken at the linguistic level, Butler suggests that Irigaray performs a kind of miming by pointing out how in Plato “the feminine survives as the inscriptional space of that phallogocentrism, the specular surface which receives the mark of a masculine signifying act only to give back a

“intrinsically” feminine or as beyond the confines of the text’s main philosophical work, I argue in this chapter that her perspective on *‘ishq* is stitched into what the text proposes about *‘ishq* as a whole. In other words, the literary techniques of reported speech and epistolary form add a dialogic level to the text that incorporates a novel point of view.⁷ Instead of regarding these as merely formal devices, I consider how the dialogic mode of the text serves as a way of cultivating ethical subject-formation. I draw from a burgeoning field of Arabic literary studies that theorizes *adab*—a term which has been rendered as “educational literature”—which emphasizes the relationship between aesthetic appreciation and embodied behavior encoded through reading.⁸ Making ethical demands, Neẓāmī’s text portrays Layla in a way that reimagines inherited understandings of the romantic relationship, which is part of the text’s larger ethical project.

I open this chapter with contemporaneous Islamic ethical literature (*akhlāq*) to think about how different kinds of bodies were expected to love in premodern Islamic contexts, and the social structure underlying these conceptions. Reading selections from Aḥmad ibn Miskawayh’s (d. 1030) *Refinement of Character (Tahdhīb al-akhlāq)* and Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī’s (d. 1111)

(false) reflection and guarantee of phallogocentric self-sufficiency, without making any contribution of its own.” For Butler this kind of work is useful in a deconstructive, rather than constructive vein, which ends in positing a universal feminine. For my purposes, Butler’s critique of Irigaray’s deployment of the feminine is helpful for not reifying the category, and yet their return to Irigaray points to the need to address persistent associations of femininity with materiality. See Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 86-111 and Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 19, and *Bodies that Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 131.

7. I draw loosely from Mikhail Bakhtin’s approach to the novelty of heteroglossia. Bakhtin’s focus on the novel creates a teleological narrative, yet his usage of heteroglossia is helpful for unpacking Islamic romantic epic’s incorporation of multiple perspectives through their literary form that creates a dialogic arena not just between Layla and Majnun, but also between the narratorial perspective and the characters as well. See Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 47-92.

8. As a polysemic term, *adab* weds ethics and aesthetics, and scholars have offered translations such as “educational literature,” “*Bildung*,” or “*paideia*,” as more proximate terms than “literature.” My reading of Layla’s role is informed by transtemporal, intersecting lenses of ethics in Saba Mahmood’s work, premodern Islamic ethics, as well as in Cristina Crosby and Janet Jakobson’s work on the ethics of caring queerly, each of which provides ways of unpacking the ethical work of *Layli and Majnun* as a text of *adab*. On *adab* more broadly, see the introduction as well as Sarah bin Tyeer, *The Qur’an and the Aesthetics of Premodern Arabic Prose*, 15-18; Hoda El Shakry, *The Literary Qur’an: Narrative Ethics in the Maghreb*, 17-19; Michael Allen, “How *Adab* Became Literary: Formalism, Orientalism and the Institutions of World Literature,” 196.

Alchemy of Happiness (Kīmyā-ye Sa'ādat) alongside Zahra Ayubi's recent analysis of masculinity in classical Islamic ethics, I show how these texts imagine lovers as elite male figures whose highest expression of love was a homosocial relationship between allegedly self-sufficient beings in the polis, largely following an Aristotelian model. I build on Ayubi's critique that ethical refinement as imagined by premodern ethicists entails the utilization of others by demonstrating how these texts occlude mutuality from the definitional activities of a lover.⁹ I then sketch Layla's presence in the Arabic materials wherein she serves both as a foil for Majnun's character and as a lover with an alternative approach even though she is not yet a titular character. Drawing from Cristina Crosby and Janet Jakobson's insights on caring queerly, I turn to *Layli and Majnun* and argue that the text's positioning of Layla as lover through reported speech and a letter can be seen not only as a kind of inclusive move, but as part of its vision of a different kind of social structure that allows for mutual care in the romantic relationship.¹⁰ Layla as lover not only critiques Majnun's approach to *'ishq*, but also channels *'ishq*'s potency towards action, which suggest the ways in which Islamic romantic epics put forth a novel way of considering *'ishq*'s polysemy.

I. *'Ishq* and ethics

In her comparative reading of Islamic romantic epics, Julie Scott Meisami turns to the ethicist Naṣīr ad-Dīn Ṭūsī's (d. 1274) conception of love as a way of contextualizing the

9. Drawing on the work of al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), Naṣīr ad-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 1274) and Jalāl ad-Dīn Davānī (d. 1502), Zahra Ayubi points to a persistent tripartite cosmology of Islamic virtue ethics wherein refinement occurs at the levels of the self, the domestic economy, and the political economy. See Zahra Ayubi, *Gendered Morality: Classical Islamic Ethics of the Self, Family, and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 6-12.

10. Cristina Crosby and Janet Jakobson point out the ways in which caring labor today generally occurs within industries that typically employ not only women, but workers of other marginalized backgrounds. Specifically, I am drawing from Crosby and Jakobson's conceptualization of caring queerly as a type of interrelation that rethinks ethical possibility and political economy in light of the critique of the liberal subject. Although their primary example focuses on revaluing domestic laborers in the modern nation-state, their insights on care as a mutual recognition of need offers a way of approaching premodern discourses on the self that question the primacy of the rational faculty. See Cristina Crosby and Janet Jakobson, "Disability, Debility, and Caring Queerly," 77-88.

philosophical import of the genre. Meisami points to Ṭūsī's definition of love in the *Akhlāq-e Nasiri* as "the 'yearning for synthesis' that arises from man's 'natural direction towards perfection' and from his awareness that he cannot achieve this goal in isolation."¹¹ Such a definition of love for Meisami undergirds her understanding of the romantic epic as an "exemplary narrative of profound ethical significance," which encourages the reader to undertake their own quest for perfection.¹² While this definition works for texts with slightly happier endings, Meisami struggles to explain *Layli and Majnun* as a narrative about the perfectibility of the self and she suggests instead that it is a story plagued by its "moral passivity," which is doubly unfortunate for its female protagonist, Layla.¹³

Most scholars have read Layla as a passive figure and hence non-exemplary. In her analysis of Neẓāmī's prior work, *Khosrow and Shirin*, Fatemeh Keshavarz praises the portrayal of Shirin as she travels from country to country on horseback, inherits the throne, and rejects a king's marriage proposal, leading her to the interpretation that Shirin "defies the Orientalist invention of Muslim womanhood."¹⁴ When confronted with a character like Shirin, Keshavarz argues, critics are forced to break from Orientalizing stereotypes of Muslim or, by her extension, Middle Eastern women as passive, non-assertive, or lacking agency. Citing the critic Saidi Sirjani, Keshavarz upholds Shirin as a model of feminine self-assertion and suggests that scholars of classical Persian literature look to see "how many Shirins, as opposed to Laylis, are found."¹⁵ Similarly, in Fedwa

11. Julie Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 137.

12. *Ibid*, 130.

13. *Ibid*, 162.

14. Although Keshavarz interestingly notes comparisons Neẓāmī draws between Shirin and his wife in the introduction to *Khosrow and Shirin*, she does not draw attention to the fact that Shirin, according to the story, is an Armenian princess. See Fatemeh Keshavarz, "Taming the Unruly King: Neẓāmī's Shirin as Lover and Educator," in Guity Nashat, ed, *Women in Iran From the Rise of Islam to 1800* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 193.

15. Sirjani's work *Sima-yi Du Zan* (Portraits of Two Women) interestingly compares Layla and Shirin by way of suggesting that Shirin was wholly Neẓāmī's creation and therefore more of an assertive protagonist. Keshavarz,

Multi-Douglas' insightful book on women's discourse in Arabo-Islamic writing, figures such as Shahrezad of the *A Thousand and One Nights* shine over and above Layla in their ability to assert control over narrative space.¹⁶ On the other hand, Asghar Seyed-Gohrab's analysis of Layla's response to an unwanted husband on their wedding night—a forceful slap that knocks him unconscious—demonstrates the ways in which Layla too can be viewed as an active female protagonist.¹⁷ While these critical evaluations differ, I suggest that viewing Layla as either passive or active relies upon a view of the subject as politically and morally autonomous, a view which, as Saba Mahmood argues, is informed by modern, liberal discourse and which typically construes the agency of feminine subjects in terms of resistance to the long history of patriarchal norms.¹⁸

While I agree with Meisami that the romantic epic encourages philosophical interpretation, I argue that Islamic romantic epics like *Layli and Majnun* offer a critique of the kind of social structure proposed by ethicists such as Tūsī. The *akhlāq* genre envisions the perfectibility of the self as a process of the proper ordering of things, which begins with a tripartite division of the

however, critiques Sirjani for his “immediate political purpose in that (he) provides social commentary directed at the ideal of womanhood in postrevolutionary Iran” even though she agrees with the relative valuation between the two female protagonists. Instead of a comparison based on activity/passivity in movement, I suggest that we shift the frame to thinking of these characters in their capacities as lovers tied to various cultural understandings of love. See Ali Akbar Saidi Sirjani, *Sima-yi du zan: shirin va layli dar khamsah-i Nezāmī ganjavi* (Tehran: Nashr-i Naw Avaran, 1991) and Keshavarz, 195.

16. Fedwa Malti-Douglas highlights the ways in which women's voices are “indissolubly tied to sexuality and to the body” in what she terms Arabo-Islamic writing. Yet Malti-Douglas' interest is in women who use such means for subversion, which allows for locating feminist exemplars in the distant past but does not allow for inclusion of a figure like Layla whose primary displays of agency are not through subversion. See Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Women's Body, Women's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing* (Princeton: Princeton Legacy Library, 1991), 27-28.

17. See Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, “#MeToo in Persian Poetry,” Leiden Medievalists Blog, last modified November 24, 2017. <http://leidenmedievalistsblog.nl/contributors/asghar-seyed-gohrab>.

18. Although many have raised the critique of the modern, liberal subject as autonomous, my approach is informed by Saba Mahmood's critique of liberal approaches to agency as well as her engagement with Judith Butler's conception of resignification. The type of care that Layla displays does contest masculine forms of desire that resembles something like resistance and Mahmood's conception of norms helps with understanding the significance of the body in caring labor and in the development of Layla's subjectivity through norms. See Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 21-28.

faculties of the soul. For medieval Islamic ethicists, the soul (*nafs*) should be governed by the rational faculty (*qowwat-e 'aql*), which keeps the irascible faculty (*qowwat-e ghazb*)—the faculty corresponding to the heart and emotions—and the concupiscent faculty (*qowwat-e shahwat*)—the faculty corresponding to the liver and nutrition—under its control.¹⁹ In her analysis of Ghazālī's *Kīmīya-ye Sa'ādat*, Ṭūsī's *Akhlāq-e Nasrī*, and Davānī's (d. 1502) *Akhlāq-e Jalālī*, Zahra Ayubi shows how these ethicists mirror this tripartite division of the self with a tripartite vision of ethical society. Each of these ethicists extend the supremacy of the rational faculty to the level of the domestic economy through the patriarchal governance of the family and to the level of politics through the naturalized rule by ethical men in the governance of the polis.²⁰ Although specific terminology changes with the specific philosophical and religious commitments of each ethicist, this underlying social structure remains remarkably consistent.

Miskawayh's *Tahdhib al-akhlāq (Refinement of Character)* offers an early example of how and where love as a virtue fits into this vision of the ideal self and its underlying social structure and it was readily available at the time of the emergence of Neẓāmī's text.²¹ From Miskawayh's text, we can see how a foundational ethical text defines and ranks different forms of love and friendship. Miskawayh defines friendship (*ṣadāqa*) as the highest form of love (*maḥabba*), which is perhaps lacking in the intensity of *'ishq* but safeguarded from *'ishq*'s associations with pleasure or utility.²² Friendship is more properly understood as related to love (*maḥabba*) and affection

19. For a full diagram of these faculties within the terminology of various philosophical schools see Ayubi, *Gendered Morality*, 77.

20. The mirroring between the ideal arrangement of the faculties of the self and that of society writ large follows a model wherein the human is the microcosm of a macrocosmic order. In this model, the hierarchy of the faculties of the self is reflected in a hierarchical cosmic order wherein animals, plant life, women, and non-elite men are thought to be in need of governance. See Ayubi, *Gendered Morality*, 70-71.

21. These texts served as student manuals, which led to their influence on the later tradition.

22.

(*mawadda*) and for Miskawayh it avoids association with ill intentions and is instead identified with loving the good (*al-khayr*) intrinsically. To love the good intrinsically, the lover must definitionally be able to go beyond forms of relations that are attached to pleasure or use, and thereby have the capacity to relate to others without these motives in mind.

Miskawayh subsequently makes clear that these lovers of intrinsic good are virtuous people who represent a specific subset of the population that excludes the young, the common people, or “those who are not wise.”²³ While Miskawayh does not identify who these imagined virtuous people are, he does point to who they are not, which signals the ways in which the idea of loving the good intrinsically is made possible by a hierarchically stratified society. Although it is not clear immediately who “those who are not wise” are besides the young, Miskawayh later draws from a climate-based framework to suggest that all those who live in the upper and lower regions of the

والصداقة نوع من المحبة إلا انها أخص منها وهي المودة بعينها وليس يمكن أن تقع بين جماعة كثيرين كما تقع المحبة. واما العشق فهو افراط المحبة وهو أخص من المودة وذلك انه لا يمكن أن يقع الا بين اثنين فقط ولا يقع في النافع ولا في المركب مع النافع وغيره وانما يقع لمحبة اللذة بافراط ولمحبة الخير بافراط واحدهما مذموم و الآخر محمود

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“And friendship is a type of love (*maḥabba*), but it concerns something more particular, which is affection in its very essence. It cannot take place amongst a large group like love. *Ishq* is excess of love and it concerns something more particular than affection and that is because it can only occur between two people. It does not occur because of use or that which is composed of the useful and something else, but rather it occurs for the lover of pleasure to excess or the lover of the good to excess - one of these two is blameworthy, while the other is laudable.” Ibn Miskawayh, *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* (Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāh, 1961), 128.

23.
محبة الاخيار بعضهم بعضاً فانها لا تكون للذة خارجة ولا لمنفعة بل للمناسبة الجوهرية بينهما وهي قصد الخير والتماس الفضيلة فاذا أحب أحدهم الآخر لهذه المناسبة لم تكن بينهم مخالفة ولا منازعة ونصح بعضهم بعضاً وتلاقوا بالعدالة والتساوي في ارادة الخير وهذا التساوي في النصيحة و ارادة الخير هو الذي يوحد كثرتهم... ولم يوثق بصداقة الاحداث والعوام ومن ليس بحكيم لأن هؤلاء يحبون ويصادقون لأجل اللذة والمنفعة ولا يعرفون الخير بالحقيقة واغراضهم غير صحيحة

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“But the love of virtuous people for one another is not from external pleasure or use but rather from the essential correlation between them, which is seeking the good and searching for virtue. If one of them loves the other for this reason, there cannot be discord or disputes between them and some of them advise the others and they arrive at justice (*al-‘adālat*) and equality (*al-tasāwī*) in seeking the good and this equality in friendly advice and will for the good is what unites their multiplicity... The young, the common people, and those who are not wise (*hakīm*) do not rely upon friendship because they love and befriend out of pleasure and use and they do not know the good in its true nature and their motives are not correct.” Miskawayh, *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, 133-134.

earth are lacking in rationality.²⁴ With this in mind it becomes clear that Miskawayh's category of virtuous people excludes not only the young and the common folk, but also racialized groups of the medieval Islamic landscape.²⁵ These exclusions show not only the limited range of subjects who have the capacity to be virtuous, but also how these virtuous people's choice of loving the good intrinsically is predicated on a hierarchical social structure that ranks peoples and groups based on their perceived rationality.

