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To TJ Quinn and Farouk Abdel Wahab

In Memoriam

اَلا يا أَيُّها السَّاقى اَدِرْ کَأساً وناوِلْها
که عِشق آسان نِمود اَوَّل وَلی اُفتاد مُشکِلها

Boy   bring round the wine
and give me some

for love that at first seemed easy
turned difficult

—Ḥāfeẓ (tr. Geoffrey Squires)

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Abstract

In the first half of the eleventh century CE, a series of narrative poems about love and lovers were composed in the eastern Iranian lands, marking the advent of what is now generally called the romance genre in Persian literature. However, sustained theoretical considerations of this genre, and the role of these early texts within it, remain few and far between. This dissertation addresses both lacunae by situating these poems in a comparative framework that runs both broad and deep, exploring lines of continuity and change between it and neighboring traditions in Greek, Arabic, and Middle Persian to explore the ways we may use "romance" as a critical term to flesh out our historiography of Persian literature and document the rise of one of its hallmark genres. A study of these works from this perspective reveals that they constitute a highly innovative group of poems, not only in the Persian context but also in the wider generic tradition of which they form a part.

We investigate some of these innovations in a close reading of *Vis & Rāmin*, the most prominent member of these early romances and a sophisticated literary work in its own right. The story provides a nuanced study of romantic love, the central theme of its genre, by raising new problems and implications for those who would pursue its elusive promises. The role of faithfulness and chastity for women in this genre, even when it paradoxically guides them into adultery; the pressures of masculinity, caught within intersecting codes of manhood, kingship, and love; the use of mode to individuate characters and portray competing visions of the world; and the relation between love, death, and selfhood are all discussed in separate chapters. These readings show how *Vis & Rāmin* and its sibling texts were successful in recasting a kind of literature that had once been viewed as little more than bedtime stories into a subtle medium that could pose complex questions of the individual and her place in society.

Acknowledgments

The first words of a dissertation may be the most difficult to write; so many people have contributed to this project and helped me along the way, I fear the following pages cannot but fall short of what I wish to say and what ought to be said. Despite these inevitable shortcomings, this section does serve as a worthy testament to the adage that it takes a village to raise a child—or in this case, a thirty-two year-old who is finally getting done with school!

First and foremost, to my parents for providing me with access to a good education, instilling in me a love of books, and pushing me to follow my dreams; to my mother and her merciless red pen, who taught me the three cardinal rules of writing (edit once, edit twice, edit chicken soup with rice); to Avonne, for her love, support, and delicious baked goods; and to Jonathan, who hasn't baked me a cookie in his life but made up for it by teaching me how to use LaTeX (and I do not exaggerate in saying I could never have done it without him), my hugs, kisses, and perpetual love.

I am deeply indebted to the many schools and institutions that nurtured and trained me throughout my life. I first developed a love for history, literature, and languages at D'Evelyn Jr./Sr. High School, and if not for the support I found from my Latin and English teachers Mr. Habel, Mrs. Juganaru, and Mr. Haller, who taught me the fundamentals of self-study and self-critique, I doubt I would have ever begun this journey. The same can be said for my mentors at the University of Colorado at Boulder, Suzanne Magnanini and Scott G. Bruce, who introduced me to the wide and wonderful world of medieval thought and literature; the impression they left on me is visible in every word I write. The community of students and scholars at the American University in Cairo has been a second family to me, particularly my dear friends Jim O'Keefe, Mark Rodney, and Brian Loo, and the nonpareil faculty at the Arabic Language Institute;

they were with me over a crucial time in my life where I wasn't really sure where all this was going, but I could always rely on their unwavering confidence and encouragement as I found my way forward. Much of my subsequent time in graduate school was funded by generous grants and fellowships from the Center for Arabic Studies Abroad, the Foreign Language and Area Studies program, the Houtan Scholarship Foundation, and the American Institute of Iranian Studies.

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Speaking of my committee, it has been a privilege and a pleasure to work with them these last couple years. I am still amazed that Tahera Qutbuddin, Daisy Delogu, and Mark Miller were willing to hop on board and give me their full attention after little more than a brief introduction to my project; yet their enthusiastic support, thorough comments, and wise suggestions have improved the quality of this project by an order of magnitude. Would that all graduate students be so lucky to have such advisers. I cannot say how grateful I am for all the time and energy they have given me.

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A Note on Transcription

When starting out on this project, I intended to use a system of transcription that could be applied across both Persian and Arabic with minimal adjustments. Such systems, of course, are readily available: the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*), the Deutsches Institut für Normung (DIN), and the American Library Association-Library of Congress (ALA-LoC) all establish rules that enable the consistent conversion from Arabic to Roman script, regardless of language.[1] The major flaw with these systems, otherwise commendable for their consistency, is that they adopt classical Arabic pronunciation as their baseline phonetic set, with the inevitable result that other languages written in this script (Persian, Urdu, and Turkish among others) become arabized to a certain degree. The distortion is quite noticeable in Persian, whose vowels and consonants only roughly correspond with their Arabic counterparts; indeed, the vowels *ē* and *ō* cannot be rendered by the Arabic script and were literally called "unknown" (*majhūl*) by the medieval grammarians. Meanwhile, Iranists have developed methods that accurately reflect Persian phonetics and emphasize the link between Middle Persian and New Persian elements, with the unavoidable side-effect of distorting classical Arabic pronunciation to a similar degree.[2]

I was therefore left unsatisfied with the results produced by any single overarching system. Although this dissertation focuses on a Persian text, it was conceived from the beginning as a comparative project,

1. For more information on these systems, visit http://ijmes.chass.ncsu.edu/docs/TransChart.pdf (*IJMES*), http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DIN_31635 (DIN), and http://loc.gov/catdir/cpso/roman.html (ALA-LoC). A handy set of charts comparing the common transcription systems for Arabic, Persian, and host of other languages can be found at http://transliteration.eki.ee/ (all URLs accessed 11 June 2015).

2. For examples of these systems, see the *Encyclopædia Iranica* (*EIr*, http://www.iranicaonline.org/pages/guidelines), the *Abstracta Iranica* (http://abstractairanica.revues.org/), the *Journal of Iranian Studies* (http://iranianstudies.com/journal/transliteration), and the new multi-volume series *A History of Persian Literature*, edited by Ehsan Yarshater (Yarshater, *A History of Persian Literature*).

situating the text within a number of intertextual traditions and perspectives; and as I desire neither to persianize Arabic nor to arabize Persian, I established in-house rules to adhere to the conventions established for both languages without insisting that they fully harmonize with each other. In so doing, I hope to respect the plurality and difference of the two languages as much as I wish to keep them in dialogue with one another. The following paragraphs lay out the guidelines I set for myself: the overarching goal at all times has been to produce a study that is readable, phonetically accurate, and accessible for a wide range of English readers, while still retaining enough detail as to guard against ambiguous cases for specialists. It is a tough balancing act, and I will be quite tickled (and not a little surprised) if I have wholly succeeded.

"Write in English"

This most simple of dicta, quoted from the venerable *Strunk & White*, can be surprisingly difficult to uphold in academic writing.[3] Nonetheless, I have endeavored to keep it to heart, limiting my transcriptions to short citations of no more than two lines and select terms that I consider essential to my argument. I will not render words that have entered the English language according to a strict dogma of transliteration, but when multiple orthographies of the same word have gained currency, I opt for the version that is closest to an accurate pronunciation: "shaykh" rather than "sheik," Qur'an instead of Koran. Dynasties, toponyms, and titles are readily anglicized and are given in their most common form without diacritics: Abbasid, Ghaznavid, Seljuk; Khorasan, Soghdia, Transoxiana; sultan, shah, bey, khoja, amir, caliph. A few other anglicized terms include "hadith," "sufi," "udhri" (*ʿudhrī*), a kind of love poetry, and "divan" or "diwan," a collection of poetry. Books and publications are also rendered in English when it makes sense to do so, but the original title will always be cited in the bibliography.

I also seek to "English" a few poetic terms indigenous to the Perso-Arabic tradition, on the conviction that they are useful additions to our lexicon. This has already taken place in some cases; the "ghazal" entered European poetry through translations and original compositions by Goethe, Von Platen, and Rück-

3. William Jr. Strunk, *The Elements of Style: with revisions, an introduction, and a chapter on writing by E. B. White*, 4th ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2000), 81.

ert, and the form has gained popularity in recent decades among American poets.[4] Edward FitzGerald (d. 1883) immortalized the quatrain (*rubāʿī*) in his *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, and Richard Burton (d. 1890) attempted (with less success) to introduce the "kasîdah" (*qaṣīda*) to his readers; following modern conventions, I think the word "qasida" works very well as an English term.[5] Last but not least, the *maṡnavi* is one of cornerstone poetic forms of Persian literature and the central object of this study; I shall therefore adopt the term into English as "masnavi."[6] In describing lines of Arabic or Persian poetry, I follow Browne's suggestion and use the terms "half-verse" or "hemistich" for *miṣrāʿ* and "line" or "verse" for *bayt*.[7] When transcribing poetry, I mark the end of the hemistich with a dot (·) and the end of the verse with a slash (/).

Monographs vs. Digraphs

The numerous digraphs used in English orthography pose a perpetual challenge in transcription, and from one point of view, the best way to deal with them is to avoid them altogether. Monograph characters like /š/, /ġ/, /ṯ/, and /ḫ/ are unambiguous and transferable from language to language, which is why they tend to be favored in Continental scholarship. While I prefer this approach myself, I had to consider my audience: this is an English-language work of comparative literature, not philology, and while the bulk of my readers will not necessarily know how to pronounce unfamiliar symbols, they should recognize a digraph like 'sh' or 'th' with little effort. In the spirit of readability, I would prefer that my non-specialist readers have a good shot at pronouncing a transcribed word correctly, and trust that the specialists will be able to adjudicate ambiguous moments, which are in practice few and far between.

4. See Hendrik Birus, "Goethe's Approximation of the Ghazal and its Consequences: Transformations of a Literary Genre," in *Ghazal as World Literature*, ed. Thomas Bauer and Angelika Neuwirth, vol. 1 (Beirut: Ergon Verlag, 2005), 415–429; *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, s.v. "Ghazal" (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

5. Edward FitzGerald, *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám, the Astronomer-Poet of Persia, Translated into English Verse* (London: B. Quaritch, 1859), republished in four subsequent editions from 1868–89; Richard Francis Burton, *The Kasîdah of Hâjî Abdû el-Yezdî* (London: Octagon Press, 1974).

6. The form also exists in Arabic as *mathnavī* and *muzdawaj*, but it is far less central within the Arabic poetic tradition. For further information on the features and history of these various forms, see *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, s.vv. "Rubāī," "Qaṣīda," and "Masnavī."

7. Edward Granville Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, 4 vols. (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1902–1924), 2:24. By extension, this would mean that "distich," or *dobayti* as it is called in Persian, would be the best term for the quatrain, but since the latter term has already gained currency in English, I will respect the convention.

Names and Honorifics

Compound names are abundant in this study, and here too, scholarly convention has been my guide. An interesting divergence is discernible between Arabic and Persian studies: Arabists seem to prefer disjoined names—Abū Bakr, Badīʿ al-Zamān, and Ibn al-Nadīm are the usual spellings—while Persianists tend to link the constituent elements of a name together with hyphens, or even combine them all into a single word: Moḥammad-Reżā, Faridoddin, ʿAbdorraḥmān, Loṭfʿali, Reżāqoli, and Zabiḥollāh are all common renditions. Again, I decided to acknowledge plurality rather than impose uniformity, and will therefore rely on the primary language or language environment of that figure when deciding on the convention I use. For example, though writers like Ghazālī and Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ were ethnic Iranians, Arabic was the primary language of their output, and so I transcribe their names as I transcribe the contents of their books. Titles, honorifics, and *kunya*s (Neẓām al-Molk, Rukn al-Dawla, Abu l-Faraj) are unjoined in all cases, and I always spell أبو "Abu," for the sake of simplicity. For contemporary writers who have established a standard orthography for their names in Roman-script publications, such as Moayyad, Khaleghi-Motlagh, or Yarshater, I adhere to that convention.

Some final details: I drop the particle *al-* except when it appears in a genitive construct or an extended sequence, such as Ibn al-Athīr or ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī; similarly, I keep the genitive *eẓāfa* when it is an established part of a Persian name, e.g. Nāṣer-e Khosrow, Shams-e Qays.

Technicalities

Inflection (Arabic). I use the pausal form when transcribing single words, terms, and titles, but when transcribing a phrase, a sentence, or a line of poetry, I include inflection (*iʿrāb*).

Hyphens (Persian). I think transcribed Persian reads a little more easily when we keep the hyphens to a minimum. Thus, the common suffix *-nāma* ("book, chronicle") is assimilated into titles like *Shāhnāma* and *Qābusnāma*; so too simple compound nouns like *badjens*, *zanbāregi*, or *bimehri*. Long or unusual compounds, however, will be separated into their component elements, and I use hyphens to identify a number of particles: (1) the plural marker *-hā*; (2) the *eżāfa* (*-e*, *-ye*); (3) the indefinite *-i* (allowing us to

distinguish *mardi* ("manliness") from *mard-i* ("a man"); (4) enclitic verbs and suffixes (*-am*, *-at*, *-ash*, *-ast*, *-and*); (5) and contractions (*k-ash*, *k-u*, *k-az*, *u-st*).

Silent *vāv*. A common consonant cluster in Persian is *khw*, equivalent to Latin *qu*, which is pronounced as *kh* in contemporary speech (like *qu* in modern French and Spanish). My transcription reflects this phonetic shift: in classical texts, where it was pronounced (and is sometimes essential for the rhyme), I write it out as *khw*, but in contemporary works, I write *khʷ*; thus the word خواست would be *khwāst* and *khʷāst* respectively; خورد would be *khward* and *khʷord*.

Orthography. I cite many lines of Perso-Arabic prose and poetry in the footnotes and appendices of this dissertation. In general, I transcribe the citation exactly as it appears in my source, except for the following small adjustments:

1. I add short vowels to Arabic poetry, filling in the gaps when necessary;
2. I add short vowels in Persian when they are necessary to clear up ambiguous readings, indicate unusual pronunciations, and mark the *eżāfa*;
3. I modify the orthography to fit modern conventions, which tends to disjoin the prefix مـی, the suffixes ها and تر, and the preposition به.

Bibliographic References and Citations

My bibliography will follow the rules of the ALA-LoC, as this is the standard used in North American libraries; it seemed manifestly unfair to expect my readers to reverse-engineer my transcription methods just so they could look up a book or an article. Thus, when I mention the *Shāhnāma* of Ferdowsi in the body of my dissertation, it will appear as the *Shāhnāmah* of Firdawsī in the bibliography.

In many citations, I include the chapter and/or line number in the body text; the reference and page number will be provided in the footnotes. When standard numerations exist, such as in well-known classical texts, I will indicate these first (e.g. 163b) before referring to the page number of the particular edition or translation used. Some works do not yet have standard line numbers established; in this case, my shorthand reference will be (page/line); thus (121/8) will indicate page 121, verse 8.

In-text citations of *Vis & Rāmin* refer to the Rowshan edition using the shorthand (<chapter>.<line>); 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. For readers using other editions or English translations of the poem, I provide the corresponding page numbers in **Rowshan** (1998), **T'odua and Gvaxaria** (1970), **Morrison** (1972), and **Davis** (2009).[8] These appear in the footnotes using the shorthand form (RTMD), along with the Persian text. For example, a citation that reads 60.31–46 (R177/T235/M158/D199) will point to chapter 60, lines 31–46 in the Rowshan edition, followed by the page numbers in Rowshan, T'odua, Morrison, and Davis where this passage can be found.

Translations

Warts and all, all translations are mine unless otherwise noted. These will cite the original language in the footnotes, and advise readers to consult other translations (if they exist) by adding "cf." after the citation. Otherwise, I will simply cite the work in translation, and at times include a reference to an edition in the original language for the reader's reference.

8. Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī, *Vīs va Rāmīn*, ed. Muḥammad Rawshan (Tehran: Ṣidā-yi Muʿāṣir, 1377 [1998]); *Vīs va Rāmīn*, ed. Magali T'odua and Alek'sandre Gvaxaria (Tehran: Bunyād-i Farhang-i Īrān, 1349 [1970]); *Vis and Ramin*, trans. George Morrison (Columbia University Press, 1972); *Vis and Ramin*, trans. Dick Davis (New York: Penguin Books, 2009).

Transliteration Charts

Table 1: Transliteration of Arabic and Persian

	Ar.	Per.		Ar.	Per.		Ar.	Per.
ء	ʾ	ʾ	ر	r	r	ف	f	f
ب	b	b	ز	z	z	ق	q	q
پ	–	p	ژ	–	zh	ك	k	k
ت	t	t	س	s	s	گ	g	g
ث	th	ṡ	ش	sh	sh	ل	l	l
ج	j	j	ص	ṣ	ṣ	م	m	m
چ	–	ch	ض	ḍ	ż	ن	n	n
ح	ḥ	ḥ	ط	ṭ	ṭ	ه	h	h
خ	kh	kh	ظ	ẓ	ẓ	و	w	v
د	d	d	ع	ʿ	ʿ	ي	y	y
ذ	dh	ẕ/ð	غ	gh	gh	ـة	a, at	a
ا ، ى	ā	ā	ـَ	a	a	ـَو	aw	ow
و	ū	u, ō	ـُ	u	o	ـَي	ay	ay
ي	ī	i, ē	ـِ	i	e	ـُوّ	ūw	ovv
						ـِيّ	īy	iy

All letters, including those with diacritics, can be pronounced as their equivalents in English, but note the following: /**th**/ as in **th**in; /**dh**/ or /**ð**/ as in **th**at; /**kh**/ as in Scottish lo**ch**; /**ch**/ as in **ch**ur**ch**; /**zh**/ as in vi**si**on; /**q**/ is a deeper 'k,' as in **c**ut; /**gh**/ as in French Pa**r**is, or, for Persian, as in **gr**otte. /ʿ/ and /ʾ/ can be treated as glottal stops, as in 'uh-oh!'. Vowels are pure and pronounced as in Spanish and Italian, but note that in Persian /**a**/ is pronounced 'æ' as in d**a**d, while /**ā**/ is a deep 'ɑ' as in f**a**ther; the diphthong /**ay**/ is pronounced as in m**ay**; and /**aw**/ and /**ow**/ range from n**ow** to kn**ow**, depending on regional accent.