Turning to Ghazālī's (d. 1111) *Alchemy of Happiness*, a text that was circulating in Persian during Neẓāmī's lifetime, the language of "loving the good intrinsically" is recast in a specifically religious vein, yet the social structure underlying the ability to undertake this voluntary action remains. Instead of appeals to the young, Ghazālī contrasts the rationality of virtuous men with the baseness of animals as well as the weakness and vulnerability of women.²⁶ Such a marked contrast reinforces not only how women were excluded from the category of the virtuous subject envisioned by these texts, but also how the *akhlāq* genre relied upon a heteronormative family structure as a mirror to its tripartite division of the soul. As Ayubi's analysis has shown, Ghazālī's model results in an instrumental vision of the ideal wife, who in addition to her beauty, devotion, and respectable lineage, should take care of the domestic labor so that the virtuous subject can

24. When separating the human from the animal based on animals' lack of rationality, Miskawayh states "the first rank in the human realm, which touches the limit of the animal realm, is the rank of the people who dwell in the farthest parts of the inhabited world both to the north and to the south, such as the remotest Turks in the countries of Gog and Magog and the remotest Negroes (*al-zanj*) which are distinguished from apes to a slight degree only." (trans. Zurayk) See Miskawayh, *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, 74 and Constantine Zurayk, *The Refinement of Character* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1968), 61.

25. After the Abbasid translation movement, many early Islamic thinkers adopted a Hellenistic model of different "climes" or climates producing humoral differences in the human body that resulted in not only different complexions, but also different mental capacities. See Rachel Schine, "Race and Blackness in Early Islamic Thought," Center for Religion & the Human, Indiana University (2021): <https://crh.indiana.edu/teaching-religion-in-public/engaging-religion/teaching-modules/schine-module.html>

26. Ayubi, *Gendered Morality*, 79.

“attend to the work of the hereafter.”²⁷ As such, the loftier work of contemplating the hereafter relies directly upon the utilization of others to meet basic needs. The ideal wife gives “leave” to the ethical subject, and Ghazālī assumes this labor as natural based upon the assumptions that the ethical subject is male and that his wife is limited in her rational capacity.

Similar to Miskawayh, Ghazālī associates the highest forms of love with friendship, which ranks immediately beneath the love of the divine for itself. When Ghazālī turns to the behavior of the ethical subject in the public sphere, it is striking that he uses the same terminology of men giving “leave” to other men, but this time the action is cast not as natural but as voluntary. For example, Ghazālī imagines ethical subjects giving “leave” to “a person to whom he gives bread and clothes” or to his wife specifically “for the reason of bringing forth children” and “as an act of charity.”²⁸ As Ayubi has discussed at length, Ghazālī here imagines ethical subjects giving “leave”

27.

فایده چهارم آن بود که زن تیمار خانه بدارد و کار پختن و رفتن و شستن کفایت کند که اگر مرد بدین مشغول شود از علم و عمل و عبادت بازماند و بدین سبب زن یاور بود اندر راه دین. و بدین سبب بوسلیمان دارانی گفته است که زن نیک از دنیا نیست از آخرت است. یعنی که تو را فارغ دارد تا به کار آخرت پردازی

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“The fourth benefit is that the wife takes care of the house and completes the work of cooking, sweeping, and washing. For if a man becomes occupied with these, he will be kept from knowledge, work, and worship. For this reason, the wife is a friend on the path of faith. For this reason Abu Sulayman Darani has said, “A good wife is not from this world, she is of the hereafter.” In other words, she gives you leave so that you can attend to the work of the hereafter.” See Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī, *Kimiya-e Sa'adat*, ed. Hossein Khadivjam (Tehran: Ketabhaaye Jibi, 1975), 305-306. This passage also trans. Ayubi, *Gendered Morality*, 130.

28.

اگر کسی را دوست دارد که وی را نان و جامه می دهد و وی را فارغ می دارد تا به عبادت پردازد این دوستی خدایی بود چون مقصود وی فراغت عبادت است و بسیاری علما و عباد با توانگران دوستی داشته اند برای این غرض و هر دو از دوستان خدای تعالی بوده اند. بلکه اگر زن خویش را دوست دارد برای آنکه وی را از فساد نگاه دارد و به سبب آمدن فرزند که وی را دعای نیکو گوید این دوستی برای خدای تعالی بود و هر نفقه که بر وی کند صدقه باشد

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“If he loves a person to whom he gives bread and clothes and leave such that that person may engaged with worship, then this is love of the divine because his intention is giving leave for worship. Many of the scholars and worshippers have had loving friendships with the rich and powerful for this purpose and both of them are among the friends of God. Additionally, if one loves one’s own wife for keeping him from degradation or for the reason of bringing forth children who pray good prayers for him, then this is love for the divine and every amount expended on her is an act of charity.” Ghazālī, *Kimiya-e Sa'adat*, 394.

to other ethical subjects as an action whose voluntarism is opposed to the utilization of the ideal wife whose domestic labor inevitably gives “leave.”²⁹ Building on Ayubi’s critique, I argue that Ghazālī’s other example of who the ethical subject gives leave to—a person in need of bread and clothes—demonstrates that Ghazālī envisions this voluntary action as existing within a power dynamic wherein the ethical subject only and always provides for others. This power dynamic precludes Ghazālī from seeing the ethical subject as also having needs, needs which are already being met by those assumed as hierarchically lesser in the social structure that these ethicists envision.

In contrast, *Layli and Majnun* endorses Layla’s position as a lover and as a subject, even as this position thwarts a normative vision of the domestic economy. The text’s envisioning of her as a lover accompanies its vision of a different set of social relations. Layla’s actions as a lover as build outwards from a view of the subject as both in need and needing, which establishes a foundation for a very different set of social relations than those imagined by contemporaneous ethical treatises. When viewed in this light, Layla’s actions as a caring lover stem from a model of the subject that is also quite different from the kind assumed by modern critics who consistently read her as passive, and it is to the framing of her subjectivity in *Layli and Majnun* and in its Arabic predecessors that I now turn.

II. Layla in the Arabic sources

If we shift our lens for viewing Layla away from a modern, liberal view of subjectivity, I maintain we can get a fuller sense of Layla’s character. The development of her presence is limited in the Arabic material given the fact that the earliest sources are quasi-biographical accounts that

29. Ayubi, *Gendered Morality*, 183.

mainly explore Majnun’s life. Yet even in these sources there is a sense of Layla’s multifaceted presence as she both inhabits and transgresses norms through her position as a fellow poet-lover. The earliest poetic lines attributed to Layla concern her insistence that Majnun keeps their love secret. In the *Book of Songs*, these lines appear after the lovers are introduced amidst a scene where Majnun competes with another attractive young man named Munāzil for Layla’s attention as she sits amongst a group of young women. When Layla diverts her attention, Majnun loses his color out of jealousy, and then Layla recites:

<p>In front of people, we both appear with hatred Yet each for his companion is firm</p> <p>Eyes were revealing us in what we wanted Yet hearts store the secret of affection³⁰</p>	<p>كَلَانَا مُظْهِرٌ لِلنَّاسِ بَغْضًا وَكُلٌّ عِنْدَ صَاحِبِهِ مَكِينٌ</p> <p>تُبَلِّغُنَا الْعَيُونَ بِمَا أَرَدْنَا وَفِي الْقُلُوبِ نَمَّ هَوَى دَفِينٌ</p>
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Layla insists on a secrecy that can be betrayed by glances, which recalls the register of courtly love poetics I detailed in chapter two. Layla speaks of passion (*hawā*), which she knows to be threatening to her society’s kinship structure. The first line is quoted verbatim in Ibn Qutayba’s *Book of Poetry and Poets* and a slightly altered version is in the *Dīwan*.³¹ The replication of this

30. *Iṣfahānī* vol. 2, 14.

31.

وَكُلٌّ مُظْهِرٌ لِلنَّاسِ بُغْضًا
وَكُلٌّ عِنْدَ صَاحِبِهِ مَكِينٌ

تُخَبِّرُنَا الْعَيُونَ بِمَا أَرَدْنَا
وَفِي الْقُلُوبِ نَمَّ هَوَى دَفِينٌ

—
“Before people, we appear with hatred
yet each one for his companion is firm

eyes have revealed us in what we wanted
yet in our hearts is the hidden desire.”

This occurs in a rapid interchange in the *Dīwan* that describes the lovers’ meeting after Majnun says a nostalgic couplet about living together amongst flocks of sheep. In Ibn Qutayba, the line is quoted similarly after Majnun’s line about the flocks, although Ibn Qutayba first states that Majnun grew up, adding a temporal dimension to when the need for

line across the earliest sources indicates that secrecy is a key element to Layla’s ability to be a fellow lover while maintaining the norms expected of her in a society whose kinship structure is built around maintaining familial honor.

In the *Book of Poetry and Poets*, Layla’s character primarily function as a foil for Majnun’s ardent passion. This becomes clear in how her character is woven into the anecdotes nearly anonymously. For example, the entry gives a detailed account from an anonymous trader of the Murra tribe as he passes through the Najd region.³² When the trader is caught in the rain, the entry reports his conversation with a local woman:

<p>She said, “Oh servant of God, what regions of the Najd did you pass through?” I said, “All of it.” She said, “With whom did you stay there?” I said, “With Banū ‘Āmir.” She sighed deeply and then said, “With whom of Banū ‘Āmir?” I said, “With Banū l-Ḥarish.” She wept and then said, “Did you hear mention of a youth among them that is called Qays and his nickname is Majnūn?” I said, “Yes, by god, I stayed with his father and went to him and looked upon him.” She said, “What is his state?” I said, “He wanders in that desert plain with the beasts, not realizing or understanding anything except when Laylā is mentioned to him and he weeps and recites poems in which he speaks of her.”³³</p>	<p>فقلت يا عبد الله اي بلاد نجد وطنت فقلت كلها قالت بمن نزلت هناك فقلت ببني عامر فتنفست الصعداء ثم قالت بأي بني عامر فقلت ببني الحريش فاستعبرت ثم قالت هل سمعت بذكر فتى منهم يقال له قيس يلقب بالمجنون فقلت اي والله نزلت بأبيه وأنتيته ونظرت اليه قالت فما حاله قلت يميم في تلك الفيافي ويكون مع الوحش لا يعقل ولا يفهم إلا أن تذكر له ليلي فيبكي وينشد أشعاراً يقولها فيها</p>
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Through this conversation between an anonymous trader and woman, the entry shows that Majnun has become a local legend—affirmed through the details of his life amongst the beasts and his

secrecy arises. Though the circumstances of when Layla’s line on secrecy is quoted changes, its overall meaning each time reinforces how her character abides by the rule of secrecy and aims to quell Majnun’s public transgressions. See *Dīwan*, 50-53 and Ibn Qutayba, 374.

32. The Murra family were a family of prominence during the arrival of Islam. See Ella Landau-Tresson, “Murra,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., edited by P. Bearman et al. Leiden: Brill Online. http://dx.doi.org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_5546

33. Ibn Qutayba, 374.

poetry about Layla—that attracts the attention of those passing through. Together, these two speakers discursively produce the wondrousness of Majnun’s state, and the anecdote serves to recapitulate specificities such as Majnun’s birth name and his natal tribe.

Yet this reported conversation does not end here. The woman is revealed to be Layla herself, and she further affirms Majnun’s anguish:

<p>She then raised the curtain that was between me and her whereupon I saw a moon-face, the like of which I had never seen before and she wept and wailed until I thought, by god, that her heart would be broken and I said, “Oh woman, do you not fear God? I did not say a wretched thing!” And she remained in that state of weeping and wailing for a long while. Then she said:</p> <p>Would that I knew while calamities are many when Qay’s saddle would be readied for return</p> <p>I ransom my soul for the one who does not prepare his saddle for the one not protected by God is lost</p> <p>Then she wept until she fainted and when she regained consciousness I said, “And who are you, o maiden of God?”</p> <p>She said, “I am Laylā who has caused his misfortune and does not console him.” I have never seen sadness and anguish, nor passion (<i>wajd</i>) like hers.³⁴</p>	<p>فرفعت الستر بيني وبينها فإذا شقة قمر لم تر عيني مثلها قط فبكت وانتحبت حتى ظننت والله ان قلبها قد انصدع فقلت ايها المرأة اما تتقين الله فوالله ما قلت بأساً فمكثت طويلاً على تلك الحال من البكاء والنحيب ثم قالت</p> <p>ألا لئيت شغري والخطوب كثيرة متى رحل قيس مستقلاً فراجع</p> <p>بنفسي من لا يستقل برحله ومن هو إن لم يحفظ الله ضائع</p> <p>ثم بكت حتى غشي عليها فلما افاقت قلت ومن انت يا أمة الله قالت أنا ليلي المشؤومة عليه غير المؤاسية له فما رأيت مثل حزنها عليه وجزعها ولا مثل وجدها</p>
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Layla’s own weeping brings admonishment from the anecdote’s speaker—his questioning of Layla’s piety or fear (*taqwā*) indicates how he views Layla’s behavior as exceeding the norm of what is expected of a woman in their society. This is further underscored by his observation on her ecstasy or ardor (*wajd*), which, alongside her poetry, positions Layla as a lover. Yet the focal point of this anecdote, as affirmed by Layla’s final comment, remains on Majnun’s suffering, and the revelation of her character is mainly in service of Majnun’s story.

34. Ibn Qutayba, 374.

Different aspects of Layla’s character emerge in the *Book of Songs* and the *Dīwan*. Layla’s critiques in these sources come through the mediums of messengers and writing, which serves as a prelude to how her character is more fully developed in *Layli and Majnun*. Her prowess as a fellow poet-lover comes to the fore in the *Book of Songs* when Qays b. Darīḥ—a fellow ‘*udhrī*’ poet whose homosocial bond with Majnun I explored in chapter two—encounters her after meeting Majnun in the desert. Qays b. Darīḥ proceeds to relay to her Majnun’s greeting, which spurs an angry response:

<p>Then Qays b. Darīḥ left and when he reached Layla he greeted her and said who he was. She said to him, “God bless you, are you in need of something?” He said, “Yes, your cousin sent me to you with greeting.” She bowed and then said, “If I knew you were his messenger, I would not have welcomed you. Say to him from me, ‘what about your saying: A night refused in al-Ghayl, O mother of Mālik, for you, anything but true love is a lie. But an echo remains, O mother of Mālik, that goes wherever the wind goes’ Tell me about the night in al-Ghayl, which night was it? Have I ever been alone with you in al-Ghayl or elsewhere, day or night?”³⁵</p>	<p>فمضى قيس بن ذريح حتى أتى ليلي فسلم وانتسب فقالت له حياك الله، ألك حاجة؟ قال نعم ابن عمك أرسلني إليك بالسلام فأطرقت ثم قالت ما كنت أهلا للتحية لو علمت أنك رسوله قل له عني أريت قولك أبت ليلة بالغيل يا أم مالك لكم غير حب صادق ليس يكذب ألا إنما أبقيت يا أم مالك صدى أينما تذهب به الريح يذهب أخبرني عن ليلة الغيل أي ليلة هي؟ وهل خلوت معك في الغيل أو غيره ليلا أو نهاراً؟</p>
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Instead of affirming Majnun’s passion, Layla foregrounds the potential of slander in his discourse. In her anger, she recalls a poem attributed to Majnun that may have indicated a physical tryst between the lovers, and Layla’s refutation indicates her awareness of a need to protect her own honor within her society. Unlike Majnun’s ability to transgress, Layla’s actions as a lover differ due to her different social position.