Table 2: Transliteration of Greek

α	a	ε	e	ι	i	ν	n	ρ	r, rh	φ	ph
β	b	ζ	z	κ	k, c	ξ	x	σ, ς	s	χ	ch
γ	g	η	ē	λ	l	ο	o	τ	t	ψ	ps
δ	d	θ	th	μ	m	π	p	υ	y	ω	ō
		αι	ai	αυ	au	ει	ei	ηυ	ēu		
		οι	oi	ου	ou	υι	ui	ωυ	ōu		

Older Persian manuscripts, like those of *Varqa & Golshāh* and *Samak-e ʿAyyār*, write ذ for what later became د, e.g., بوذ instead of بود. In such cases, I transcribe it as /**ð**/ (*buð*). When transcribing Middle Persian, I use the system established in D. N. MacKenzie, *A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

For Greek, I adhere to the conventions established by the ALA-LoC, with one minor adjustment: when transliterating proper nouns (the names of books, authors, and literary characters), I use /**c**/ for the Greek /**κ**/, because this is the practice adopted by the majority of the translators whose texts I cite, and I want the reader to be able to move between the quoted passages and my discussion with as few bumps as possible. Thus, we will read of the loves of Callirhoe (Καλλιρόη), but I will mention how the author of the story refers to his creation as a *pathos erōtikon* (πάθος ἐρωτικὸν).

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List of Abbreviations

BSOAS	Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies
BSOS	Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies
EIr	Encyclopædia Iranica
EI²	Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition
HIL	History of Iranian Literature
JAL	Journal of Arabic Literature
JAOS	Journal of the American Oriental Society
JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies
JRAS	Journal for the Royal Asiatic Society
LHP	Literary History of Persia
RAS	Royal Asiatic Society
ZDMG	Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft

K&S	*Khosrow & Shirin*
M&P	*Metiochos & Parthenope*
T&I	*Tristan & Iseut*
V&ʿA	*Vāmeq & ʿAẕrā*
V&G	*Varqa & Golshāh*
V&R	*Vis & Rāmin*

Introduction

Once upon a time, there lived a great king named Mobad, who lived in the city of Marv along the eastern marches of Khorasan. There, he ruled as King of Kings over all the other noble houses, and his authority was supreme. One day, when he had summoned his vassals to join him in celebrating the advent of the New Year, the king's eyes landed upon the figure of Shahru, queen of the western province of Media. Captivated by her beauty, he propositioned her on the spot, begging her to join his side either as his wife or his lover. The queen, however, turned down the offer, saying that she was too old for such youthful pursuits. Undeterred, the king countered with a second proposal: if not Shahru, then let it be her daughter—if she were to bear one—for she would surely be as beautiful as her mother. To this, Shahru gave her assent, and in binding their contract, the king and queen unwittingly laid the foundation for the tale of *Vis & Rāmin*.

Many years later, Shahru did indeed bear a daughter named Vis, but she neglected her oath to Mobad and married Vis to her (Vis's) brother, Viru, in line with traditional practice. Furious at the violation of the contract and the corresponding insult to his honor, Mobad charged into Media with his army behind him, on a mission of vengeance and redress; and though he failed to defeat Viru in battle, he eventually managed to abduct Vis through guile and persuasion, and retuned to his capital in triumph. Torn from her family and the unwilling bride of a man she loathed, Vis had her Nurse cast a spell of impotence on Mobad to ensure that she would remain a virgin until the longed-for day when Viru would come back and reclaim her as his lawful wife. But that day never came. Mobad's younger brother, Rāmin, had secretly fallen in love with his sister-in-law, and, through the assistance of the Nurse, he eventually persuaded Vis to join up with him as his illicit lover.

Figure 1: The geography of *Vis & Rāmin*. Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Iran_relief_location_light_map.jpg; accessed 11 June 2015. The image has been cropped and modified.

For those of you familiar with the story of *Tristan & Iseut*, this setup might look familiar. We have on our hands a love triangle, straddling the line between the lawful and forbidden; and like the Authurian lovers, Vis and Rāmin will have many adventures as they scheme to come together while evading Mobad's attempts to catch and punish them. At times, these stories are funny and end on a happy note; but more often than not, they end badly, particularly for Vis, who is humiliated, exiled, beaten, and nearly killed numerous times for her transgressions. The increasing pressures of an untenable relationship eventually force the lovers apart, with Rāmin seeking a new life with another woman, but this latest separation only compounds their pain and demolishes any trust they could still place within the other. It is only after a dramatic confrontation that the lovers are able to reaffirm their mutual commitment and do the dirty work necessary to make their union both possible and permissible: by launching a full-scale rebellion against the king, who is ignominiously gored to death by a raging boar as he prepares to make his final stand. The lovers finally get their happy-ever-after, but only through the most ambivalent of journeys.

This, in brief, is the story of *Vis & Rāmin*. It was composed in Isfahan in the mid-tenth century CE, a time when the romance was starting to emerge as a genre of some prestige in Persian literature; the

poem itself was instrumental in this development. The tale, furthermore, is based off an oral tradition that likely dates back to the first century CE, making it one of the oldest works of Persian secular literature that we have with us today. It therefore lies at the crux of some crucial developments in the history of Persian literature, a moment when one of the tradition's hallmark genres came into its own, and an example of how materials from the ancient past could be reworked to the pleasure of contemporary audiences. As entertaining as it is, there is an earnestness about the work as well: even this most skeletal of outlines demonstrates the extent to which it is obsessed with the fraught interplay of what Dante called the *libito* and *licito*, the point of rupture between desire and the licit. The stakes of this negotiation are particularly high in the world of romantic love, which, I have come to realize, is a kind of contractual love between the two partners, just as the romance as a genre acts as a literary contract between the text and its audience. *Vis & Rāmin* is an interesting text precisely because it and its characters break so many rules, explicit and implicit; but to determine the rules in the first place, we have to measure it against other works that invoke a similar horizon of expectations. The perspective, therefore, must needs be a comparative one: we must reevaluate what the romance genre is in the Persian tradition, determine its relationship with other literatures, and then see how this work in particular challenges, complicates, and reforms the conventions of its genre. Hence, the title of this dissertation: *The Poetics of Romantic Love in* Vis & Rāmin.

An obvious question stemming from this project has to do with its choice of terms: how can or should one distinguish romantic love from a host of other loves—erotic love, mystical love, friendship, compassion, charity, recognition, selflessness? For the purposes of this dissertation, I begin with an inductive approach. Romantic love is the love we find in the romance; that is to say, although *Vis & Rāmin* draws from a dazzling array of sources, modes, and genres, it develops a distinctive "grammar" of its own through which it engages with the fundamental question of what it means to love. Nor did it invent this grammar from scratch; it is part of a centuries-old oral and written tradition whose distinctive features are visible among a large number of like-minded texts. Indeed, as a mode of practice and expression, the romance need not be limited to a specific genre, and its tropes and techniques can be discerned in virtually any kind of writing that takes up the topic of love: stories of kings and heroes, lyric poetry,

philosophical treatises, utterances of mystical longing and devotion. While all these genres may at times reflect modes of affection and narrative conventions that we might consider "romantic," there are also texts, such the topic of this dissertation, that adopt these norms as their central organizing principle. Thus I set *Vis & Rāmin* at the center of the constellation, building outwards in radial fashion to other texts that resonate with the work in terms of their structure and thematics, to develop a study of romantic love within this discursive cluster (a cluster is by definition always open and porous, with texts on the borders welcome to come and go as need arises—a very different dynamic than that invoked by a rigid set of parameters). Of course, languages themselves are not monolithic or uniform creatures; just as a community of English speakers may be extremely diverse in their thoughts, personalities, and opinions, yet use the same words to communicate with each other, so too can a variety of attitudes about love, not all of them in harmony with one another, be articulated in the course of the conversation.

The first order of business is to get to know our interlocutor, which is regrettably not a very well-known text even within the field of Persian studies. The first chapter, "The Story of the Story," attempts to rectify this. It begins with a summary of all that we know or can surmise about the author of *Vis & Rāmin*, the circumstances of his life, and the possible sources of his poem; this is followed by an account of the story's reception and afterlife, that is its *Nachleben*, from the time it was written until the present day. This is a fascinating story in its own right, and it serves as a valuable case study in tracking shifts in literary taste and practice over the passage of time. We will learn that *Vis & Rāmin* was very successful for the first centuries of its life, and although the poem began to dissolve, so to speak, in the thirteenth century, its traces can still be found at work behind the scenes: the famous "Ten Letters" passage, for example, came into its own as a popular spinoff genre during the Ilkhanid period. However, the poem fell into obscurity after the fifteenth century, only remembered on the strength of its reputation and a number of proverbial lines. It was rediscovered in the nineteenth century by European scholars, who took an immediate interest in the work when they realized its historical and philological value; but as a literary specimen, they tended to find it rather repugnant, holding it at arm's length as though they pinched a bag of doggy-doo between their fingertips. In recent decades, there have been a number of attempts to reengage with *Vis & Rāmin* as a worthwhile literary enterprise, but these efforts have been relatively

disparate and disconnected from one another, scattered across the seven climes of the academe. It is my hope that in synthesizing and summarizing the state of the field (such as it is), this chapter might provide sufficient groundwork and momentum to generate further interest and get the conversation started.