35. *Iṣfahānī*, vol. 2, 94.

The anecdote continues with Qays b. Darīḥ defending Majnun, which results in Layla's entrance into the field of poet-lover rivalry:

<p>Qays said to her, "Oh cousin, people recall his words for other than what he wanted, do not be like them. He related that he saw you the night he passed al-Ghayl and you stole his heart. He did not mean you harm."</p> <p>(He said) She bowed for a long time and her tears were falling while she held them back... then she said, "Send greetings to my cousin, and say to him, 'By God, my ecstasy for you is greater than yours, but I have no way of getting to you.'"³⁶</p>	<p>فقال لها قيسٌ يابنة عم إن الناس تأولوا كلامه على غير ما أراد فلا تكوني مثلهم. إنما أخبر أنه رآك ليلة الغيل فذهبت بقلبه. لا أنه عناك بسوء.</p> <p>قال فأطرقت طويلاً ودموعها تجرى وهي تكفكفها... ثم قالت أقرأ على ابن عمي السلام وقل له بنفسي أنت! والله إن وجدي بك ل فوق ما تجد ولكن لا حيلة لي فيك.</p>
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As explored in chapter two, Layla indicates competitiveness in her speech as she claims to Qays b. Darīḥ that her ecstasy (*wajd*) is greater than Majnun's own. This positions her as an 'udhrī poet herself, and her suffering is in fact intensified by her gendered inability to move. Although her anger seems to be abated by Qays b. Darīḥ's explanation of audience misinterpretation, Layla nevertheless appears here as more multidimensional than in Ibn Qutayba's account.

The *Dīwān* expands upon this aspect of Layla's perspective as communicated through the medium of messengers by indicating how her voice changes when presented in written form. Amongst the anecdotes in the latter half of the *Dīwān*, i.e., once separation has been definitively established and Majnun has retreated to live in the wilderness, there is the following anecdote about a man who happens upon Layla on his way to visit Majnun's kinsmen:

36. *Iṣfahānī*, vol. 2, 94.

<p>A man passed by Layla when she was standing at the door of her tent and she said to him, “Where are you going, oh servant of God?” He said, “I am going to the tribe of ‘Āmr,” and she sighed deeply and then cried and began reciting:</p> <p>Oh rider not slackening in his mount rise and take to him some of what I feel.</p> <p>People did not see the ecstasy that encompasses them and my ecstasy for him is above what they feel.</p> <p>I love to satisfy him, until the end of my days I strive in his friendship and affection.</p> <p>Then she wrote to Majnun by that man and she said:</p> <p>And you who failed me in what you promised me you caused your blamer to take pleasure at my misfortune.</p> <p>You exposed me before people then you left me for them as a target thrown while you are secure.</p> <p>If speech were writing the body, my body became wounded from the speech of slanderers.³⁷</p>	<p>أَنْ رَجُلًا مَرَّ بِلَيْلَى وَهِيَ وَاقِفَةٌ عَلَى بَابِ خَبَائِهَا فَقَالَتْ لَهُ : أَيْنَ تَرِيدُ يَا عَبْدَ اللَّهِ؟ فَقَالَ: أُرِيدُ بَنِي عَامِرٍ فَزَفَرْتُ زَفْرَةً ثُمَّ بَكَتْ وَأَنْشَأَتْ تَقُولُ:</p> <p>يَا أَيُّهَا الرَّكَّابُ الْمُرْجِي مَطِيئَتَهُ عَرَّجْ لِمَجْنُونٍ عَنِّي بَعْضَ مَا أجدُ</p> <p>فَمَا رَأَى النَّاسُ مِنْ وَجدٍ تَضَمَّنَهُمْ إِلَّا وَوَجِدِي بِهِ فَوْقَ الَّذِي وَجَدُوا</p> <p>حُبِّي رِضَاهُ وَإِيَّيَ فِي مَوَدَّتِهِ وَوُدِّهِ آخِرَ الْأَيَّامِ أَجْتَهُدُ</p> <p>ثم كتبت إلى المجنون مع ذلك الرجل وقالت:</p> <p>وَأَنْتَ الَّذِي أَخْلَفْتَنِي مَا وَعَدْتَنِي وَأَشْمَتَّ بِي مَنْ كَانَ فِيكَ يَلُومُ</p> <p>وَأَبْرَزْتَنِي لِلنَّاسِ ثُمَّ تَرَكَتَنِي لَهُمْ عَرَضًا أُرْمَى وَأَنْتَ سَلِيمٌ</p> <p>فَلَوْ أَنَّ قَوْلًا يَكَلِّمُ الْجِسْمَ قَدْ بَدَأَ بِجِسْمِي مِنْ قَوْلِ الْوَشَاةِ كُلُّومٌ</p>
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This interchange places on display two very different types of poetic voices. In the first, Layla proclaims to be a lover in a couplet that could be read as composed by one who was skilled in the vocabulary of love poetics—not only does she employ various terms for degrees of love, such as affection (*mawadda*), love (*ḥubb*), and ecstasy (*wajd*) with some specificity, but also she plays with the various meanings of the *w/j/d* root to draw attention to connected nuances of meaning of finding, feeling, and being ecstatic in love.³⁸ Yet then when Layla decides to write a kind of letter

37. *Dīwan*, 244-245.

38. Michael Sells has explored the range of meanings in the *w/j/d* root as connected to the poetics of mystical union. Sells demonstrates how mystics such as ‘Abd al-Karīm ibn Hawāzin al-Qushayrī (d. 1074) and Abū l-Qāsim al-Junayd (d. 910) play with the various meanings of the words derived from the root - “*wajd* (ecstasy, finding) and *wujūd* (ecstatic existentiality, found existentiality, founded existentiality).” In this couplet attributed to Layla, the play with existential meanings alongside a more common valence of ecstatic love can be detected from shift between nominal and verbal uses of the term. See Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 98, 252.

to Majnun, the tone changes and her poetry attacks not him as a beloved, as often is the case in the poetry of the famous *‘udhrī* lovers, but rather his discourse on love itself as exposing her to slanderers. Making an appeal to the social, Layla draws attention to her body as the site that is ultimately harmed when exposed by Majnun’s poetic discourse. This shift in tone coincides with the fact that the second attribution is supposedly written and thus offers a different kind of space from which Layla’s perspective emerges. The fact that Layla expresses herself through writing may have reflected historical realities on gendered modes of participation in the literary sphere in the early medieval period, although given the lack of historical data on women’s writerly production and female literacy, it is difficult to assert this with any certainty.³⁹ Instead of reading these texts for historical information, I bring forth this writerly dimension to show that it is through the incorporation of a different kind of formal space that the reader gains access to Layla’s perspective, which both inhabits the norm of proper behavior for a woman in a society that traffics in women and which presses against it, albeit secretly through her position as a lover. The space of Layla communicating with messengers is extended in *Layli and Majnun* as Layla, now a titular character, gains textual prominence.

III. Layla’s position in *Layli and Majnun*

Layla’s character throughout Neẓāmī’s *Layli and Majnun* is framed by commentary on the ways in which her interiority is at odds with her exterior appearance, which further illuminates the

39. Anver Giladi points to the fact that thinkers such as Muḥammad Saḥnūn (d. 870) warned against coeducation, indicating that “girls were not entirely absent from institutions of elementary education (*kuttābs*).” Manuela Marín moreover postulates that, broadly speaking, “it was only in the context of scholarly or high-class families that women were allowed to introduce themselves into the world of specialized learning, taking advantage of the fact that they could be taught by the male members of their families.” This historical backdrop offers a contextualization of Layla as a kind of upper-class, fairly educated woman. See Anver Giladi, “Gender differences in child rearing and education: some preliminary observations with reference to medieval Muslim thought,” in *Al-Qantara* 16, 2 (1995): 301 and Manuela Marín, “Women, Gender, and Sexuality,” in *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, ed. Robert Irwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 372.

associations of her character with secrecy inherited from the Arabic material. When taken at surface level, such contradictions lend themselves to an interpretation of Layla as deceptive. Deception is a common charge raised against feminine actors in premodern Islamic literatures, and it is often associated with trickery or guile (*kayd*).⁴⁰ Guile, although it appears with reference to masculine figures as well, is more typically cast in a negative light when associated with essentialist statements about femininity.⁴¹ Such a generic assessment of a proclivity towards deception can be detected from a common saying about Layla's "inherently" untrustworthy proclivities that compares her to a poorly mixed yogurt drink (*dūgh*) by stating "be aware of Layla's *dūgh*, its yogurt is little and its water is much (*amān amān az dūgh-e layli, māstāsh kam o ābash khayli*)."⁴² Yet as Farzaneh Milani and others have shown, even as deception is often essentialized as feminine, it can also carry simultaneously positive connotations, which are underscored by its Qur'anic usage to describe certain actions of the deity.⁴³ These positive valuations typically indicate a necessity of striving to comprehend a hidden, internal meaning.

Layli and Majnun plays with the trope of woman as inherently deceitful only to dismiss it as an untrustworthy opinion. This occurs when a messenger comes to give Majnun the news of Layla's marriage. The messenger declares that Layla has not remained loyal (*vafā*) and adds, "the

40. For a review of the history of associations of femininity with guile in and beyond Islamic texts, see Gayane Merguerian and Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Zulaykha and Yusuf: Whose 'Best Story'?" in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* Vol. 29, No. 4 (Nov. 1997): 487-488.

41. One main example in Persian literature is Firdawsī's portrayal of Sudabah who explicates her role as wicked stepmother by stating that "all our privations come from women's wiles." For further examples, see Farzaneh Milani, "The Mediatory Guile of the Nanny in Persian Romance," *Iranian Studies* Vol. 32, No. 2 (Spring 1999): 182.

42. My thanks to John Perry for sharing this saying. For further evidence of the usage of this phrase, see the popular satirical news channel, Simay Azadi "Amān āz dūgh-e Layli," Simay Azadi TV, last modified January 24, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PIrgVqVGz60&ab_channel=SimayAzadiTV

43. There are at least thirty-four uses of the k/y/d root in the Qur'an, many of which refer to God's actions. See for example Q 68:45 when the deity assures the Prophet on the destruction of those who reject his message, by stating that "I only delay their end for a while, indeed my plan is firm." See also Shalom Goldman, *The Wiles of Women/The Wiles of Men* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 48.

ways of women are faithful and true / their deceit is extensive and accrues,” thereby adding an accusation of deception to the already fraught charge of infidelity.⁴⁴ Such a remark turns the value of loyalty—a value persistently upheld by the text as central—on its head while crediting Layla with its opposite, deception. Majnun, upon hearing these words, faints and then tackles this messenger out of anger, who then confesses that all he has said was a lie. The trope of inherent feminine deception is thus rehearsed and then quickly dismissed by the text to show that there is something else going on with Layla’s contradictory behavior.

The text repeatedly signals Layla’s interiority through the deployment of the imagery of blood that cuts through long descriptive passages her external beauty. When Layla first appears, the text offers typical features of her beauty such as a small mouth, dark and copious curly hair, and an attractive mole, only to add that “her rosy face was nourished by blood in her mother’s milk / blessed with the kohl from her mother’s black pupils.”⁴⁵ A similar transition occurs in a later episode dedicated to a lengthy description of Layla’s beauty, wherein the text states “yet despite this heart-stealing dalliance / her heart became bloodied from this kindness.”⁴⁶ Both instances draw

44.

این کار زنان راست بازست
افسون زنان بد درازست

This comment comes after a lengthier speech that declares women to be the enemy and to be consistently at odds with man’s desires. Unfortunately, this happens by way of an internalized anti-blackness—the messenger is described as black (*siyahi*) and like a demon (*div*), making it clear to the reader, in problematic ways, that he too is not to be trusted. See Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, 163-164.

45.

گلگونه ز خون شیر پرورد
سرمه ز سواد مادر آورد

Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, 78 / 12 v. 67.

46.

با این همه ناز و دلستانی
خون شد جگرش ز مهربانی

attention to Layla’s suffering interiority (the former perhaps highlighting her mother’s suffering as well) through appeals to blood, which is set against a more amorous external appearance. By illuminating her interiority and corporeality, the text gives a window into Layla’s contradictory position as both fulfilling the role as the beloved and as a fellow, suffering lover.

The fact that Layla’s interiority does not match up with her exterior behavior thus signals not a fault of Layla’s in the narrative, but of external societal expectations. The text leads the reader toward this interpretation by underscoring these expectations and then drawing attention to how Layla both externally fulfills them while internally she differs. After the death of Layla’s husband, the text poignantly displays this contradiction by illuminating how her public display of mourning is actually a release of a very different kind of suffering. In mourning, the text shows how Layla fulfills her societal obligations:

<p>It is the Arabs’ custom after the death of the husband a wife does not show her face to people.</p> <p>Layla remains for two years in her home no one seeing her nor her anyone</p> <p>she weeps with a humility she knows reciting a verse of her own desire.</p>	<p>رسم عربست کز پس شوی ننماید زن به هیچکس روی</p> <p>سالی دو به خانه در نشیند او در کس و کس درو نبیند</p> <p>نالد به تضرعی که داند بیتهی به مراد خویش خواند⁴⁷</p>
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It is not clear where this kind of anthropological observation of cloistered, feminine mourning as an intrinsically “Arab custom” comes from, and it reads as a generalization that may not be based in fact given the prominence of an elegiac genre of classical Arabic poetry, *rithā’*, wherein a feminine speaker publicly mourns the death of a male kinsman.⁴⁸ This comment nevertheless

Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, 113 / 22 v. 28.

47. Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 255 / 54 v. 75-77.

48. As Tahera Qutbuddin notes, the majority of extant women’s poems were either in the genre of elegy (*ritha’*) in the case of freeborn women, or erotic love song (*ghazal*) in the case of slave girls. In the genre of *rithā’*, free women lamented their fallen warriors and kinsmen as a form of ritual mourning that Suzanne Stetkevych has linked to men’s

signals a distancing from such practices as foreign or dated and prepares the way for a complex depiction of Layla’s interiority to emerge.

The text then presents Layla’s mourning as affording her an opportunity for expressing her ecstatic desire to be with her beloved, which undercuts the performance of the societal obligation of mourning her late husband. After explicitly glossing that, “she weeps out of pain for the beloved / her sound is on behalf of her husband,” the text elaborates:

Using the excuse of such an event, immediately Layla emptied her tent of people.	لیلی به چنین بهانه حالی خرگاه ز خلق کرد خالی
Due to the norm of mourning a husband she sat face to face with grief.	بر قاعده مصیبت شوی با غم بنشست روی در روی
Because there was an excuse for shouting her patience left her.	چون یافت غریب را بهانه برخاست صبوری از میانه
By the convention of mourning, she raised mourning and lamentation to the seven heavens.	می برد به شرط سوگواری بر هفت فلک خروش و زاری
She bravely became frenzied, ecstatic satiating herself with blows to chest.	شوریدگی دلیر می کرد خود را به طپانچه سیر می کرد
She sighed aloud as much as she wanted fear and danger dissipated.	می زد نفسی چنانکه می خواست خوف و خطرش ز راه بر خاست ⁴⁹

This frenzy underscores Layla’s position as a lover herself. Layla uses the “excuse” for shouting and becoming ecstatic, thereby acting as a suffering lover in ways that resemble Majnun’s erratic actions. She, however, cannot typically act in such a way because mad behavior risks making her more vulnerable—public expression of her *‘ishq* has already at this point placed her at odds with

participation in the ritual of blood vengeance. See Qutbuddin, “Women: Poets,” 865-866 and Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak*, 161-205.

49. Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 255 / 54 v. 68-73.

various members of her family.⁵⁰ It is only through revealing a duplicity in her mourning that the text signals Layla's role as a fellow, suffering lover.

In addition to these descriptive details on her interiority, Layla's ability to write cuts through the potential contradiction of her interior states and exterior circumstances by offering the reader another window through which to access her motivations. The narrator highlights her ability to write alongside access to her interiority through another appeal to the imagery of blood by stating, again after a lengthy description of her beauty, that "hidden, she was fashioning a page with blood / and she was writing that short verse on it."⁵¹ It is unclear whether or not the reader is to take this literally, yet Layla's discourse blends the materiality of blood with the physicality of the page through the act of writing. Writing becomes the means through which the text provides access to lengthier quotations that illustrate Layla's own perspective on *'ishq*.

IV. Messages and letters

As the text gives way to a series of communications between the lovers, messages and letters from Layla's perspective offer a different discursive occasion for critiquing Majnun's dominant perspective on *'ishq* as well as articulating an alternative view. Neẓāmī was not the first to experiment with epistolary form in the Islamic romantic epic, nor was he the last. T. Gandjei has pointed to the prevalence of the technique in medieval Persian and Turkish literature by locating what he terms the "*dah-nāma* (ten love letters)" tradition. This tradition, according to

50. Specifically, Layla's mother scolds her for speaking about *'ishq* in a rose garden, and her father threatens that it would be better to have her killed than married to Majnun. See Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, 116-117 and 137.

51.

پنهان ورقی به خون سرشتی
و آن بینک را برو نوشتی

Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, 115. Her writing here is also explicitly described as eloquent (*fushā*), whereas Majnun's speech is extemporaneous.

Gandjei, began with the lengthy verbal contest between the lover-protagonists in Gorgānī's (f. 11th century) *Vis and Ramin* and its earliest typified form is in the neatly packaged ten-episode sparring in Neẓāmī's *Khosrow and Shirin*.⁵² Gandjei locates six subsequent romantic epics in Persian and four in Turkish composed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to arrive at a definition of the *dah-nāma* as "a poem in *masnāvī* form in the *hazaj* meter, interspersed with ghazals, having for its theme either the exchange of ten letters between lover and beloved or ten letters addressed to the beloved."⁵³ Such a definition is remarkably specific, although the disputation form that Gandjei points out could be fruitfully expanded to include other texts that experiment with such literary sparring between lovers such as 'Imād al-Dīn 'Alī Faqīh Kermānī's (f. 14th century) *Maḥabbat-nāma-yi šāḥib-dilān* (*Love Story of the Lords of Hearts*), which includes a series of allegorical disputations between the soul and the body, and other texts that include disputations in the form of letters even if they do not number ten, such as Neẓāmī's *Layli and Majnun*.⁵⁴ This motif of a verbal sparring between lovers, often concretized in experiments with epistolary form, is one of the concrete commonplaces of Islamic romantic epics that point to their own fictionality.⁵⁵ The extended segments of reported speech signal a letting go of a pretension to factuality and create another discursive level on which these texts operate. It is through this semantic mode that we

52. See T. Gandjei, "The Genesis and Definition of a Literary Composition: The Dah-nāma ('Ten love-letters)," in *Der Islam* Vol. 47 (1971), 65.

53. *Ibid*, 65.

54. Kermānī's text also notably includes disputations between entities belonging to the three kingdoms of nature atom and sun, iron and magnet, straw and amber, bee and palm, candle and moth, rose and nightingale, and elephant and gnat, which shows the ways in which this motif extended into various meta-poetic and allegorical registers in later periods. See J.T.P. de Bruijn, "Emād al-Dīn 'Alī Faqīh Kermānī" in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, VIII/4, p. 378-379; available online at <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/emad-al-din-ali> (accessed March 1, 2020).

55. Thinking with Orlemanski again on fictionality, she does not suggest that we do away with medieval literary theory, but that we recognize that "literary making has independence from its theorization." My analysis of this motif is not intended to displace the scholarship on medieval Islamic literary criticism, but rather to approach the question of fictionality from literary texts themselves. See Orlemanski, "Who has Fiction?" 157.

arrive at a fuller picture of what Layla as a character has to say about *ishq* and how her perspective critiques and diverges from Majnun's. This emphasis on the written word can be seen as reflecting larger dynamics in the shift towards writerly culture in the Persianate world at the time.⁵⁶ This historical shift towards the production of a written tradition allows for self-conscious modes of representation, modes which create space for literary techniques such as metadiegetic narrators and experiments with epistolary form.

Layla's reported speech typically critiques Majnun's method of approach as well as the harm that his discourse on *ishq* has on her as an embodied woman. The interchanges between the two lovers escalate after Layla's marriage and after Majnun's decision to live permanently amongst the animals in the wilderness. There, an old man encounters Majnun having just met with Layla and proceeds to relay to him a message from her, which sets in motion a series of communications. After giving the requisite account of Layla's beauty, the old man states:

56. Julia Rubanovich has carefully analyzed this shift through assessment of a wide range of prose narratives (*dāstān*), from which she concludes that there was a shift to the recording of these narratives in the eleventh century, and that written versions likely existed alongside the continuance of a widespread oral culture. While Rubanovich is more concerned with prose, her approach is also helpful for considering how we measure the commitment to writing in contemporaneous poetic narratives against an oral backdrop. See Julia Rubanovich, "Orality in Medieval Persian Literature," in *Medieval Oral Literature* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 661-665.

<p>She opened her sweet lips in a sad smile said, "O you who has sprinkled salt on my wound</p> <p>I was Layla but now I have become madder than even a thousand Majnuns</p> <p>more than that enraptured, black-starred one I am a thousand times more mad!</p> <p>Even though he is the target of pain in the end he is man, I am woman</p> <p>he is quite nimble in the ways of <i>'ishq</i> for no fear comes to him from anyone.</p> <p>He is not diminished like me in his torment and his foot goes wherever he desires.</p>	<p>بگشاد شکر به زهر خنده کای بر جگرم نمک فکنده</p> <p>لیلی بودم ولیک اکنون مجنونترم از هزار مجنون</p> <p>ز آن شیفته سیه ستاره من شیفته تر هزار باره</p> <p>او گر چه نشانه گاه درد است آخر نه چو من ز نست مرد است</p> <p>در شیوه عشق هست چالاک کز هیچ کسی نیایدش باک</p> <p>چون من به شکنجه در نکاهد آنجا قدمش رود که خواهد⁵⁷</p>
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Through reported speech, Layla enters a poet-lover's contest with Majnun, declaring that she is madder (*majnūn-tar*) and more enraptured (*shīfteh-tar*) than him—redeploying his epithet of the madman (*majnūn*) to indicate not only that her suffering is similar in kind but greater in degree. This is similar to the poet-lovers' contest explored in chapter two between Majnun and other poet-lovers from the *'udhrī* tradition, a tradition that is associated with seventh-century poets who dwelled on their personal suffering due to allegedly unconsummated desire.⁵⁸ As such, Layla's speech can be read as negotiating herself into and within this tradition, yet simultaneously Layla points directly to her gender, here declared in the absolute, as a social factor that leads to her different way of embodying *'ishq*. Pointing to the expectation that one roams and recites delicate poetry if one is a lover, Layla follows up her declaration of suffering with the societal expectations of her as a woman as an explanation for why she does not display signs of her suffering publicly.

57. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, 201 / 43 v. 48-53.

58. *'Udhrī* poetry was retroactively attributed to a group of poets from the Arabian Peninsula in the early Umayyad period (661-750). For a full review of the tradition, see Ruqayya Khan, *Bedouin and 'Abbāsīd Cultural Identities*, 49-53 and chapter two.

Ishq here acts in opposition to fear (*bāk*), yet Layla nevertheless notes the fact that displays of suffering make the already societally vulnerable more vulnerable. Her placement within her society's marital system makes it impossible to fully inhabit the suffering-lover position publicly.

Further clarification of her actions follows as Layla articulates in detail the particularities of her position:

<p>It is I who am lonely and wretched I cannot voice this grief to anyone.</p> <p>I fear that from rawness and becoming selfless I will become exiled from my good name.</p>	<p>مسکین من بیکسم که یک دم با کس نزنم دلیر ازین غم</p> <p>ترسم که ز بیخودی و خامی بیگانه شوم ز نیک نامی⁵⁹</p>
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Her inability to voice grief to anyone bolsters the claim at the beginning of this quotation that perhaps she is madder (*majnūn-tar*) than Majnun himself—insofar as being a lover is rated according to degree of suffering, her loneliness multiplies her suffering. Moreover, it is the qualities of becoming selfless (*bikhūdī*) and rawness (*khāmī*) that are especially difficult to inhabit for one who is necessarily concerned with preserving a good name.

Layla's character proceeds to further define societal expectations by explicitly naming the various actors that restrict her expression of *ishq*:

59. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, 201 / 43 v. 54-55.

<p>From one side comes the grief of the estranged from the other the grief of guardians</p> <p>because of these two strong-armed groups I have fallen into continual conflict.</p> <p>I don't have the heart to quarrel with my husband nor do I have the nerve to escape the father.</p> <p>Sometimes <i>'ishq</i> gives me heart, saying "Rise like a partridge flee the crow and sparrow!"</p> <p>And sometimes honor and shame say "Sit, the falcon is stronger than the partridge."</p>	<p>از یک طرفم غم غریبان وز سوی دگر غم رقیبان</p> <p>من زین دو علاقه قوی دست در کش مکش او فتاده پیوست</p> <p>نه دل که به شوی بر ستیزم نه زهره که از پدر گریزم</p> <p>گه عشق دلم دهد که بر خیز زین زاغ و زغن چو کبک بگریز</p> <p>گه گوید نام و ننگ بنشین کز کبک قویترست شاهین⁶⁰</p>
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It is not only guardians (*raqibān*) such as her father and her husband, but also the estranged ones (*garibān*) such as Majnun who maintain control over her through their vested interests. Here Layla articulates *'ishq* as something quite separate from marriage, not only because of her own particular marriage but also because of the way in which *'ishq* acts in opposition to honor with the two personified through dialogic interaction. *'Ishq* personified commands action, saying rise (*bar khīz*), while through a parallel construction (sometimes/sometimes, *gāh/gāh*), honor commands Layla to sit. This focus on action is quite striking when compared to the position of the suffering lover, and to the general medical backdrop of *'ishq* as something that actually causes madness. As such, Layla's understands *'ishq* as an action that retains a radical potential to rethink a kinship structure that traffics in women for the purpose of maintaining familial honor, which undergirds the legend's plot. Thinking with Saba Mahmood's work, it is through inhabiting the norms of her gendered inability to move that Layla's agency as a lover develops in a way that alters her perspective on what might be done with *'ishq*'s force.

60. Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, 201-202 / 43 v. 57-61.

After naming these groups, Layla names herself as a woman and wrestles with what “being a woman” means:

<p>Even if a woman can throw down warriors in the end she is woman, being a woman.</p> <p>Suppose that a woman is in her blood fearless though a lion, she is still a woman.</p> <p>Since one cannot be cut off from this grief I gave my body to enduring it.</p>	<p>زن گرچه بود مبارز افگن آخر چو زنست هم بود زن</p> <p>زن گیر که خود به خون دلیرست زن باشد زن اگر چه شیرست</p> <p>زین غم چو نمی توان بریدن تن در دادم به غم کشیدن⁶¹</p>
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One way of reading this repetition of “being a woman” is an undoing of its ontological certainty, similar to how Judith Butler sees citationality as a force for undoing the congealing of metaphors of gender.⁶² Leaning into that viewpoint, Layla’s appeal to blood as a way of claiming fearlessness undoes this passage’s definition of “being a woman” as something antithetical to being a soldier or a lion. Such a reading remains unsatisfying, however, when we consider the fact that Layla’s statements here leave a lingering sense of essentialism intact that may have been assumed by premodern readers. Instead of necessarily undoing these assumptions, Layla’s statements on “being a woman” can be read as pointing to how societal expectations understand her role as a woman and how she sees herself as somehow exceeding that. Her embodied laments alongside her fearless blood complicate the perception of her as existing only as a beloved as they simultaneously give voice to her positionality as a desiring lover herself.

The tone shifts at the end of Layla’s message from a complaint of her positionality to a series of questions about Majnun’s state:

61. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, 202 / 43 v. 62-65.

62. On the force of such citational practice, Butler argues that citations of gendered norms open the possibility of resignification, wherein one cites the law to produce the effects of it differently. See Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, xxii.

But my heart is drowned with blood, wondering how is that lover who is without me?	لیکن جگرم به زیر خونست کان یار که بی منست چونست
Without me, whose pages does he turn? How, in what way, does he pass his days?	بی من ورق که می شمارد ایام چگونه می گذارد
On which path does he now take a journey? In which cloister does he take a meal?	صاحب سفر کدام راهست سفره ش به کدام خانقاهست
Whose companionship does he choose? Who's his friend, with whom does he sit?	هم صحبتی که می گزیند یارش که و با که می نشیند
If you are aware of that traveler give me news here, on this path.”	گر هستی از آن مسافر آگاه مارا خبری بده در این راه ⁶³

Once again pointing to her own suffering through the imagery of blood, Layla's character shifts to asking about her fellow lover, or perhaps more accurately, her beloved (*yār*). This series of questions contrasts to the discourse of a suffering poet-lover that is directed inward and that dwells on hierarchy. It likewise contrasts to Majnun's mystically inflected discourse on *'ishq* explored in the previous chapter through its concern for the state of the other. Instead of blaming him for her suffering or claiming ontological union, Layla here is more interested in understanding how her fellow lover is doing in the adverse circumstances in which they, together, have found themselves. Layla's repeated questions indicate a way of embodying *'ishq* that is directed outwards, with a sense of care for the simultaneous suffering of the other.

Although Layla's character gives a variety of speeches throughout the narrative, this message contains some of the most overt critiques of Majnun, and it is through the technique of reported speech that the reader gains access to such critiques, with the old man as the intermediary. This suggests an added layer of authority to Layla's words, as well as a marking of fictionality as

63. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, 202 / 43 v. 65-69.

the reader is to imagine that the old man quotes this extensive passage verbatim.⁶⁴ By utilizing this added layer of dialogic space, the text offers a fuller account of Layla’s perspective—of one who is not only a suffering but also a caring lover—even as it remains once removed. Backed by an old man, it is through the technique of reported speech that the reader gains access to such a perspective, and this layer of dialogic space allows for a novel perspective on *‘ishq* as a way of acting to be incorporated into the work as a whole.

Shortly after this passage, the text includes an epistolary exchange. In a letter, Layla offers advice to Majnun on how he might consider changing his behavior and thereby adds an additional dimension to her critiques alongside the explication of a different view of what one does with the force of *‘ishq*. Experimenting with form, the narrative moves in and out of direct quotation. After the letter’s opening, the text, with its access to Layla’s interiority, gives Layla space to address her personal concerns. Her letter then takes on a personal tone of direct address:

<p>This letter that is like a piece of silk comes from a grief-stricken one to one with pain.</p> <p>Meaning from me one shut in the fortress to you O one whose cage is broken.</p> <p>O beloved of old oath, how are you? O cradle of the heavens, how are you?</p>	<p>کاین نامه که هست چون پرندی از غمزده ای به دردمندی</p> <p>یعنی ز من حصار بسته نزدیک تو ای قفس شکسته</p> <p>ای یار قدیم عهد چونی وی مهدی هفت مهد چونی⁶⁵</p>
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Once again declaring herself a fellow, suffering lover, Layla’s letter offers a quick gloss on the similarities and differences between the lovers’ external circumstances—they are both aggrieved

64. It is also interesting to note that the mediator is specifically an old man, as opposed to the more common figure of the nanny. Perhaps this substitution indicates an appeal to earnestness, as opposed to the creative deceptiveness of the nanny as analyzed by Milani. The old man, unlike the previously deceptive messenger, is socially coded as a more reliable transmitter of Layla’s speech. See Milani, “The Mediatory Guile of the Nanny in Persian Romance,” 185-187.

65. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, 205 / 44 v. 10-12.

as she describes herself as grief-stricken (*ghamzadeh*) while he is one with pain (*dardmandī*), but she is locked up in fortress while his own cage is broken. The address to him as a beloved of “old oath” establishes a sense of deep familiarity before opening out onto a series of vocatives that praise his level of commitment. The shift towards questions at the end of this passage reinforce the directionality of the letter toward an inquiry about the state of the other, similar to her questions in the previous segment of her indirect speech.

The letter then opens out onto a series of vocatives, which place Layla’s poetic abilities on display. The epithets she gives to Majnun read both as laudatory and playful as she comments upon his external conditions:

<p>O treasurer of intimate treasure <i>‘ishq</i> has taken its radiance from you.</p> <p>O how your blood has colored the soil settled now like agate within a stone.</p> <p>O fountain of Khizr in your blackness moth of the candle in the dawn’s brightness.</p> <p>O from you ecstasy fell into the world you whose made wild asses his companions.</p> <p>O you are the place of the wound of my blame caravan-mate of my resurrection.</p> <p>O heart given in loyalty to me me who has not left from your loyalty</p> <p>How are you? What do you do? My longing’s for you, your <i>‘ishq</i> is for who?</p>	<p>ای خازن گنج آشنایی عشق از تو گرفته روشنایی</p> <p>ای خون تو داده خاک را رنگ ساکن شده چون عقیق در سنگ</p> <p>ای چشمه خضر در سیاهی پروانه شمع صبحگاهی</p> <p>ای از فتاده در جهان شور گوری دو سه کرده مونس گور</p> <p>ای زخمگه ملامت من هم قافله قیامت من</p> <p>ای دل به وفای من سپرده من سر ز وفای تو نبرده</p> <p>چونی وچگونه ای چه سازی من با تو تو با که عشق بازی⁶⁶</p>
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Once again from a place of deep familiarity, Layla makes particular the kind of treasure that she and Majnun share—its intimacy (*āshnā-ī*) is proximate to *‘ishq* itself, which radiates from

66. Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, 205 / 44 v. 13-19.

Majnun.⁶⁷ In the course of praising Majnun, Layla’s epithets begin to point out certain aspects of the way he looks that contrast with his laudable position—he appears downtrodden with two or three wild asses constantly following him. Her comment on his “blackness,” while it reifies certain associations of the color with death or decrepitude, also playfully juxtaposes these associations with a metaphor comparing Majnun to the fountain of life that, according to Islamic lore, was discovered by Iskandar (Alexander the Great) with the guidance of the Prophet Khizr.⁶⁸ Layla’s letter continues this playfulness of tone as it returns back to a series of inquiries about Majnun’s state wherein Layla asks with whom Majnun is doing intimate love-play (*‘ishq-bāzi*)—an inquiry that may read as jealous, adding another embodied register to Layla’s perspective on *‘ishq*. However, given that Majnun now lives alone in the wilderness, such an accusation also reads as a deeper critique of his revised understanding of an *‘ishq* that culminates in ontological unity, and which leads his character away from the social. These repetitive questions once again signal Layla’s overarching motive of concern and position her as a caring, internal critic.

Continuing to waver in and out of praise, the letter fluctuates in subject matter as it offers the most extensive representation of Layla’s perspective. Strikingly different from Majnun’s loss

67. Intimacy (*āshnā-ī*) is a term that comes up frequently for Neẓāmī in reference to a particular kind of lover who is devoted until death, such as Farhad. My thanks to Franklin Lewis for pointing this out. See Neẓāmī, *Khosrow and Shirin*, 396. The term can also imply sociability, as I analyzed in chapter three when the text points to Majnun’s loss of sociability (*āshnā-ī*) after he begins to live amongst animals, and in the tale of the King from Marv who lacks this desirable trait.

68. The Prophet Khizr is often connected with fertility. Although he is not mentioned by name in the Qur’ān, Ṭabarī, Bukhārī, and other exegetes identify him with the anonymous spiritual guide to Mūsā (Moses) mentioned in Q 18:60-82. This passage gives way to another narrative section in Q 18:83-97 on Dhu al-Qarnayn (commonly identified with Alexander the Great). Combining the motifs of an unknown guide and the search for a distant body of water of these Qur’anic passages as well as the Alexander romance tradition in Greek, Arabic, and Persian, later Islamic authors such as Neẓāmī placed Khizr as a guide to Alexander’s quest for immortality through discovering the water of life. See Anna Krasnowolska, “Khezr” in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, online edition, 2009, available at <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/kezr-prophet> (accessed March 22, 2021).

of memory, Layla recalls recent events and addresses Majnun in an immediate, personal tone. This is most heightened when Layla mentions the recent death of Majnun's father:

When I heard of the death of your father I tore at the shroud on my dead body.	مرگ پدر تو چون شنیدم بر مرده تن کفن دریدم
I pummeled myself with slaps on the face imagining that my own father died.	کردم به طپانچه روی را خرد پنداشتم آن پدر مرا مرد ⁶⁹

Utilizing imagery of a funeral shroud, Layla empathizes with Majnun's position and seeks to share the grief that he may feel. She recounts slapping herself in a performance of embodied suffering, which temporarily unifies her external state and internal desires. Desire and empathy run hand in hand in her caring sensitivity for her fellow lover's losses. Layla's sense of care here exceeds the romantic and offers a way of considering familial relations that extends care between lovers to a larger community.

There is a shift in the second half of the letter from this focus on care and concern to a voicing of Layla's own approach to living in a world that falls short. Having established herself as a fellow lover, and as one who is speaking from a proximate place of empathy, Layla critiques Majnun's overall disposition as lacking in patience:

I am aware of the pain of your heart in this path patience is the best succor.	از رنج دلت چو هستم آگاه هر چاره شکیب شد درین راه
For a day or two in this transitory abode, one must put up with fate.	روزی دو درین رحیل خانه می باید ساخت با زمانه
For this abode that brings you fresh splendor also brings torment with its narrowness.	کاین خانه که آب و رنگت آرد از تنگی خود به تنگ آرد
Shake it off like a donkey see the shortness of life and be silent!	بفکن چو خران درازی از گوش کوتاهی عمر بین و خاموش ⁷⁰

69. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, 206 / 44 v. 37-38.

70. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, 206 / 44 v. 43-46.

Fronting her critique with a reinforcement of their shared pain, Layla positions herself as an internal critic—she is not an outsider recommending a cure, or, like Majnun’s father, holding a medicalizing view of *‘ishq*, but rather a fellow lover who has recommendations for living in the world despite its ills. Although Layla, like Majnun, views the world as somewhat despicable or narrow (*tāng*) and asserts that life is short, she nevertheless recommends patience (*shakīb*) as a way of living. Why? Why not rage against these facts as Majnun has been doing?

Once again taking recourse to her position as a fellow, suffering lover, Layla explicates why:

<p>I too have that same wandering desire but I keep my foot fixed, stationary —</p> <p>it is better if the wise close their eyes than that weeping that brings the foe’s laughter.</p> <p>It is better if the knowing do not recall the grief that makes an enemy happy.</p> <p>And regarding yourself as you are, you should be happy in this situation.</p> <p>Do not be affected if the world turns for this wheel turns time and time again.</p> <p>Do not look at the lords who sprinkle seeds see instead how seeds arise from seeds.</p>	<p>من نیز همان عیار دارم لیکن قدم استوار دارم</p> <p>عاقل به اگر نظر ببندد ز آن گریه که دشمنی بخندد</p> <p>دانا به اگر نیاورد یاد ز آن غم که مخالفی شود شاد</p> <p>ای در حق خود چنانکه هستی خوش باش درین میان که هستی</p> <p>در خط مشو ار جهان بگردد کاین چرخ زمان زمان بگردد</p> <p>دهقان منگر که دانه ریزد آن بین که ز دانه دانه خیزد⁷¹</p>
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As explored at the beginning of this chapter, Layla here lays claim to a similar desire for wandering, yet she redirects this toward finding contentment because of the potentials for mockery. Such mockery has already befallen Majnun by various onlookers throughout the work and underscores his nickname when used pejoratively. Instead of claiming her own madness (as with

71. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, 207 / 44 v. 49-54.

the line where she claimed to be more *majnūn* than Majnun), Layla’s tone shifts as she asks Majnun to consider behaving like a wise one. Even as she recognizes Majnun’s truth, this suggests a way of behaving that is again distinctly different. As with her questions, Layla embodies a way of caring for Majnun that is, nevertheless, not without critique as she suggests forgoing the suffering-lover position entirely and instead beseeches Majnun to “be happy.”

Yet Layla’s focus on “being happy” is not merely a call for positive affect and instead continues with a recommendation of material engagement with the world. Layla articulates that the world is wretched because the lords of the day (*dehqāns*)—a landholding class that signals those with access to material wealth—will sprinkle seeds where they will. This recalls social structures beyond the lovers’ control. Yet instead of apathy, Layla underscores her recognition of lurking enemies and misguided lords with a recommendation to instead pay attention to what seeds can arise from seeds already present in the material world. The repeated emphasis on the seeds (*dāne*) shows a continuity of generation as seeds sprout from seeds. This emphasis on seeds may point to Layla as a kind of nurturing figure, recalling a way of understanding care as connected essentially to the feminine, as in, say, Carol Gilligan’s work.⁷² However, what is more striking about this passage to me is that it is a command directed at Majnun to engage in the material world, which requires that he not be too preoccupied with suffering or with transcendence. Such a command imagines a very different form of relations between lovers than the naturalized domesticity of the wife in premodern Islamic ethics (*akhlāq*) who cares for a husband who is then

72. Scholarship on care took off in the 1980s with Carol Gilligan and Nel Nodding’s work, which has been criticized for potentially reinforcing traditional stereotypes around femininity, especially maternalism. The most robust responses to these critiques take on some form of revaluing domestic or reproductive labor, which is why I focus on Cristina Crosby and Janet Jakobson’s work, which also helpfully brings to attention intersections of race, sexuality, gender, etc. in who is asked to do caring labor. For an overview, see Maureen Sander-Staudt, “Care Ethics,” in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://iep.utm.edu/care-ethics/> (accessed January 23, 2022).

free to engage in transcendent contemplation. Rather than merely emphasizing an ability to nurture, Layla's character here places on display material concerns that resonate with Cristina Crosby and Janet Jakobson's suggestion that caring actions carry a radical potential only if its attendant material requirements—such as domestic labor—are valued across different segments of society.⁷³ Significantly, the letter employs the verb (*khāstan*, *khīzad*) for what arises from the seeds. This is the same verb used when 'ishq, personified in the old man's quotation of Layla's speech, commanded Layla to rise and fight her own condition as one constricted by honor (*gah 'ishq-e delam dahad ke bar khīz*). Each time this verb underscores a view of 'ishq as a way of acting. In this passage, we get a glimpse of how this way of acting, when accompanied by material shifts, carries the potential of envisioning a novel form of the romantic relationship.

Through an experiment with epistolary form, Neẓāmī opened a dialogic space in the romantic epic that allows for a more extensive exposition of Layla's perspective—a perspective that is couched within interiority and apparent contradiction. The letter offers a way of getting at a point of view that is simultaneously intimate with and distant from Majnun's own perspective, and Layla's concerns and critiques throughout mirror this overall positionality. As Layla's concerns pile up and potential for union arises, however, Layla abandons writing in favor of movement as a way of embodying her approach to 'ishq as an action directed outwards.

V. Embodiment and active engagement

73. Crosby and Jakobsen situate their project of revaluing caring labor within materialist analysis. Their primary example stems from hired domestic work typically completed by women of color who have migrated from the global south and work in care-giving facilities such as hospitals, nursing homes, etc. in the global north. Revaluing for them means attending to the fact that such work is underpaid, and resources should be redistributed in a way that sees this work as work for all. Layla's request for Majnun to engage in the material world is not the same as this example, but it nevertheless asks for a shift in Majnun's way of being that likewise would require a redistribution of labor in the domestic sphere. See Crosby and Jakobsen, "Disability, Debility, and Caring Queerly," 86-94.

After the death of her husband, there is a shift in Layla's forms of expression. As before, Layla's character displays an understanding of *'ishq* as action, but now this action itself takes on an embodied form of sexual desire that is no longer prohibited by codes of honor associated with the marriage economy.⁷⁴ In the last chapter, I analyzed how this episode depicts physical and/or sexual union, and now I turn to the gendered dimensions of sexuality present in the scene as it is Layla who initiates. This aspect of Layla's character is not present in the Arabic material. In ways comparable to Jāmī's Zulaykha in *Yusuf and Zulaykha*, this section highlights how, for Neẓāmī's Layla, the spiritual and the sensuous are intertwined.⁷⁵ The profane and sacred layers of *'ishq*, although offering windows to one another, are not, however, directly analogous, and Layla's actions in this episode suggest that time causes a rupture in the analogous nature of profane and sacred understandings of unity. In other words, while waiting for divine or ontological union, for Layla temporary, sensual union is possible, desirable, and enacted through the body. Her perspective moreover suggests that a variety of positions around the sexual connotations of *'ishq* were available and in flux at the time and the ways in which Islamic romantic epics offer perspectives that differ from contemporaneous mystical texts.

Against her previous recommendations for patience, this episode opens with a sense of urgency—once union is possible, for Layla, it is to be immediately sought. The text fantastically heightens the urgency of this scene by positioning Majnun's animals as barricades between the

74. Although Layla is no longer at risk of being charged with adultery, her actions in this episode could still technically fall under the category of *zinā'* in Islamic law, which prohibits any sex outside of marriage. For more on the legal differences between *zinā'* and adultery, see Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam*, 56-74.

75. Afsaneh Najmabadi and Gayane Merguerian have analyzed Jāmī's depiction of Zulaykha against other genres such as the stories of prophets (*qiṣāṣ al-ānbiyā'*) and *Qur'anic* commentaries. Against these genres, they are that Jāmī's depiction of Zulaykha no longer represents evil temptation yet she nevertheless eventually becomes Yusuf's object of desire. See Gayane Merguerian and Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Zulaykha and Yusuf: Whose 'Best Story'?" in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* Vol. 29, No. 4 (Nov. 1997): 497-500.

lovers and a hostile outside world. The episode comes after the introduction of Zayd and Zaynab, an analogous pair of lovers, to the narrative and after Zayd becomes the consistent and loyal messenger for Layla and Majnun.⁷⁶ After the death of her husband, Layla springs into action:

From the modesty she patiently kept she took the curtain from that hidden <i>'ishq</i> .	آزم شکیب کرده بر داشت زان عشق نهفته پرده بر داشت
She smashed the bottle on a rock, spattering like wine she threw her shield on the water, scattering like roses.	بر سنگ زد آبگینه چون مل بر آب سپر فگند چون گل
When she found a door recently closed by reason to be a door freed from its lock	آن تازه دری به عقل بسته ⁷⁷ چون یافت دری ز قفل رسته
she showed no weakness in seeking a remedy and she sought for help in a healthy body.	در چاره گری نکرد سستی می جست به چاره تندرستی ⁷⁸

Like a shattered wine glass or scattered roses, Layla's efforts to reach Majnun read as a last chance attempt. Instead of situating her abandonment of patience as contradictory to her previous advice, the text highlights the change in her external conditions, namely the death of her husband, that has led to this shift. She cloisters herself in her tent in a way that is portrayed as reasonable (*'aql*) given the ritual of mourning the death of her late husband, yet this ritual additionally affords her the time and space to plot her next move. Moreover, not only does Layla instigate her search for Majnun through activating *'ishq* from within her body, but also the text notes that she does so in a

76. Given their contextualization in the early Arabic milieu, Zayd and Zaynab could be read as an analogous pair of *'udhrī* lovers, albeit fictionalized ones. Most poets whose poetry professed this type of love were known by the poets' name followed by the beloveds name in a possessive construction, such as Jamīl Buthayna (Jamil of Buthayna), Kuthayyir 'Azza, and Majnūn Laylā. Oftentimes poetic attributions could be mixed up between these poets who were predominately known for their style.