Once we have gotten to know our text, we must outline more precisely the themes, concerns, topoi, archetypes, and plotlines that give *Vis & Rāmin* its distinctive shape and trajectory. A simple way of putting this comes in the form of a question: what are we reading, anyway? What genre, type, class, or register of writing is this? Forays into indigenous literary criticism are both helpful and unhelpful; we learn that for contemporary audiences, *Vis & Rāmin* was a *dāstān-e ʿāsheqāna*, a story about lovers—no more, no less. Thus it is content and context, and not rhetorical theory, that establishes the genre: when I propose to tell you a story about love, you'll already know that the story has to have at least two people who will fall in love with each other, and most likely a third party who will stand in their way. And if I tell enough love-stories that offer variations on this basic structure, you'll come to have a set of expectations as to how any given tale about lovers will probably go. This process is theorized by Hans-Robert Jauss in his discussion of genre as an unfolding horizon of expectations created over time by the process of reading new works and comparing them to ones already experienced. This theory, I find, is very effective in explaining the deep intertextual connections that lie between *Vis & Rāmin* and its generic neighbors; as soon as we dive into the world of technique, topos, structure, and strategy—of what narratives *do*, rather than what they are *called*—we can start to discern the outlines of what seems to constitute a relatively stable way of telling stories about lovers and their adventures in a number of Near Eastern literatures. Precisely because this area experienced centuries of rule under large, multilingual empires, the genre could easily move across and among various traditions: to show this, I follow the trajectory of two of the first romances that emerged in New Persian in the early eleventh century via Greek and Arabic sources. In the latter text, *Varqa & Golshāh*, we have the luxury of being able to check different Arabic recensions of the story, which are translated and included as an appendix, and there we can see how with each iteration, the story picks up more and more elements that draw it into the orbit of what we might call the romance genre. This takes us to the last major point of the chapter: though romantic literature never "appears" or "disappears" as far as we can tell—so that in other words,

it would be a red herring to go searching for the origins of such a genre—it certainly falls in and out of fashion, and its defining elements are constantly being being tweaked and adapted to speak to new generations of readers and listeners. In this sense, one can point to the early eleventh century CE as a turning point in the genre's reception as a form of "high" literature; authors were trying out new things with these tales, and their work was well-received by their royal patrons and elite audiences, initiating a moment whose innovations would reverberate for many centuries thereafter. More interesting still is the observation that this "rise of the romance," prefigured in *Vis & Rāmin*, really comes to the fore in the twelfth century, with Neẓāmi Ganjavi writing in Persian and similar revivals of the genre taking place in Georgia, Byzantium, and northern Europe. A comparative study of this broader phenomenon will have to wait for another project, but I hope that, if nothing else, this chapter might contribute to our ongoing efforts to bring further clarity and intentionality to the generic terms we use, sharpening our account of a formative period in the history of Persian literature.

One of the special features of the romance is that it produces what Bakhtin calls polyphonous and heteroglossic worlds: a cacophony of individuated and at times competing voices. In the final three chapters, I take up the story of the three major characters, Vis, Mobad, and Rāmin, moving chronologically through the text, to examine how each narrative generates a different telling of *Vis & Rāmin*, laden with concerns, anxieties, and challenges unique to that character's perspective. We begin our analysis with Vis in Chapter 3, "An Affair of Conscience," where we consider what is probably the most well-known feature of the work, namely her adulterous affair with Rāmin. With the conventions of the Greek novel and Helleno-Arabic ideas about chastity, fidelity, and reciprocity in mind, this chapter follows the story of Vis's marriage, second marriage, and seduction to contend that her affair is not evidence of a lack of moral rectitude, but rather demonstrates her commitment to right behavior even if and when it must entail sin, shame, and disgrace. This account challenges a long line of criticism that sees Vis either as a woman of loose morals, or, conversely, as a woman who rejects conventional morality in a proto-feminist rejection of the patriarchy. Far from it; Vis is obsessed with her virginity and spiritual purity, and the fact that she consents to a relationship that she regards as sinful generates a profound sense of guilt, shame, and self-loathing within her; even as she prepares to embrace Rāmin for the first time, she cries out, "I've

sullied my pure body, I've annihilated loyalty and shame." Nonetheless, she portrays her sin as a choice, accepting its consequences even as she laments them. The fact that Vis's commitment to fidelity can somehow betray her into choosing adultery says something powerful about the internal slippages and counteracting pressures buried within the norms and expectations of romantic love; having been born out of this instability, Vis's love for Rāmin will be poisoned from the outset, with dire implications for the story's ending. Yet here too lies Vis's triumph, for though she suffers tremendously in a world where all roads to righteousness have been blocked, she learns to forge her own path, to vindicate herself on her own terms, and to claim her actions as her own. Vis becomes the author of her own story, and throughout the remainder of the tale, we will see her ready to fight tooth and nail to ensure that her narrative, and the selfhood wrapped within it, remain visible, a counterweight and protest against the normative tendency to villify her for her actions.

Next, we turn to Mobad, the cuckolded king. Like Vis, there has been very little done to draw out the complexities of this fascinating villain who at times almost seems to be the good guy, caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. His character is summed up in the chapter's title, "Impotent," for not only is he rendered sexually impotent by magic, his whole range of action is constrained, paradoxically, by the very kingship that awards him supreme potency. As in the story of Vis, the king is thrust into a position in which all he can do is pick his favorite poison: if he kills Vis, her family will overthrow him; if he kills Rāmin, he ends his own dynasty; but if he lets the lovers live, they will continue to flout his authority and ruin him as a king, the one entitled to give orders and enforce them. In short, he is structurally doomed to lose power no matter what he does, and his awareness of this fact shrouds his character in a profound sense of despair as he marches helplessly towards his downfall, a prisoner, as the poet puts it, of the skin upon his body. This issue of the king's body also invites an inquiry into the relationship between kingship and manhood, a central thematic in Mobad's story; lines like "he who is not a lover is not a man," in turn, raise another set of questions as to how or if he can express his love for Vis in a way that is authentically male. The root of Mobad's paralysis, I conclude, lies in the overdetermination of his body: in his efforts to enact an ideal that can simultaneously fulfill the roles of man, lover, and king, he is ultimately crushed under the weight of these competing and contradictory visions of manhood. If we agree with Meisami

that later romances like Nezami's *Haft Paykar* offer a success story of a man learning to harmonize love and kingship within his person, the story of Mobad critiques such an ideology, presenting instead an image of masculinity that is as incapable of delivering its promises as the king is of receiving them.

The title of the fifth chapter, "The Minstrel in the Romance," is an homage to an important article by Robert Dankoff that analyzes the practice of embedding lyrical performances within long narrative poems. In this chapter, we take Dankoff's study a step further and look for ways in which narrative poetry can mode-switch, so to speak, from an epic or narrative voice to a lyrical register without relying on formal features or paratextual cues. One of the main ways this switch can be triggered is through character: as the resident minstrel, Rāmin sings and speaks using a stock of rhetorical tropes and techniques that recall the world of the lyric for his audience, inviting them to experience his soliloquies within such a mode. The lyric is thus abstracted from its formal features and transmuted into a more general way of thinking, speaking, and doing that is put on display through the figure of Rāmin, its designated representative. Yet when he descends into the noisy and polyphonic world of the romance, our minstrel—who, by dint of his profession, also takes on the role of the in-house narrator—experiences a bit of a culture shock: jarred by the intrusion of counter-narratives that challenge his authoritative voice (especially in the letters and laments of Vis), Rāmin is forced against the walls of the world that he himself constructed. The costs of his desperation to maintain control over his story become visible as his love turns increasingly cruel and erratic, and it is within such moments of rupture between the story he seeks to tell and the other stories his narrative would suppress that we find a scathing critique of Rāmin's world-view, which has obliterated Vis as an independent actor and replaced her with a smiling image who will always be there for him when and if he desires her.

This critique leads us to the heart of the central conflict that we now see unfolding: we have two lovers whose vision of each other is so different that mutual recognition is stymied, and perhaps made impossible. The implications of this impasse are discussed in a short epilogue, "*Liebestod*," which I present as a moment to reflect on some of the major points of the analysis and provide a suggestion as to how the insights gleaned from this project might help us read the story's complex ending. The ideal of romantic love has been placed under so much pressure in *Vis & Rāmin* that it must, in the end, fall apart;

the inevitable breakdown occurs in the final climatic meeting of the lovers, set against a hellish backdrop steeped in images of death, decay, and murder. After all the pain and hardship they have gone through, Vis and Rāmin finally reject each other and abandon their counterpart to die in the wilderness—a twisted version of the double-death motif we find in stories like *Pyramus & Thisbe*, *Layli & Majnun*, and *Romeo & Juliet*. This is the moment, it seems to me, in which the promises of union and happiness so fundamental to the romance genre are shattered beyond repair, and in its place, we are left with a portrait of two lovers who have come to understand that they will never truly find themselves in the other: no matter how they try, a certain unbridgable gap of strangeness and unrecognition will lie between them. Yet in this isolation comes a new sense of selfhood: it is only now that Vis and Rāmin can finally break free of the self-destructive cycle in which they have been trapped. Yet the route to freedom is only possible by displacing this necessary destruction onto another party, and Rāmin's brothers Mobad and Zard must in due course be slain, a bittersweet victory that casts the protagonists' triumph into further moral ambivalence. These final thoughts, it must be stressed, are more speculative than conclusive, and they are offered in the hope that they may demonstrate the extent of the critical work that still lies ahead: if any of my readings (or misreadings) are provocative or interesting enough to spur on additional studies of *Vis & Rāmin*, or to integrate Persian literature more fully into a comparative and intertextual framework for analysis, then I will deem this project a success.

This is the outline of the dissertation; it is now time to get to know this poem in all its quirks and peculiarities. But first, to set the mood, we will begin with a short story about the author of *Vis & Rāmin*, Fakhroddin "Fakhri" Gorgāni, which was related by the sufi poet Fariddodin ʿAttār of Nishapur in the early thirteenth century CE.

Proem: The Tale of Fakhri and the Slave-Boy

> If an important decision is to be made, [the Persians] discuss the question when they are drunk, and the following day the master of the house where the discussion was held submits their decision for reconsideration when they are sober. If they still approve it, it is adopted; if not, it is abandoned. Conversely, any decision they make when they are sober, is reconsidered afterwards when they are drunk.
>
> —Herodotus[1]

There once was a king who ruled in Gorgan,
a wise man of good disposition and faultless faith;
And because he was kind and esteemed by all,
the poet Fakhroddin joined his court.
He always took care to praise the king,
so his lord would likewise esteem him.

The king possessed a slave-boy,
a moon of the age with the face of Joseph,
And two musky locks like two black fish—
what am I saying? Like two Hindus in fair Khatay!
His face like the moon, his tresses like Pisces;
a king in every way
from crescent to tail.
A jealous eye that met his brow would be struck in turn by his eyebrow's bow.
Two narcissi peered from the thorns of his lashes,
two lips pouted like grenadine seeds, so sweet to shame the sugarcane;
so small and pert to confound the eye.

1. Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Aubrey de Sélincourt, with an introduction by John Marincola (London: Penguin Books, 2003), I.133.

But one day,
when the august king had called his men to feast,
and Fakhri sat in joy at the banquet,
the boy came in
and set the world ablaze:
A thief whose beauty stole the heart away from every soul,
whose sweetness filled the world with sugar.
His lasso locks ensnared his earthly prey;
his lips wreaked havoc throughout the skies.
When Fakhri saw that face, he gave up his heart;
his heart with the boy, he gave up the ghost.
But he feared the king; he dared not raise his eyes to that moon-like face,
And gathered his scattered wits, and manfully restrained his eyes.
The king knew at once what had happened,
but did not reveal the secret.

The sots grew drunk and fell off their feet,
But the rapture of wine and the beloved's face compounded in Fakhri,
And waves of fire pounded his soul to oblivion.
He kept to himself, candle-like,
smoking and sputtering in the riotous crowd.
When the king of Gorgān saw Fakhri this way, his heart ablaze with love and fire,
He gave him his slave, then and there.
The poet was silenced by joy and turned a hundred colors,
Torn between love's ardour and courtly propriety,
Until the king said,
"What's the matter? Have you died?
The boy is yours, take his hand and go!"
And Fakhri and the boy joyfully fled the king's symposium.

But though Fakhri was drunk
and beyond himself, his reason got to work;
The nobles who attended the king were wise, and
Fakhri said to them, "The king is drunk, and this boy too is floored by wine!
And if tonight I take him away from the king's embrace,
and keep him in my home till dawn—
Or if the king regrets his deed when he sobers up—
Or forgets his promise, or boils in a jealous rage—
Nothing I say will save me, if I have slept with this boy!
He will spill my innocent blood,
throw my corpse to the wandering dogs, and say,
'Fool! Since when is drunken speech considered and sound?
Could you not wait until the day, when your great monarch's wits had cleared?'
No. I will not take the boy with me, for the king is drunk
and cannot know the wisdom of his ways."

The nobles agreed: "Your judgement is good;
tonight, let him sleep by his king."
Below the chamber of that august king
was a sturdy grotto hewn of rock,
And in that place was a stone dais,
beautifully draped with ten sets of silken cloth.
There, before the gathering,
Fakhri laid the drunken boy to sleep,
Tenderly lit three candles, then went out, himself burning like a candle.
He then closed the cellar door for all to see,
Gave them the key,
and slept by the door until day,
as ardor smouldered within his heart.

Day arrived;
the king assumed his seat with wine,
and Fakhri came in, his belt girdled for service.
The nobles hailed him, then placed the key before the king,
And told him what Fakhri had done: "Truly, he was more circumspect than need be!"
But since the king had given away the boy while drunk,
the poet was true
and kept his faith,
And shut the boy away before ten people;
he now awaited his lord's command.
The king spoke:
"I am most pleased by this courtesy; my slave is his and his alone."
And Fakhri fell into utmost joy, his heart ablaze.

But then,
when he opened the grotto door,
he brought forth bloody tears from the eyes of all.
From head to toe, that moon-like face was turned to horrible ash and cinders!
Perhaps a spark had leapt from the candle,
fallen upon that delicate face,
And consumed him without mercy.
Nothing remained,
of garments, bed, and furnishing.
Senseless in wine and sleep, he had drowned in burning fire.

When Fakhri saw that beloved face in such a state,
he gained an inferno in exchange for his soul.
When his beloved perished in fire,
his life too was lost in the flames.

What can I say?

His heart became wild, and many mad deeds were ascribed to him.
In that madness, he retreated to the desert,
    wandering day and night, like the turning sphere.
And when his love exceeded all limits, he took his pain,
    and made the story of *Vis & Rāmin* his endless liturgy,
The grief he poured therein was his,
    although he told the story in their name.
Amidst the desert, day and night, he recited and wandered.
Streaked with blood and dust, he rambled and slumbered.

If you have not trod on such a path, how could you know the lovers' secrets?
What do you know of the life of a lover, who lowers his head to the top of the gibbet?
For them to bring you to that point of prostration,
you must lave yourself first in the water of your blood.[2]

2. Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār, *Ilāhī nāmah*, ed. Muḥammad Riẓā Shafīʿī-Kadkanī (Tehran: Sukhan, 1387 [2008]), 191–193. Many thanks to Austin O'Malley for helping me revise and improve my translation. The Persian text may be found in Appendix D.

Chapter 1

The Story of the Story

One hundred and one years ago, Sir Oliver Wardrop—traveler, translator, and diplomat for the British government—introduced English readers to a legend they had likely never heard of before. It was called *Visramiani: The Story of the Loves of Vis and Ramin; A Romance of Ancient Persia*, and in his preface to the story, Wardrop writes:

> This book is an elaborate study of a woman whose whole life was dominated by love. It is certainly one of the oldest novels in the world. Thus it will appeal to historical and linguistic students, but its intrinsic merits give it a claim to universal interest. The love-letters deserve notice as early specimens of this kind of composition, and the lyrical passages (the songs of Ramin) are also worthy of attention.[1]

To my mind, this remains the best introduction to the story of *Vis & Rāmin* (*V&R*) we have in English, and it seems fitting to revisit these words on the centennial of their publication. With insight and concision, Wardrop gets right at the heart of why this work deserves our attention as historians and readers: his bold claim that *V&R* is one of the oldest novels in the world, one that brought new "kinds of composition" to the genre through embedded love-letters and lyrical performances, certainly deserves a closer look; nor is it every day we find a work of medieval fiction that features a woman as its main protagonist and concerns itself with her private world of thoughts, desires, and emotions. Yet when Wardrop put pen to paper, the story was virtually unknown in Iran, the country of its origin, and had been given only cursory

1. Oliver Wardrop, trans., *Visramiani: The Story of the Loves of Vis and Ramin* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1914), v.

treatment by the European scholars who had discovered manuscripts of the poem in India some fifty years prior. And despite its obvious antiquity, few critics rushed to hail *Vis & Rāmin* as a new milestone in literary history; on the contrary, many of Wardrop's contemporaries denied the work any aesthetic value at all. The negative aura surrounding the story may have been on his mind when he adds, in a slightly defensive tone:

> Of its moral tone the reader will be able to judge. The perjury, treachery, cowardice, and roguery of the chief characters are mercilessly set forth. The author sometimes shows his contempt for them; he perpetually poses as an ethical teacher; but he is evidently fond of Vis and Ramin, and will not have them blamed, for they are the slaves of relentless Fate in its most forceful form. The modern reader will probably find them less immoral than Tristan and Isolde.[2]

This final reference speaks volumes about the discomfort that *V&R* inspired in the general readership of Wardrop's generation. Like their Arthurian counterparts, Vis and Rāmin are adulterous lovers, and Rāmin compounds his offence by having an affair on top of the affair, just as Tristan abandons Iseut for Iseut of the White Hands. Our dashing hero also seems to have little respect for the moral obligations of family and fraternity, for he kills one of his brothers and overthrows the other. If the fratricide and extramarital adventures were not enough to raise Victorian eyebrows, the romance is also laced with acts of incest and endogamy: Vis's first husband is her brother, Rāmin has an unsettling sexual encounter with his own wet-nurse (who also raised his lover), and the text is ambiguous as to whether the cuckolded king is Rāmin's brother or father. Yet somehow, these dubious antiheroes end up on the winning side of history: after all is said and done, the lovers marry, rule over Iran for many years in joy and contentment, and are united forever in Paradise. The story's infamous refusal to punish the guilty has had an enormous impact on the scholarly reception of *V&R*, from Wardrop's time until our own; as Inga Kalazde writes:

> No other classical monument of Persian literature has given rise to such controversial, incompatible and even mutually exclusive appraisal. The lovers' piquant relations and the moral aspect of the story aroused particular indignation among the scholars, for whom there were among the characters no positive persons. . . . Vis was vicious, lascivious, and a liar. Lustful Rāmin is no better.[3]

2. Wardrop, *Visramiani: The Story of the Loves of Vis and Ramin*, v.

3. Inga Kaladze, "The Georgian Translation of *Vis and Rāmin*: An Old Specimen of Hermeneutics," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 2, no. 2 (2009): 138–39.