77. Zanjani has this line as:

آن تازه دری به قفل بسته

“That fresh door that was bound to a lock,” which ma, though the repetition of the lock does not add any meaning and I am inclined to go with Sarvatiyan's reading here. See Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Zanjani, 151 / v. 3847.

78. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan 263 / 57 v. 14-17.

specifically healthy body, signaling the different way in which her character channels *'ishq* as a force—instead of emphasizing suffering or transcendence, Layla channels the force into actions that aim at altering the material world.

Layla's speech moreover signals the heightened sense of the present moment. Calling her faithful messenger Zayd, Layla commands him to bring Majnun to her:

<p>“Zayd today is not the day of waiting it's the day of seeking and uniting with the beloved.</p> <p>Rise for the world is well, rise and go forth bring the sugar and mix it with the rose.</p> <p>Give to the pasture its cypress partner cut the jasmine for the tulip bouquet.</p> <p>Bring that elegant gazelle to the trap and bring that navel of musk to my hand.</p> <p>So that I make fine silk out of his cloth I'll make perfume from the dust of his path.”</p>	<p>کامروز نه روز انتظارست روز طلب وصال یارست</p> <p>بر خیز جهان خوشست بر خیز پیش آر شکر به گل برآمیز</p> <p>همخوابه سرو کن چمن را در دسته لاله کش سمن را</p> <p>آن آهوی نغز را به شست آر وآن نافه مشک را به دست آر</p> <p>تا از قصیش حریر سازم وز گرد رهش عبیر سازم⁷⁹</p>
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It is today—not the common time-marker “one day” (*rūzī*) that often marks the beginning of episodes in the text—that Layla declares to be the day of union, separating it definitively from a previous period of waiting. Layla employs the same verb for rising (*khāstan*, *bar khīz*) that earlier was used for *'ishq*'s ability to instigate action as her character launches into a series of direct commands to Zayd. While each of these commands spiral into various metaphors on her relatively stationary position compared to Majnun's ability to move—he is the freshly cut jasmine to her as bouquet, the gazelle to her trap—it is Layla who instigates this movement through her intermediary Zayd. Her speech cuts through the gendered metaphors that it employs and shows how she enacts her position as a desiring lover while still paying lip service to the norms of being Majnun's

79. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan 263 / 57 v. 19-23.

beloved. The end of this passage deploys a series of material metaphors—comparing her ability to weave fine silk from his cloth, and to make perfume from his dust—that signal how Layla plans to use material resources to transform Majnun into something more refined. As with the seeds that Layla writes about in her letter, these metaphors underscore her character’s persistent engagement with the material world.

As the episode progresses, Layla reinforces her position as the one who seeks physical union. Zayd obeys Layla’s commands and brings Majnun whose animals circle him like a barricade. Layla, presumably without fear of the lion, wolf, or leopard that we have seen accompany Majnun, goes to kneel at his feet whereupon they both faint and the animals serve as guardians shielding them, creating a safe space while killing one or two trespassers—the animals reinforcing the need to protect the lovers from a hostile outside world, which I explored in the previous chapter. Zayd then awakens them with rosewater, and Layla proceeds to lead Majnun into her tent:

<p>Layla out of much modesty and shame came up to that dusty stranger.</p>	<p>لیلی به هزار شرمناکی آمد بر آن غریب خاکی</p>
<p>She took his hand and brought him before her she brought him into her own special tent.</p>	<p>دستش بگرفت و پیش بردش در خیمه خاص خویش بردش</p>
<p>She sat him down in amorous play she caressed him with soul-comforting union.</p>	<p>بنشانند به صد نشاط و نازش بنواخت به وصل جان نوازش⁸⁰</p>

In these few lines, the text indicates that it is Layla who initiates physical or sexual intercourse, even while it inscribes a sense of modesty (*sharmnākī*) in her character. Although the connotations of this passage are clearly physical, Layla’s actions do not seem to be separated from the transcendental as she caresses Majnun “with soul-comforting union” (*be vasl-e jān navāz*). The

80. Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 265 / 57 v. 62-65.

transcendental and the mundane senses of union remain inextricably intertwined for Layla whose actions are here carried out in the immediate present. The lovers then embrace in a way that clearly indicates physical if not sexual union.⁸¹ As such, this episode as a whole may carry the resonance of an understanding of the physicality of *‘ishq* as separate from sexual intercourse, which was primarily understood within the logic of reproduction.⁸² The fact that Layla makes the move aligns with her character’s embrace of embodied action, folding sexual longing into an overarching approach to the unity in *‘ishq* as something obtained through embodied relationships.

This sense of real time breaks with the previous endlessness of messages—now, in this moment, there is a chance for union that resonates with Layla’s heightened focus on the present at the beginning of the episode. This focus on the present is not reciprocated by Majnun, however, and once the lovers leave Layla’s tent and face the external world, Layla returns to critique:

<p>Layla with her biting, quick-witted tongue pronounced what was in her heart unrehearsed.</p> <p>“What happened to you ten-tongued lily, such that thought of me takes your tongue from you?</p> <p>The nightingale who is preoccupied with speech without the rose will remain mute all year,</p> <p>but when it sees the rose in the garden it says not just one but a thousand tales.</p> <p>You are the nightingale of the garden of fate. I’m with you like a rose in harmony</p> <p>today that is the day of uniting</p>	<p>لیلی به زبان غمزہ تیز می گفت بدیہہ ای دل آویز</p> <p>کای سوسن ده زبان چه بودت کاندیشه من زبان ربودت</p> <p>بلبل کہ سخن سگال باشد بی گل همه ساله لال باشد</p> <p>چون ببند روی گل به بستان گوید نہ یکی ہزار داستان</p> <p>تو بلبل باغ روزگاری</p>
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81. As translated in chapter three, this passage underscores unity and makes use of metaphors that indicate how the duality of embodiment is temporarily overcome, be that in sexual union or in physical embrace. See Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 265 / 57 v. 87-95.

82. The Arabic philologist ‘Abd al-Malik al-Aṣma‘ī offers an anecdote about a conversation with a “Bedouin” that places this non-sexual, physical meaning of *‘ishq* on display: “I (Aṣma‘ī) said to a Bedouin woman: ‘what do you consider love to be among you?’ ‘hugging, embracing, winks, and conversation,’ she replied. Then she asked, ‘how is it among you, city-dweller?’ ‘he sits amidst her four limbs and presses her to the limit,’ I answered. ‘Nephew,’ she cried, ‘this is no lover (*‘āshiq*), but a man after a child.’” The list of physical actions cited here show a distinctly embodied understanding of *‘ishq* that is quite distinct from sex, which was associated primarily with procreation. See Bell, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam*, 133-135.

on the mouth's treasures you have placed a seal.”	<p>من با تو چو گل به سازگاری امروز که هست روز پیوند بر درج دهان نهاده ای بند⁸³</p>
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With a quick-witted and flirtatious tongue (*ghamzeh tīz*—literally a tongue of biting wink, signaling both a sense of playfulness and of critique), Layla questions why Majnun does not reciprocate her physical desires. Walter Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı have noted how Layla’s questions here remain within the realm of “poetic expectations” such that it remains to a certain extent ambiguous whether or not Layla seeks more by way of physical reciprocity.⁸⁴ While this ambiguity is present and reflects ambiguity about her own actions inside the tent, the way in which Layla instructs Majnun on how the famous image of the rose and the nightingale should work clearly shows her position as lover while simultaneously upholding the norm of her as the beloved/recipient of his speech on love. From her perspective as a lover, union is possible and is tied to the present, to the fact that today especially is the day of union—signaling the radical potential of a desire that is not displaced but enjoyed even if temporary.

In the text, however, such a sexualized, worldly union is displaced by Majnun whose own perspective on *‘ishq* causes him to flee. Claiming to have already absorbed the beloved in ontological union, for Majnun physical union no longer makes sense as the lovers are no longer

83. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 267-268 / 57 v. 115-120.

84. As Walter Andrews and Mehmet Kapaklı note, in this section of Neẓāmī’s text “Layla’s sensuality and seductiveness are represented mostly through the description of her embraces, caresses, tender and longing glances. In Fuzūli, however, her behavior is condensed into speech, and she makes a startling offer: Come, be a lawful guest at the feast of union / for a moment be my close companion / Give luster to the narcissus with a poppy / adorn the lily with a fresh fragrant herb / Make turquoise near companion of the ruby / make a meal for the parrot of purest candy / Graft the red-bud to the rose / bring Khizr to the water of life.” The metaphors for sexual intercourse are clearer here than in Neẓāmī, and thus this section can be seen as opening a space in the romantic epic for the development of Layla’s character that was explored to varying degrees by later authors. See Walter Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı, “Layla Grows Up: Nizami’s Layla and Majnun ‘In the Turkish Manner,’” in *The Poetry of Nizami Ganjavi: Knowledge, Love and Rhetoric* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 46-49.

two separate bodies.⁸⁵ After the lovers weep once more, Majnun tears his clothes apart and flees with his animals back to the wilderness. The text offers a brief comment seemingly affirming Majnun's actions by stating that in love thoughts of selfhood are wrong, but then follows this with another metaphor to a written page that contrasts the two lovers' manner of approach:

Madness removed the page from Majnun and Layla became that page that remained.	مجنونی ازو ورق برانده لیلی شده آن ورق که مانده ⁸⁶
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85. As quoted in chapter three:

از جان خودت جدا ندارم
جان بی تو من این روا ندارم
چون آتشم ار بجوشی از تاب
از تو نبرم چو ماهی از آب
تو چشم منی نه چشم بی نور
بیننده ز چشم کی شود دور
کی دور شوم درین ره از تو
دوری و نعوذ بالله از تو
اینجا منی و تویی نباشد
در مذهب ما دویی نباشد

I have no separation your soul
I do not accept life separate from you

I am like fire if you boil with water
I cannot take myself from you like a fish cannot take itself from water

You are my eye not an eye without light
How can a seer be far from his eye?

How can I become far from you in this path
Respectfulness and refuge is from you

Here let I-ness and you-ness not be
In our religion let two selves not be.”

Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 269 / 57 v. 146-150.

86. Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, 271 / 57 v. 189.

While Majnun is like an oral saying that exceeds the limits of the page in his own being *majnūn* (mad), Layla is the very materiality of the page itself. Both signal to aspects of writing, with Majnun as that which overflows and cannot be properly represented on the page and Layla being the page upon which the act of writing is contingent. This line breaks from total contrast by comparing both to aspects of writing, yet here Layla is clearly that which remains. This line points to the ways in which Layla's embodied presence breaks through the metaphor that undergirds Majnun's later mystical perspective on *'ishq*, which asserts the possibility of ontological unity and which requires that his concrete beloved slide into being one and the same as the divine beloved. Layla's embodied existence is like the material residue that ruptures that process.

Given that Nezāmī's text is the first attempt at writing the legend as a unified narrative, this insistent focus on the materiality of the page points to the text's own fictionality in and through attempts at more fully representing Layla's perspective. Her letter, itself on pages, highlights the ways in which written representation is bound up with the fictionalization of the legend itself. The letter asks the reader to suspend disbelief about this being the verbatim words of an actual, historical Layla, and draws attention to the act of representation itself. Likewise, each time one of the intermediaries (the old man, Zayd, etc.) passes along Layla's messages, the reader is alerted to the act of representation through a doubling or tripling of the layers of discursive quotation. Beneath these layers lies not only what a historical Layla could have said but also the page itself, drawing attention to the text's own existence as a written document.

More immediately, the insistent focus on materiality recalls Layla's corporeality throughout the text more broadly, and in this episode in particular. As mentioned briefly above, Layla's embodied sexuality recalls the Qur'anic narrative of the prophet Yusuf and Zulaykha.

Zulaykha, having fallen in love with Yusuf after witnessing his immense beauty, attempts to seduce him. In the Qur'an, this act of seduction serves as a test of Yusuf's prophecy and Zulaykha's actions slide to the background of the narrative. Later exegetical and literary texts, however, spill much ink parsing through the motivations behind and potential judgements upon Zulaykha's sexuality, especially as it is associated with her guile (*kayd*).⁸⁷ Jāmī (d. 1492) in his romantic epic *Yusuf and Zulaykha*, a text that parallels the Neẓāmī's *Layli and Majnun* in its focus on the longing pains suffered by lovers, highlights Zulaykha's *'ishq* as a focal point of the text by analogizing her yearning with a physical/transcendental sense of longing for the divine. While this shift releases the narrative from judgement on Zulaykha's sexual desires, Jāmī's text nevertheless concludes with Zulaykha's sexuality being subdued or brought to its "proper" end in marriage. The sexuality of Neẓāmī's Layla, however, while it is often coded in gendered metaphors or appeals to modesty, is nevertheless left in this episode as profoundly ambivalent as the text eschews judgement on her actions. Her sexuality is simply there, as a part of the narrative, which the narrator juxtaposes with Majnun's rejection of the embodied registers of *'ishq* but does not condemn or overtly circumscribe in the logic of marriage.⁸⁸ It exists in harmony with her perspective on *'ishq* as a

87 Cf. Q 12:50-55. Gayane Merguerian and Afsaneh Najmabadi have offered a nuanced reading of this Sura that complicates the picture of Zulaykha as neither a representative of female guile nor a lover. They argue that Zulaykha's seduction of Yusuf is just one amongst many tests of prophethood and that "the larger message of the story is Yusuf's victorious emergence." Najmabadi has moreover returned to analyzing this Sura in a subsequent article wherein she provides a reading of Zulaykha as the paradigmatic example of "wiles-of-women stories" that "become phantasmic tales of women's control of space and sociality," which speaks to "an imagined heterotopia of female bonding." Najmabadi connects a shift in how these stories are interpreted to "the heterosocialization of urban space and the emergence of more nuclear urban families in Iran." See Gayane Merguerian and Afsaneh Najmabadi, 487-489, and Najmabadi, "Reading: And Enjoying: 'Wiles of Women' Stories as a Feminist," in *Iranian Studies* Vol. 32, No. 2 (Spring 1999): 220-222.

88. In their discussion of discussion of Fuzūlī's *Layli and Majnun*, Kalpaklı and Andrews argue that the interweaving of the *ghazal* into the romantic epic becomes another space from which Layli's perspective emerges. They conclude their analysis of her perspective by stating that "the later Layla is a good, faithful, chaste woman who deserves a normal married and sexual life." While their analysis usefully points to the lingering sexuality of Layla's character development, I do not think we have to read it as what she deserves or as necessarily leading to marriage,

form of active engagement with the material resources of the world, which entails a recognition of corporeality and of sexual desire.