Vis & Rāmin is something of a ghost in Persian literature, hovering over the tradition as a vision of what might have been, haunting the psyches of later lovers and love-poets, its presence palpable but hidden, its place in world literature considered but seldom acknowledged. Because of its ambivalent reception and tenuous place in the canon, there are few sustained studies of it to be found in any language; indeed, I began this project convinced that, outside of a handful of well-known articles, the work was still uncharted territory. To my surprise, I discovered that it actually pops up quite a lot, often in the most unexpected of places, when one goes looking for it, but its treatment has nevertheless tended to be disparate, cursory, and piecemeal: a citation here, a survey entry there, an isolated feature brought in as evidence to larger arguments with little interest in the work on its own. The closest we have to a dedicated monograph is the extensive introduction by Moḥammad Jaʿfar Maḥjub in his 1959 edition of the poem, and indeed much of the present chapter is indebted to the ground he broke in that piece.[4] However, even this is now over fifty years old; much has been written since then, and it is time to bring the story up to date. In the following pages, we will attempt to map out the many cul-de-sacs and alleyways of *V&R*'s troubled history, pulling together the loose ends and scattered traces into a somewhat more cohesive narrative to orient us on the path that lies ahead. We begin with an account of all that we know or can surmise about the author of the poem, his philosophical and religious inclinations, the historical circumstances of his milieu, and the tantalizing question of his sources; the chapter concludes with a discussion of the poem's afterlife from the eleventh to the twenty-first century. Those uninterested in this background may move to the next chapter, but they might bear in mind the old saw that sometimes the journey is the destination; the story of the story is a fascinating tale in its own right.

1.1 A portrait of the artist (as a young man?)

Although the roots of *Vis & Rāmin* likely go back to the first centuries CE, the version we have now was composed in approximately the year 446/1054 by one Fakhroddin Asʿad Gorgāni.[5] About this man we

4. Muḥammad Jaʿfar Maḥjūb, "Muqaddamah-i dar bārah-i Vīs va Rāmīn va surāyandah-i ān," in *Vīs va Rāmīn* (Tehran: Ibn-i Sīnā, 1337 [1959]), 7–105.

5. Following the usual convention in Islamic or Islamicate studies, all specific years are provided first in *anno hegirae*, followed by the "common era" reckoning.

have almost no external information: virtually nothing of his work outside of *V&R* survives, and beyond the succinct entry in a thirteenth-century prosopography by Moḥammad ʿOwfi, the annals and memoirs that mention the poet are, as Ẕabiḥollāh Ṣafā flatly puts it, "all wrong and filled with mistakes."[6] Our richest source of information, then, is to be found in the introductory chapters of the work itself; like many narrative poems in Persian literature, *V&R* does not launch straight into the story, but prefaces it with a number of chapters in which the author offers his thanks to God and the Prophet Muḥammad, praises the patrons (real or desired) of his work, and informs his audience of the circumstances that led to the composition of the story (see Table 3). Fortunately, we are not alone in dealing with this prefatory material, for it has been the object of careful and repeated scrutiny by some of the best minds in Persian literary studies. The first effort to establish a historical biography of Gorgāni was completed in the early 1930s by Badiʿozzamān Foruzānfar in his seminal study *Poets and Poetry*, in which he extracted all the information available in the poem's introduction and weighed it against a wide range of historical sources to produce a tentative date of composition and flesh out the life of its author; the results of this study were upheld and expanded in subsequent articles by Mojtabā Minovi and Moḥammad Jaʿfar Maḥjub.[7] Independent of this line of inquiry, Ṣādeq Hedāyat and Vladimir Minorsky both published meticulous studies of the linguistic and historical elements of the story in the mid 1940s, which in general buttressed the conclusions reached in Foruzānfar's account.[8] The bulk of the information that follows is therefore the fruit of these scholars' labors, noting the occasional emendations and disagreements between them.

As Gorgāni's name suggests, it is likely that he was born in the province of Gorgan, or grew up there, or traced his lineage back to that region. Like other regions directly south of the Caspian Sea, Gorgan is mountainous, rainy, densely forested, and rather isolated in comparison to the caravan cities stationed in the plains and rivers of eastern Iran and central Asia. Nevertheless, Minovi maintains that this out-of-the-way province was a center of learning and knowledge in the tenth and eleventh centuries, citing

6. Ẕabīḥ Allāh Ṣafā, *Tārīkh-i Adabīyāt dar Īrān* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Firdawsī, 1369 [1990]), 2:370.

7. Badīʿ al-Zamān Furūzānfar, *Sukhan va sukhanvarān* (Zavvār, 1387 [2009]), 368–430; Mujtabā Mīnuvī, "Vīs va Rāmīn," *Sukhan* 6, nos. 1, 2 (1333 [1954]): 13–21, 129–37; Maḥjūb, "Muqaddamah."

8. Ṣādiq Hidāyat, "Chand nuktah dar bārah-yi Vīs va Rāmīn," in *Vīs va Rāmīn*, ed. Muḥammad Rawshan (Tehran: Ṣidā-yi Muʿāṣir, 1377 [1998]), 381–413; Vladimir Minorsky, "Vīs u Rāmīn: a Parthian Romance (Continued)," *BSOAS* 11, no. 4 (1946): 741–763; "Vīs u Rāmīn: a Parthian Romance (Conclusion)," *BSOAS* 12, no. 1 (1947): 20–35; "Vīs-u-Rāmīn (III)," *BSOAS* 16, no. 1 (1954): 91–92; "Vīs-u Rāmīn (IV)," *BSOAS* 25, nos. 1/3 (1962): 275–286; revised and reprinted in *Iranica: Twenty Articles*, Publications de l'Université de Tehran 775 (Hertford, Eng.: S. Austin, 1964), 151–199.

Table 3: Part I: Doxology, panegyric, and exordium (1–7)

A. Exordium and doxology.	Praise of God the timeless and unchanging, beyond all thought, sense, and language; account of the creation of the world and the four elements (1); praise of the prophet Muḥammad, and the story of his feats and exploits (2).
B. Encomia to Gorgāni's patrons.	Praise of Sultan Toghrul Bey and account of his conquests (3); praise of Abu Naṣr Manṣur b. Moḥammad, minister to Toghrul (4); on the taking of Isfahan by Toghrul and his punishment of the unjust; his appointment of 'Amid Abu l-Fatḥ Moẓaffar to the governorship of Isfahan and his message of counsel to him (5); praise of Abu l-Fatḥ (6).
C. On the story's composition.	Description of the sultan's departure from Isfahan, and why the poet was compelled to stay; Abu l-Fatḥ's request to hear the story of *V&R*; description of the poem's origins and discursus on the *ars poetica*; intends that the poem, its author, and its patron remain immortal in record and memory (7).

figures like the philosopher Avicenna, the Ziyarid prince Qābus b. Voshmgir, and a handful of (admittedly lesser-known) poets to prove his point.[9] Gorgan is also the site of some monuments dating to the early eleventh century that bear bilingual inscriptions in Arabic and Pahlavi, suggesting that knowledge of the latter script was still current in Fakhroddin's time. These were produced by the Bavandids, a petty dynasty in the region who held the inherited title *shahryār*, and as it happens, one of the few poetic fragments attributed to Gorgāni outside of *Vis & Rāmin* is a bit of invective directed at one Ṡeqat al-Molk Shahryār; it is therefore possible, Minorsky argues, that this is where Gorgāni was active in his youth, and may substantiate his claim to know Middle Persian.[10] If Gorgāni did indeed reside in this area, it is likely that he would have joined the Seljuks' entourage as it passed through the region in the 1040s; on the basis of a line in which the poet claims to be young (*javān*) at the time of writing, Minovi further estimates the year of his birth at around 406/1014.[11] While one must take self-descriptions of this sort with a grain of salt, I do not doubt that the ballpark estimate of the turn of the eleventh century for Gorgāni's birth is more or less accurate.[12] His profession is also a matter of inference: by virtue of the fact that he served a local

9. Mīnuvī, "Vīs va Rāmīn," 14–15.

10. Minorsky, *Iranica*, 154–55; for more on the Bavandids, cf. C. E. Bosworth, *The New Islamic Dynasties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 165–66. See Appendix B for Gorgāni's invective.

11. The line reads, "O Lord, forgive the youth who recited this beautiful poem" (*yā rab biāmorz in javān rā · ke goft-ash in negārin dāstān rā*, 126.61). Minovi reasons that the oldest age that someone could be considered "young" at that time was forty, so if Gorgāni is being "honest" when he describes himself as *javān*, he could not have been more than forty in the year 446/1054. See Mīnuvī, "Vīs va Rāmīn," 15; also Maḥjūb, "Muqaddamah," 11.

12. In a similar vein, Foruzānfar suggests that the poet had suffered in a bitter love affair, but the quotations he provides as evidence are again too general to be of much use: "O world! I will separate myself from you, I'll never again heed your tricks, for I have seen your love for others, and cleansed my heart of the rust of your love!" (*jahānā man ze to bebrid khwāham · farib-e*

potentate and composed a long narrative poem, we can surmise that he was either a professional poet or a court secretary with literary aspirations. The latter seems more likely; "professional" poets, at least the ones who won the most approbation at court, earned their bread and butter writing panegyrics, and while it seems that Gorgāni did compose short poems under the pen-name "Fakhri," we never hear that he was remembered for his eulogies.[13] Scattered across the biographical dictionaries and anthologies, we find only the aforementioned satire, two incidental poems (*qeṭʿa*s), and the following somber quatrain ascribed to his name:

Again my breath has the whiff of madness	This pain is more than I can bear
If one should poke blame at my heart	Blood will spill out from such talk[14]

My guess, then, is that Fakhroddin was a man of letters, what one would have called an *adib* in his time. It is almost certain that he knew Arabic and was well-versed in its literature, as he peppers *V&R* with references to famous lines by the canonical Arab poets, including Imruʾ al-Qays (fl. sixth c. CE), Abu Tammām (d. ca. 232/845), and especially Mutanabbī (d. 354/965); a number of additional lines appear to paraphrase verses from the Qur'an, sayings from the hadith, and Arabic proverbs and aphorisms.[15] This is by no means unexpected, for although New Persian was in the midst of an unprecedented efflorescence at this time, Arabic remained a vital language of education, religion, and literature: the *Pearl of the Age*, an anthology of poetry composed by Abu Manṣūr Thaʿālibī (d. 429/1038) in nearby Nishapur, lists dozens of contemporary eastern Persian poets who used Arabic as their primary idiom.[16] The intertextual references in Gorgāni's work thus indicate a solid education in the disciplines that any clerk

to digar nashnid khwāham / cho mehr-at bā degar kas āzmudam · ze del zangār-e mehr-e to zodudam, 123.42–43).

13. Mīnuvī, "Vīs va Rāmīn," 14; Minovi does speculate, however, that Gorgāni must have done some work in panegyric for him to even be employed by a court in the first place, and points to the embedded panegyrics in chs. 3–6 of *V&R* as examples of his art; ibid., 17.

14. See Muḥammad ʿAwfī, *Kitāb-i Lubāb al-albāb*, ed. Edward Granville Browne and Muḥammad Qazvīnī (Leiden: Brill, 1903–6), 2:240; Muḥammad ʿAwfī, *Lubāb al-albāb*, ed. Saʿīd Nafīsī (Tehran: Ibn Sīnā, 1333 [1955]), 418, 713; Luṭf ʿAlī Bayg Āẕar, *Ātishkadah*, ed. Ḥasan Sādāt Nāṣirī, 3 vols. (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1336 [1958]), 804–5; Muḥammad ibn Badr al-Dīn Jājarmī, *Mūnis al-aḥrār fī daqāʾiq al-ashʿār*, ed. Mīr Ṣāliḥ Ṭabībī (Tehran: Ittiḥād, 1337 [1959]), 2:952; and Riẓā Qulī Khān Hidāyat, *Majmaʿ al-fuṣaḥā*, ed. Maẓāhir Muṣaffā, 2 vols. (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1339 [1960]), 1:934–36. For further information, see Maḥjūb, "Muqaddamah," 13–14. All of these citations, along with the original text, may be found in Appendix B.

15. Furūzānfar, *Sukhan*, 371; Mahdī Muḥaqqiq, "Yādʹdāsht-hāʾī dar bārah-i manẓūmah-i Vīs va Rāmīn," *Yaghmā* 10, nos. 9, 10 (1336 [1957]): 462–64.

16. See ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Muḥammad Thaʿālibī, *Yatīmat al-dahr fī maḥāsin ahl al-ʿaṣr*, ed. Mufīd Muḥammad Qumayḥah, 6 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīyah, 2000), vol. 4; J. T. P. de Bruijn, "Arabic Influences on Persian Literature," in *General Introduction to Persian Literature*, ed. J. T. P. de Bruijn (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 370–71. Rowson notes that indeed Thaʿālibī seems rather uninterested in the new Persian poetry coming out of Khorasan in the tenth century; only two poets are named as bilingual (*dhū lisānayn*) and the most prominent poets of the Samanid period receive little or no attention. However, the

or secretary of the day would require: Qur'an, hadith, grammar, poetry, rhetoric, and jurisprudence.[17] We can only speculate as to where Gorgāni received this training, but Richard Bulliet's research suggests that it might have been through the burgeoning *madrasa* system, schools that were founded either with private endowments or with state money, which was undergoing increased systemization at this time.[18] It is equally plausible that Gorgāni was an "independent scholar" who sought out private teachers on his own initiative; given the breadth and variety of his knowledge we encounter in *V&R*, this too seems a reasonable guess. One thing for certain is that in addition to his basic clerical training, Gorgāni was no slouch when it came to philosophy, theology, and the natural sciences. This is readily apparent in the opening lines of his doxology:

> Gratitude and praise upon that King who brought both us and the world into being!
> Realm and rule are justly His, for the King is never far from his kingdom.
> The pure Lord, without peer, without helper, far from thought and vision:
> The eye perceives Him not; to Him, the mind cannot find its way.[19] (1.1–4)

These lines lay out the paradox that the only word that can aptly describe God is "ineffable": neither the senses nor the mind can truly comprehend the nature of God's being, though his bounty is manifest in

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appendix to this anthology, the *Tatimmat al-yatīma*, is more alert to the phenomenon of poets composing in both languages. See Everett K. Rowson and Seeger A. Bonebakker, *A Computerized Listing of Biographical Data from the* Yatīmat al-dahr *by al-Thaʿālibī* (Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientique, 1980), 10.

17. Richard Bulliet, "The Age Structure of Medieval Islamic Education," *Studia Islamica* 57 (1983): 107–12; Arthur Stanley Tritton, *Materials on Muslim Education in the Middle Ages* (London: Luzac, 1957), 21–22, 32–34; Mehdi Nakosteen, *History of Islamic Origins of Western Education: With an Introduction to Medieval Muslim Education* (Boulder, CO: University of Colorado Press, 1964), 37–63; S. M. Ziauddin Alavi, *Muslim Educational Thought in the Middle Ages* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 1988), 71–77.

18. Richard Bulliet, *Islam: The View from the Edge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 145–51; see also Daphna Ephrat, *A Learned Society in a Period of Transition: The Sunni 'Ulama' of Eleventh-Century Baghdad* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 25–31. For a general survey of medieval Islamic education, see the seminal work by George Makdisi, *The Rise of the Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh University Press, 1981); and a summary of this book and its impact in Joseph Lowry, Devin Stewart, and Shawkat Toorawa, eds., *Law and Education in Medieval Islam: Studies in Memory of Professor George Makdisi* (Cambridge: E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 2004), 1–6. For studies of Islamic education in the thirteenth-fifteenth centuries, see Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education* (Princeton University Press, 1992); Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350* (Cambridge University Press, 1994); a broad overview of the system and its character is discussed in Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, 3 vols. (University of Chicago Press, 1977), 2:357, 438–45.

19. R19/T1/M1:

سپاس و آفرین آن پادشا را — که گیتی را پدید آورد و ما را
بدو زیباست مُلک و پادشایی — که هرگز ناید از مُلکش جدایی
خدای پاک و بی‌همتا و بی‌یار — هم از اندیشه دور و هم ز دیدار
نه بتواند مرو را چشم دیدن — نه اندیشه درو داند رسیدن

all aspects of creation. It is only through creation that one can conceptualize the Creator, but while these aspects can give us a picture of what God is like, they bring us no closer to understanding what he actually is. Such a portrait of the divine would have been quite familiar to readers of Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāma*, which was completed about forty years prior in 400/1010 and begins with these lines:[20]

> In the name of the Lord of life-force and mind, above whom thought cannot climb,
> The Lord of renown, the Lord of esteem, the Lord who guides and provides our daily bread,
> The Lord of heaven and turning spheres, who kindles the sun, the moon, the star of Venus,
> The Limner of all that may be seen, beyond all speech or sign or thought.
> Strain not your two eyes, for eyes alone will not behold the Creator;
> And thought finds not a way to He who is beyond all name and place.
> And though speech may transcend the elements, neither mind nor spirit will trace a path to Him.[21] (1.1–7)

Such a portrayal of the deity in either text is by no means "un-Islamic"; the idea that the eye cannot perceive God, for example, recalls the qur'anic verse, "No vision can comprehend Him, but He comprehends all vision."[22] But as time moved along, passages like these were amplified and interpreted to create a theology with a distinctly Neoplatonic coloring. It is not enough to assert the ineffability of the divine and leave it at that; one should systematically describe all the different ways in which God is indescribable. Gorgāni does this in the following passage:

20. See Muḥammad ʿAlī Islāmī-Nudūshan, "Vīs va Rāmīn va Shāhnāmah," in *Nāmah-i Mīnūvī*, ed. Ḥabīb Yaghmā'ī, Iraj Afshār, and Muḥammad Rawshan (Tehran: Kāvīyān, 1350 [1971]), 20–21 for a side-by-side comparison of the doxologies of *V&R* and the *Shāhnāma*, which follow a very similar arrangement.