Majnun’s rejection leaves Layla’s character deeply conflicted, and she remains an internal critic of his perspective on *‘ishq* until her death. This is once again a new dimension of Layla’s character not present in the Arabic material. In her final message to her mother on her deathbed, Layla asks that her mother hold Majnun “like a dear one (*azīz*)”—despite the pain that he has caused her, she displays once again an ethic of mutual care at the root of her perspective on *‘ishq* as an action directed outwards. This request moreover pushes her mother to reconsider the kinship structure that has, throughout, underpinned the lovers’ separation and it begins to envision a different form of social relations through an ethic of care. Yet subsequently, Layla performs the act of quoting herself as she asks her mother to be her last intermediary and to relay a final, critical message to Majnun:

<p>and give to him this advice from my tongue saying ‘Oh my soul, and death of my soul</p> <p>from today onwards do not look upon anyone except upon the generosity of God.</p> <p>When you fell from the path into error and you kept a glance on the likes of yourself</p> <p>you saw that despite your being a wise one your name became Majnun of the era.’⁸⁹</p>	<p>وین پند بدو ده از زبانم کای جان من و هلاک جانم</p> <p>زنهار نظر مدار ازین پس جز بر کرم خدای بر کس</p> <p>دیدى چو ز ره غلط فتادى بر همچو خودى نظر نهادى</p> <p>با عاقلی چنان تمامت مجنون زمانه گشت نامت</p>
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This final message opens by highlighting Layla’s deeply fraught feelings towards Majnun at the moment of her death—he is both her soul (*jān*) and the death of her soul (*halāk-e jān*). She dies

especially given the connotations of *‘ishq* as something which exists beyond the confines or perhaps in opposition to the marriage economy. See Kalpaklı and Andrews, “Layla Grows Up,” 40-49.

89. Nezāmī, Layli and Majnun, ed. Sarvatiyan, 276 / v. 68-71.

embittered as she offers a final critique of the way in which he has lived up to the pejorative sense of his epithet of “madman” (*majnūn*) through his inability to act or be the wise man (‘*āqil*) that she claims to know that he is. Behrouz Servatiyan has suggested that the referent of “the likes of yourself” is Layla—that she is here suggesting that Majnun has fallen into error because of his obsession with her.⁹⁰ While this could be implied, I maintain that such a statement remains ambiguous as it could equally be read as a critique of the ways in which Majnun’s perspective results in ascetic withdrawal and focus on ontological union, of regarding the other as like or the same as the self, which leads to the neglect not only of the beloved, but of other others such as his family or friends. The force of the critique highlights how Layla views Majnun’s approach to *‘ishq* as deficient with regards to the social, and her dying wish indicates an entrenchment in her own perspective, a perspective which foregrounds action and engagement with the material world.

I want to turn back to one last passage to consider the ethical import of the text beyond Layla’s role. Chapter three explored how metadiegetic commentary occasionally intervenes in the textual progression of the plot. One key space of intervention is after the death of various figures, such as in a homily after Majnun’s death—a climactic moment in the text—that opens out onto a series of commands to the reader:

90. Dick Davis also interprets Layla’s dying remark as a critique of Majnun’s narcissism, yet he states that it “expresses a fundamental Sufi tenet, that in order to reach spiritual truth the self must be suppressed, destroyed, and transcended.” This seems to be a bit of a stretch here, especially given that the following line returns to a reminder of the social. Though Layla admits to a “wisdom” of Majnun’s perspective, and thus is not wholly outside of it, the critique she raises here ties her perspective to materiality in ways that are not addressed by a Sufi modality of annihilation of the self. See Nezāmī, ed. Servatian, 512 and Davis, *Layli and Majnun: Nezami Ganjavi*, xxxiii.

<p>Go far away from this revolving mill for it is far from the salvation of men</p> <p>in the house of pouring floods do not sit flood after flood came, rise, do not sit!...</p> <p>Make the heart right, do not think of the blights consume rubies, do not think of the plague.</p> <p>From mastery's mount get down and descend show your own falling into impotence</p> <p>then when the lion of death comes like a pain it brings mercy to your powerlessness.⁹¹</p>	<p>دوری کن ازین خراس گردان کاو دور شد از خلاص مردان</p> <p>در خانه سیل ریز منشین سیل آمد سیل خیز منشین...</p> <p>دل راست کن از بلا میندیش یا قوت خور از وبا میندیش</p> <p>از مرکب خواجگی فرود آی افتادن خود به عجز بنمای</p> <p>تا شیر اجل چو زحمت آرد بر عاجزی تو رحمت آرد</p>
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The tone of this homily resembles Layla's letter and her commands to Zayd as the text commands the reader to action, to not sit in what is described as a wretched world of pouring floods but instead to rise (*khāstan*, *khīz*). Despite this wretchedness, the homily beseeches the reader to “consume rubies,” a slightly glitzier version of Layla's seeds, which likewise recommends engagement with the material world despite its ills. As explored in the previous chapter, the text tells the reader to know their own impotence (*'ājz*, *'ājizī*)—a term that can also be translated as incapacity or disability—which is reminiscent of the interdependence that work on care today often reinforces and which demands that the reader forgo any illusion of autonomy. Such a view imagines a subject whose subjectivity differs from the rationalist subjectivity envisioned in contemporaneous Islamic ethical texts (*akhlāq*). Yet this non-rationalist perspective is nevertheless slightly different from Majnun's madness, and its emphasis on “making the heart right” resonates with how Layla's character emphasizes embodied action as well as Neẓāmī's introductory remarks that he altered the existing Arabic material by placing into it “a pearl from reason (*'aql*),” which indicates the

91. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 291 / 61 v. 22-23 and 33-35.

text's philosophical import.⁹² This passage indicates that, beyond Layla's role as a caring lover, Neẓāmī's text as a work of *adab* engages an ethical register quite distinct from what was normative by emphasizing interdependence and action in the material world.

VI. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how the literary vehicle of the Islamic romantic epic opens a space for further elaboration on Layla's perspective in its discursive levels. As a lover, Layla displays a focus on caring actions through her questions about the state of the other, as well as through an emphasis on embodied action (including sexual desire) and engagement with the material world. Yet given the fact that Layla's body is persistently harmed by Majnun's speech as well as her own embittered death, we might question as readers why she continues to care? Should she have just stopped caring? Crosby and Jakobson's arguments against seeing caring labor as a "labor of love" offer a warning on how revaluing care runs the risk of debilitating those who care while forcing upon care-workers a kind of positive affect.⁹³ In order to avoid this, they suggest that revaluing care must accompany systemic change that unhooks the "various links in the chain of

92.

دری که ز عقل درج کردم
در زیور او به خرج کردم

I placed into it a pearl from reason
and I endeavored to decorate it

In this section of the introduction, Niẓāmī explains his alleged reluctance to tell the story, and narrates that his son convinced him to do so. This couplet and its contextualization suggests that he saw his text as somehow altering the meaning of the Arabic material by some kind of engagement with the intellectual traditions associated with reason (*'aql*) such as philosophy, ethics, or theology. See Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan. 47 / 5 v. 90.

93. Crosby and Jakobson offer a statement of warning against this kind of surface level revaluation, declaring that "In fact, one of the dangers of attempts to revalue domestic work is that the effects can simply return us to ideas of caring work that associate labor with love and turn domestic work into the type of affective labor that has been documented as central to much service labor, where the demand for positive affect is part of the strenuousness of the work itself— Smile! You're at work!" Crosby and Jakobson, "Disability, Debility, and Caring Queerly," 93.

capitalist value.”⁹⁴ It is only through restructuring social relations alongside material shifts that caring labor can properly be valued. The social structures underlying *Layli and Majnun* are different from those of modern capitalism, yet the portrayal of Layla as lover signals how the text envisions mutual care as a possible form of social relations, which binds the lovers together in a way that retools normative expectations of the marital bond as imagined by Islamic ethical literature (*akhlāq*) and of the lover-beloved relationship in the hierarchies of courtly love poetics. Layla’s character moreover points to the material shifts needed to fully accomplish this vision of mutuality, and her embittered death serves as a warning for how the work of caring can nevertheless be debilitating and has a long history of being essentialized as feminine. Overall, Layla’s role as caring lover in *Layli and Majnun* shows how the text not only embellishes the representation of her character, but also points to its novel recasting of the romantic relationship away from its hierarchical roots and toward a sense of mutuality.

Given the text’s persistent return to her perspective, I suggest that Layla’s character offers a window into the text’s novel way of reconceiving *‘ishq*. This perspective exposes how Majnun’s later ontological approach to unity leaves the basic question of differentiated embodiment unresolved, and it challenges any reading that understands *‘ishq* solely within mystical terms. Her perspective reveals how *Layli and Majnun* foregrounds the ethical import of *‘ishq* in ways that differ from Islamic ethical literature that sees the highest form of love (*maḥabba*) as friendship between men of the polis, largely following an Aristotelian model. Instead, *Layli and Majnun* offers a different vision of community that stems from its focus on the centrality of *‘ishq* and from various other characters’ attachments to the ways in which *‘ishq* uproots normative forms of

94. Crosby and Jakobson, “Disability, Debility, and Caring Queerly,” 95.

kinship. In a final dream sequence by Zayd, the loyal messenger who we have encountered throughout this chapter, the text offers a sketch of what a community that looks past the constraints of blood relation or the requirements of premodern citizenry might look like, and it is to this vision that I now turn.

Epilogue: Lovers' Community

By way of conclusion, I want to discuss Zayd's dream of the lovers in paradise. This dream brings together many of the themes discussed across chapters 2-4: the vocabulary of bondage as associated with courtly love poetics; the idea of a sacred space within a greater, hostile world as with Majnun's relationship with animals; and the focus on embodied actions undergirding Layla's perspective on *'ishq*. Zayd's dream envisions a community that forms around the lovers' story, and the speech he offers on *'ishq* commands the reader to action and seals the text's approach as distinct from the historical approaches explored throughout this project. Sifting through the gravitas of *'ishq*'s medical and ontological implications, *Layli and Majnun* suggests that the reader channel *'ishq*'s potency towards an ethical way of being in the world.

The dream sequence paints a picture of what this ethical way of being in the world might look like. It begins with Zayd sitting at the lovers' grave, and his role as a messenger triangulates emphases on transcendence (as seen with Majnun's character in chapter three) and materiality (as explored with Layla's character in chapter four) as he longs for the lovers' presence. The text foreshadows the significance of his role as messenger by indicating that it is through him that the lovers' story would eventually become famous, which underscores an emphasis on tales (*hikāyat*, *afṣāneh*) containing lessons placed on display throughout the text.¹ Zayd proceeds to ask himself questions about the lovers's state—"Those two young ones who did not enjoy being paired / how

1.

افسانه آن دو هم مدارا
در عالم ازو شد آشکارا

—
"The tale of those two kind ones
Became known in the world from him."

Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 296 / 62 v. 6.

are they together beneath the veil? / Are they bricks molded by the dark earth? / Or are they the sum ornament of heaven's throne?"—and his concerns for their well-being resembles Layla's questions about Majnun's state analyzed in the previous chapter.² His character then falls asleep and dreams of the lovers sitting together in paradise, a garden paradise whose fantastic greenery is detailed:

From the height of the trees the scene was pleasant Lush like the hearts of the fortunate.	صحنش ز بلندی درختان خرم چو دل بلندبختان
On the lap of every blossom a garden a lantern on the petal of every rose.	در دامن هر شکوفه باغی هر برگ گلی درو چراغی
When a discerning eye looked on all the meadows it was a celestial place in blue—	در هر چمنی چو چشم بینا مینوکه ای به رنگ مینا
there is nothing greener than that emerald its shimmering knows no limit. ³	خضراتر از آن زبرجدی نه افروختگیش را حدی نه

As with the sacred space (*haram*) that Majnun builds amongst the animals, this celestial place (*mīnūkadeh*) is depicted as a space of unfolding multiplicity. Blossoms themselves grow gardens, recalling the Qur'anic vision of paradise as gardens that unfold unto more gardens.⁴ This

2.

کان تازه دو جفت برنخورد
چونند به هم به زیر پرده

در قالب خاک تیره خشتند
یا شمسه مسند بهشتند

Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 296 / 62 v. 8-9.

3. Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 296 / 62 v. 12-16.

4. See Q 55:46-78. Angelika Neuwirth has discussed how the eschatological preoccupations of this Sura creates an image of a paradise that is just beyond the horizon, attainable only in the future, unlike the distant past of the garden of Eden in Genesis 2. Neuwirth also compares this Sura's imagery with banquet imagery of the pre-Islamic *nasīb*, arguing that it is an inversion of the anthropomorphic values of pre-Islamic poetry such that material rewards are reserved for the afterlife. See Angelika Neuwirth, "Paradise as a Quranic Discourse: Late Antique Foundations and Early Quranic Developments," in *Roads to Paradise: Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 67-92.

paradisiacal garden reflects the actual garden that grows around the lovers' graves and reinforces how the text, unlike Ibn Sīnā's Aristotelian approach, views "lesser" forms of life such as plants and animals as vital to human flourishing.⁵ Yet here, the garden glows emerald-blue, hinting at a vision that goes beyond what is possible in the everyday world.

The impossible is extended as Zayd sees the lovers together sipping wine and kissing.⁶ Yet in the dream, he does not know who the lovers are, and he asks an old man standing near them in

5.

آن روضه که رشک بوستان شد
حاجتگه جمله جهان شد

هرک آمدی از غریب و رنجور
در حال شدی ز رنج و غم دور

—
"The garden, the envy of all gardens
became the prayer house of the world

All who came with troubles and estrangement
were becoming healed and kept far from pain."

Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 294 / 61 v. 98-99. See introduction for discussion of Ibn Sīnā and hierarchy of organisms shared with ancient thought. Julie Scott Meisami, in a comparative study of garden imagery in Nezāmī, Rūmī, and Ḥāfez's works, has argued that gardens in medieval Persian poetry serve as allegorical means through which poets conveyed their visions of cosmic order as well as symbols of human potential. In Nezāmī's gardens, particularly in the *Haft Paykar*, Meisami argues that there are rich sensorial depictions alongside allegorical imagery based in analogical thought, which differ from Rūmī's gardens that she maintains prioritize the symbolic. In Layli and Majnun, the fact that the Majnun's death scene includes a depiction of an actual garden that is then recapitulated in Zayd's dream of a paradisiacal garden signals how Nezāmī's poem maintains a connection to the sensorial even as it paints this scene of transcendence. See Julie Scott Meisami, "Allegorical Gardens in the Persian Poetic Tradition: Nezami, Rumi, Hafez," in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* Vol. 17, no. 2 (May 1985): 232-239 and 253.

6.

گه بر لب جام لب نهادند
گه بر لب خویش بوسه دادند

گاهی سخنان خویش گفتند
گاهی به مراد خویش خفتند

—
"Sometimes they placed their lips on the lip of the cup
other times they gave a kiss to their own lips.

Sometimes they spoke their own words
other times they slept according to their wishes."

commitment (*ta'ahhod*) about their names.⁷ Both Zayd's questions and the old man's commitment recalls these figures' actions in throughout story as messengers who attempt to help Layla and Majnun overcome kinship issues within their society. The old man responds by identifying the lovers' archetypal names and affirming their purity:

Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 296 / 62 v. 23-24.

7.

پیری به تعهد ایستاده
سر بر سر تختشان نهاده

هر لحظه ز نو نثاری انگیخت
بر تارک آن دو شخص می ریخت

بیننده خواب از آن نهانی
پرسید ز پیر آسمانی

کاین سروبنان که جام دارند
در باغ ارم چه نام دارند

در منزل جان هوا گرفتند
این منزلت از کجا گرفتند

—
“An old man stood in commitment to them
setting his head against the head of their grave.

Every moment he scattered offerings anew,
pouring them on the head of those two people.

The dreamer asked about that hidden thing
from the celestial old man,

“These cypress roots that have glass in hand
In Eram's garden, what are their names?”

In the home of souls they have risen
From where did they get this station?”

Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 296 / 62 v. 25-29. Davis notes that this behavior of the old man resembles what is done for a king at his coronation, which squares with how Majnun is subsequently described as a king. See Davis, *Layli and Majnun*, 280.

<p>These twofold friends have become one they are eternal companions</p> <p>that one king of the world in uprightness and this, a moon of idols in kindness.</p> <p>Layla, the night, the one who is the moon that one who is the king is nicknamed Majnun</p> <p>they were two unpierced rubies in devotion's casket they were sealed.</p> <p>From the world they did not see ease and there they did not reach their desires.</p> <p>Here they see no more pain they are like this for all eternity.⁸</p>	<p>کاین یار دوگانه یگانه هستند رفیق جاودانه</p> <p>آن شاه جهان به راست بازی وین ماه بتان به دلنوازی</p> <p>لیلی شده لیلی اینکه ماه ست مجنون لقب آمد آن که شاه ست</p> <p>بودند دو لعل نابسوده در درج وفا به مهر بوده</p> <p>آسایشی از جهان ندیده و آنجا به مراد نارسیده</p> <p>اینجا المی دگر نبینند الا ابد الابد چنینند</p>
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The emphasis on one and oneness (*yegāneh*) here is unlike the emphases on unity I examined in chapter three, which included a textual display of the lovers' physical/sexual union against Majnun's character's own interpretation of unity as ontological. The old man's explanation subdues what the text had previously illustrated of the lovers' kissing, and it recapitulates gendered norms by naming Majnun as a king while recalling the lovers' names. This inscribes gendered norms into the passing along of the story, which accompany its fame and the ease with which it traverses a wide range of audiences whose expectations might differ from our own.⁹ Yet alongside

8. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 297 / 62 v. 31-36.

9. Afsaneh Najmabadi, for example, has analyzed a range of premodern Islamic narratives that depict women's wiles, including depictions of Zulaykha that I compared to depictions of Layla in the previous chapter. Najmabadi notes that these stories are no longer as popular as they once were, which she contributes to "a new definition of modern femininity in which individual initiative and movement into previously masculine domains becomes more crucial than homosocial plotting with other women." Najmabadi's approach allows for an appreciation of premodern texts as significant for the gendered norms of their own contexts, without imposing upon them a project of recovery of proto-feminist icons. See Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Reading: And Enjoying: 'Wiles of Women' Stories as a Feminist." *Iranian Studies* Vol. 32, No. 2 (Spring 1999): 222.

this inscription, the old man’s explanation appeals to transcendence and to the fact that the lovers’ are now beyond the pains they experienced in the world.

This focus on transcendence is then extrapolated into a general comment:

<p>Anyone who does not enjoy fruit in that world in this way he rises in this world</p> <p>the person who in that world is sad his happiness in this world is like this.¹⁰</p>	<p>هر کاو نخورد در آن جهان بر زینگونه کشد درین جهان سر</p> <p>آن کس که در آن جهان حزین است شادیش درین جهان چنینست</p>
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The old man offers transcendence to Zayd, and by extension to the reader, as recompense for inevitable suffering in the world, which is emblematically represented by the lovers’ story and their paradisiacal union. This emphasis on transcendence is quite unlike the ending of the Arabic material, and it reflects a tendency within Persian romantic epics prior to *Layli and Majnun*.¹¹ It moreover resonates with the utopia put forth in the text through its depiction of Majnun’s life amongst the animals (as well as his exemplary acceptance of mortality), and the promise of happiness to come in another space lingers.

But then, Zayd wakes up. His character offers the final speech of the poem, which begins with a description that affirms the old man’s promise of transcendence by stating that “this world is finite and dust / and that world is everlasting and pure.”¹² Yet his speech then gives way to a command as it reintroduces *‘ishq* as the central theme to take away from the poem:

10. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 297 / 62 v. 37-38.

11. ‘Ayyūqī’s eleventh-century romantic epic *Varqa and Gulshah*, for example, similarly ends with a depiction of the lovers united in paradise. See ‘Ayyūqī, *Varqah va Gulshāh*, ed. by Z̄abīḥ Allāh Ṣafā (Tehran: Tehran University, 1964), 120 / v. 2128-2138.

12.

این عالم فانی است و خاکست
و آن عالم باقی است و پاکست

Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 297 / 62 v. 42.

<p>Give yourself to the sacred space of <i>'ishq</i> so that you escape from yourself at once</p> <p>in <i>'ishq</i> go like an arrow directly so that you won't fall far from the target—</p> <p>an arrow because it is pointed towards good work is befitting the thumbstall of a king.</p> <p><i>'Ishq</i> is the opener of knots of being, a whirlpool, deliverer from self-worship.</p> <p>Every drink of grief that stings the soul since <i>'ishq</i> gives it, it vivifies the soul.</p> <p>Much bitter wine like poison is flavorful since it comes from <i>'ishq</i>.</p> <p>This drink even if mixed with bitterness, since its wine-bearer is <i>'ishq</i>, what fear is there?</p> <p>This mood even if it was painful since it was from <i>'ishq</i>, it was pleasant.¹³</p>	<p>خود را به حریم عشق بسیار تا باز رهی ز خود به یکبار</p> <p>در عشق چو تیر شو روانه تا دور نیفتی از نشانه</p> <p>تیر از سر آنکه راست کارست شایسته شست شهریارست</p> <p>عشق است گره گشای هستی گردابه رهان خودپرستی</p> <p>هر شربت غم که جان گزاید چون عشق دهد به جان فزاید</p> <p>بسیار شراب تلخ چون زهر کز عشق شده ست چاشنی بهر</p> <p>این شربت اگر چه تلخ ناک است ساقیش چو عشق شد چه باکست</p> <p>این حالت اگر چه رنج کش بود چون از سر عشق بود خوش بود</p>
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'Ishq is itself depicted a sacred space (*ḥarīm*) that keeps Zayd's second-person addressee (here seemingly the reader) from an overemphasis on themselves. The command to go in *'ishq* like an arrow resembles how Layla's character throughout emphasized a novel approach to *'ishq* as leading to actions. As explored in chapter two, *'ishq* is likewise personified here, this time as a wine-bearer, whose wine plays with a medical understanding of the term as it may resemble a drink of grief, poison, or otherwise be mixed with bitterness. Yet the pain is accompanied by pleasure, recalling a courtly approach. Pleasures associated with *'ishq* specifically derive from actions that distance the self from self-worship and that overcome fear (*bāk*), similar to Layla's reliance upon *'ishq* as a force that overcomes fear induced by codes of honor associated with the

13. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 297-298 / 62 v. 46-53.

legend's depiction of a kinship structure that traffics in women. This speech mirrors Zayd's devoted actions to the lovers throughout the text, and the fact that it occurs while he is awake reinforces how the text underscores an approach to *'ishq* that may hold out transcendent promise but that focuses on its workings within the material world. Overall, the dream sequence shows how it is mediators and interpreters (the old man, Zayd) who make the vision possible, which models a form of collectivity that is not defined by familial relation (as with the kinship system of the lovers' society) or the requirements of premodern citizenry (as with a community of masculine lovers imagined by the *akhlāq* genre).¹⁴ The text's final call to action in *'ishq* can be concretized as calling for actions that that lead away from the self and towards a novel sense of community and communal care.

Opening out from this vision, the text offers a final comment on the story. Praising poetic speech (*sokhān*), the text beseeches the reader to consider reading as an action that might, like Zayd's focus on actions stemming from *'ishq*, change the reader's comportment:

<p>The sea of poetic speech has docked find the boat that has reached Eden.</p> <p>the story finished in great excellence thanks be to god, oh Neẓāmī!</p> <p>May this story be a key to relatedness in reading it may there be blessedness.</p> <p>May both its opening be fortunate and its ending be lauded.¹⁵</p>	<p>دریای سخن نمود پایاب کشتی به عدن رسید دریاب</p> <p>شد قصه به غایت تمامی المنة لله ای نظامی</p> <p>این قصه کلید بستگی باد در خواندن او خجستگی باد</p> <p>هم فاتحه اش هست مسعود هم عاقبتیش باد محمود</p>
--	---

14. José Esteban Muñoz has theorized collectivity as a way of envisioning futurity beyond reproduction. Muñoz locates his work within Ernst Bloch's work on concrete utopias, which he states differ from the "banal optimism" of abstract utopias by being "relational to historically situated struggles, a collectivity that is actualized or potential." I point out normative forms of community in the medieval Islamic world here in order to show how Neẓāmī's text puts forth a vision that concretely differs. See José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 3-13.

15. Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 298 / 62 v. 54-57.

The purpose of the story as a “key to relatedness” (*kalīd-e bastagī*) recalls the bondage vocabulary of ropes, chains, and bonds that I analyzed in chapter two, with the term for relatedness (*bastagī*) stemming from the same root as bonds (*band*) themselves. Communal bonds emerge as a focal point for the reader to take away and to consider alternative ways of being bound to others than models that were available at the time, such as the focus on bondage in contemporaneous love poetics wherein a poet-lover suffers at the behest of his beloved or the bonds formed through familial ties associated with normative kinship. Instead, reading the story serves as a space for the reader to think with the community that forms around Layla and Majnun’s story and to consider how actions undertaken in *ishq* might lead to alternative ways of being related.

Moreover, this passage’s emphasis on reading, poetic speech (*sokhan*) and the story (*qiṣṣā*) itself reinforces how it sees itself as a work of *adab* that contains both aesthetic and ethical value. Indeed, *Layli and Majnun* often self-referentially references the value of poetic speech (*sokhan*), with five episodes beginning with the term as well as innumerable deployments of other words for tales (*afsāneh, hikayat*).¹⁶ The text intends for the process of reading itself in this passage to lead

16. Meta-commentary that introduces episodes with the concept of *sokhān* include:

فهرست کش بساط این باغ
بر ران سخن چنین کشد داغ

--

“Curator of the goods of this garden
as such puts a brand on the thigh of speech thusly.” Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 121 / 24 v. 1.

--

فرزانه سخن سرای بغداد
از سر سخن چنین خبر داد

--

“The wise poetry-singer of Baghdad
informed us anew with words like this.”

Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 162 / 34 v. 1.

--

صراف سخن به لفظ چون زر
در رشته چنین کشید گوهر

--

“The exchanger of speech with words like gold

to blessedness, which links poetic speech to a kind of shift in the reader’s subjectivity. Throughout this project I have shown how *Layli and Majnun* directs the reader—an educated reader who would likely have some sense of the multivalent meanings of the term *‘ishq*—towards a way of being in the world that foregrounds actions and that leads to alternative ways of being in community. Julia Bray has pointed out how writers of *adab* often had explicit political stakes that they articulated in

strung gems like this on the thread.”

Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 215 / 46 v. 1.

--

دانای سخن چنین کند یاد
کز جمله منعمان بغداد

--

“The wise man of speech recollects thus
that from among the blessed ones of Baghdad.”

Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 236 / 51 v. 1.

--

انگشتکش سخن سرایان
این قصه چنین برد به پایان

--

“The most renowned of the speech-sayers
as such brings this story to an ending.”

Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 289 / 61 v. 1.

Meta-commentary that uses other terms for tales to introduce episodes include:

صاحب خبر فسانه پرداز
زین قصه چنین خبر دهد باز

--

“The knowing tetter of tales
reveals this about the story.”

Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 186 / 40 v. 1.

--

گوینده این حکایت نغز
کاگنده شد استخوانش از مغز

--

“The narrator of this astounding tale
whose bones are compacted, full of marrow...”

Nezāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 256 / 55 v. 1.

their literary output.¹⁷ Neẓāmī in fact states the political efficacy of *Layli and Majnun* as a story that he hopes will transform the behavior of kings and princes, starting with his patron and his own son.¹⁸ Diving into the text, my aim throughout this project has been to give a sense of what this ethical work consists in, which includes a channeling of *‘ishq*’s corporeal work towards actions of generosity that themselves create community.

In conclusion, Neẓāmī’s *Layli and Majnun* filters prior meanings of *‘ishq* as associated with medical, courtly, and mystical discourse to suggest that taking *‘ishq* seriously leads to an ethical way of being in the world. Unlike the inherited Arabic material, the text explicitly thematizes *‘ishq* as a force that transforms bodies and it uses inherited motifs to show how Layla, Majnun, and Zayd channel the force of *‘ishq* in different ways. By reading the Arabic tradition against Neẓāmī’s rendition, we can see how the latter plays with inherited motifs and expands upon elements such as the animals’ protective function in the story, the enhanced role of Layla as a lover, and the incorporation of new characters such as Zayd and Salam Baghdadi. It is in and

17. Julia Bray draws attention to how writers of *adab* retained power over convention and that their manipulation of themes such as kingship should be viewed as political. See Bray, “Abbasid Myth and the Human Act,” 45-46.

18.

خواننده ش اگر فسرده باشد
عاشق شود ار نمرده باشد

باز آن خلف خلیفه زاده
کاین گنج بدوست در گشاده

—
“The reader of the story even if he’s depressed
will become a lover, if he isn’t dead

even that successor of the one born to be the Caliph
for this treasure has opened a door to the friend.”

Neẓāmī, *Layli and Majnun*, ed. Sarvatiyan, 256 / 46 v. 46-47. This is part of a longer section that I explore in chapter two, in which Neẓāmī complains of the story’s setting after King Akhistan asks him to write it. This introductory section then reports that Neẓāmī’s son convinces him to write the tale before it concludes with this comment, which is why I read the second line as referring to Neẓāmī’s son, but it could also refer to other princes.

through these inherited motifs, as well as through the accretion of meanings associated with the term *'ishq* in the early medieval Persianate world, that Neẓāmī's rendition refashions love as an ethical commitment that extends beyond the romantic attachment between the two lovers to speak to issues of communal belonging. As a text of *adab*, *Layli and Majnun*'s ethical work asks the reader rethink kinship and consider alternative ways of being related. This ask, though still relevant to readers today, was important in the early medieval Persianate world as the readers of this text were likely kings, princes, and other noble people who had access to the education required to approach the text's high literary register. These people's lineages mattered in terms of dynastic political power and asking them to think of alternative ways of being related reflects the text's persistent engagement with the material world.

Layli and Majnun is but one text of its genre and it is possible that its formulation of *'ishq* resonates with Neẓāmī's other romantic epics, and/or with the many romantic epics written in response (*javāb*) to it. As the most popular love story of the Islamic world, there are approximately eighty versions based on Neẓāmī's rendition.¹⁹ This genre moreover becomes a prominent genre in the early modern Ottoman world and writers writing in Turkish and Kurdish likewise emphasize *'ishq*, yet it remains to be seen how the matrix of meanings shifts once Persian becomes the cosmopolitan idiom to be contested by these emergent vernaculars.²⁰ The story of Layla and Majnun, unlike other love-stories of the premodern Islamic world, was particularly adept at traversing language barriers. This project has shown how the lovers were not thought of as

19. This number includes versions written in Ottoman Turkish, Chagatay Turkish, Azeri, and Kurdish. See Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, "Leylī o Majnūn."

20. Robert Dankoff has noted that unlike Persian and Eastern Turkish romantic epics, Western Turkish works tended to include ghazals spoken by the lover-protagonists in the course of the narrative poem. This formal shift likely had an effect on the overall meanings of *'ishq* in these later works. See Robert Dankoff, "The Lyric in the Romance: The Use of Ghazals in Persian and Turkish Masnavīs," in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* Vol. 43, No. 1 (January 1984): 9.

belonging solely to the Arabic tradition, and the texts written in response to Neẓāmī's as well as the modern reception indicate that the lovers do not remain inextricably tied to the Persian tradition either (indeed, many today know the story from Bollywood versions and songs). Instead, the story remains an enduring site for exploring the question of what it means to love for the multilingual expanse of Islamic cultures.

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