21. Firdawsī, *Shāhnāmah*, ed. Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh, 8 vols. (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1987–2008), 1:3, vv. 1–7. I owe a debt to Franklin Lewis's translation of this passage, from which I borrowed with a liberal hand; for I am stumped to find a better word than his rendering of *jān* as "life-force" and *negāranda* as "limner," among other *mots justes*. See "The Spirituality of Persian Islamic Poetry," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Islamic Spirituality*, ed. Vincent J. Cornell and Bruce Lawrence (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2016).

به نامِ خداوندِ جان و خرد　　کزین برتر اندیشه برنگذرد
خداوندِ نام و خداوندِ جای　　خداوندِ روزی‌ده و رهنمای
خداوندِ کیوان و گردان سپهر　　فروزندهٔ ماه و ناهید و مهر
ز نام و نشان و گمان برترست　　نگارندهٔ بر شده گوهرست
به بینندگان آفریننده را　　نبینی مرنجان دو بیننده را
نه اندیشه یابد بدو نیز راه　　که او برتر از نام و از جایگاه
سخن هر چه زین گوهران بگذرد　　نیابد بدو راه جان و خرد

22. Q6.103: *lā tudrikuhu l-abṣāru wa-huwa yudriku l-abṣāra*. Moḥaqqeq locates two additional qur'anic references in the remainder of this doxology, connecting "Had starless been the turning spheres, the ages of the world would not have been diverse" (*agar biakhtar-asti charkh-e gardān · nagashti mokhtalef owqāt-e gayhān*, 1.30) with Q2.189, and "The world's minerals, vegetables, and animals all became the dominion of Man" (*nabāt-e ʿālam o ḥayvān o gowhar · sarāsar ādami rā shod mokhassar*, 1.77) with Q17.70. See Muḥaqqiq, "Yād´dāsht-hā," 420–21.

Unlike substance, He accepts no imperfection, nor does His state alter by it.
Accident does not mingle with substances in Him, for substance, by necessity, proceeds from Him.[23]
One should not say "how" He is, for He transcends simile and depiction.
Nor is "how many" right for Him, for quantities are counted and measured.
Nor can His "where" be described, for then something must surpass His limit.
His "when" should not be said, for time cannot gauge His being,
And if one appends "when" to His name, then "first" and "final" must be said.
Nor is He bound to anything else, for then those would equal His being.
Nor has He position, border, and measure, for then His limits would be clear.
His essence has never had a place, nor knowledge of it hidden.
The Originator of time since time began, none could be His peer in that origination.[24]
Time began by His command, at the loftiest point of the substantial universe.[25] (1.1–16)

Thus God is a pure being devoid of substance, time, and motion; we are reminded of Fārābī's (d. 339/950) identification of God with the First Cause, or the theology of Isma'ili missionaries in Khorasan like Muḥammad Nasafī (d. 332/943) and Abu Ya'qūb Sijistānī (d. ca. 361/971), who disassociated God from any activity or involvement in the sub-lunar realm.[26] The most direct interlocutor for Gorgāni's philosophy is again provided by the inestimable Foruzānfar, who noticed that this doxology lines up with Avicenna's *Sublime Sermon* (*al-khuṭba al-gharrā'*) on an almost point-by-point basis.[27] This corre-

23. His word for "accident" is *'araḍ*, a particularly Avicennian term; see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy from its Origin to the Present: Philosophy in the Land of Prophecy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006), 69.

24. The term for "originator," *mobde'*, plays a prominent role in the thought of the Isma'ili missionary Muḥammad Nafasī; see Paul E. Walker, "The Ismā'īlīs," in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, ed. Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 78–79.

25. R19/T1/M1:

نه نقصانی پذیرد همچو جوهر　　نه زان گردد مرو را حالِ دیگر
نه هست او را عَرَض با جوهری یار　　که جوهر پس ازو بوده‌ست ناچار
نشاید وصفِ او گفتن که چونست　　که از تشبیه و از وصف او برونست
به وصفش چند گفتن هم نه زیباست　　که چندی را مقادیرست و احصاست
کجا وصفش به گفتن هم نشاید　　که پس پیرامنش چیزی بباید
به وصفش هم نشاید گفت گَی بود　　کجا هستیش را مدّت نپیمود
وگر گَی بودن اندر وصفش آید　　پس او را اوّل و آخر بباید
نه با چیزی بپیوستست دیگر　　که پس باشند در هستی برابر
نه هست او را نهاد و حد و مقدار　　که پس باشد نهایاتش پدیدار
نه ذاتِ او بُوَد هرگز مکانی　　نه علمِ ذاتِ او باشد نهانی
زمان را مُبدع او بودست ز آغاز　　نبایستش دران مبداع انباز
زمان از وی پدید آمد به فرمان　　به نزدِ برترین جوهر ز گیهان

26. W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh University Press, 1962), 63; Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 58–61, 121–23; Walker, "The Ismā'īlīs." For a full picture of the range and diversity of Neoplatonic thought in the medieval Islamic world, see Parviz Morewedge, ed., *Neoplatonism and Islamic Thought* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992).

27. Furūzānfar, *Sukhan*, 370. For the text of this sermon, and its Persian translation by 'Omar Khayyām, see Ahmedmian

spondence, evident in the citation below, offers compelling grounds to suppose that Gorgāni knew of the famous philosopher and was familiar with his works. After all, the two were only separated by a generation and visited the same lands: Avicenna passed through Gorgan in 403/1013, and from 415/1024 to his death in 428/1037 he resided in Isfahan, where Gorgāni arrived fourteen years later.[28]

> Holy is God, the Dominant Lord and Subduer, whom the eyes cannot perceive, nor the intellect conceive. He is not a (1) SUBSTANCE, susceptible of receiving contraries, nor an Accident, to be preceded by the existence of SUBSTANCE. He cannot be defined by (2) QUALITY, to resemble anything; nor by (3) QUANTITY, to be measured and divided. He is not to be qualified by a (4) RELATION, to conceal it in His all-comprehensive existence; nor to (5) SPACE, to be encompassed and enclosed. He is not terminable by (6) TIME, so as to be carried from one period to another; nor has He (7) POSITION, acquiring different figures by limits and extremities.[29]

This abstract and highly philosophical portrait of the Creator has provoked much discussion about the role of fatalism, agnosticism, and deism in both *Vis & Rāmin* and the *Shāhnāma*. Helmer Ringgren observes that Gorgāni and Ferdowsi rarely use the word *Allāh* to name God, opting instead for more generic terms such as "Lord" (*khodāvand*), "Creator" (*dādār*), "Judge" (*dāvari*), or oblique references to the decrees of time and the heavens.[30] Such vagueness, he avers, may be intentional, affording each writer "an intermediate position between the Iranian conceptions of his source and those of Islam."[31] This is not to say, of course, that these are *irreligious* texts, but that their authors shy away from committing to a comprehensive theological doctrine, allowing their characters and readers to puzzle out

Akhtar, "A Tract of Avicenna, Translated by 'Umar Khayyâm," *Islamic Culture* 9, no. 2 (1935): 218–233; further information can be found in Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy from its Origin to the Present*, 171–72.

28. Dimitri Gutas, "Avicenna ii. Biography," in *EIr* (1987), online edition, accessed June 11, 2015, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/avicenna-ii.

29. Akhtar, "A Tract of Avicenna," 220. The translator notes that these and the three principles that follow—condition, passion, and action—correspond with Aristotle's Ten Categories.

30. See Helmer Ringgren, *Fatalism in Persian Epics* (Uppsala: Lundequistska Bokhandeln, 1952), 111–23; also Firdawsī, *The Sháhnáma of Firdausí*, trans. Arthur George Warner and Edmond Warner, 9 vols. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1905–25), 1:50; Theodor Nöldeke, *The Iranian National Epic, or, the Shahnamah*, 2nd ed., trans. Leonid Th. Bogdanov, Originally published as *Das iranische Nationalepos* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1920) (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1979), 55–56; A. Shapur Shahbazi, *Ferdowsī: A Critical Biography* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 1991), 49–59. The name *Allāh* appears three times in *V&R*, invoked by Vis in her letters in the formulae "may God forgive" (*'afā Allāh*) and "may God punish" (*jazā Allāh*); the word "divine" (*elāhi*) also occurs in the opening doxology on the world's submission to God: "But the world of being and fading received another divine command" (*valikan 'ālam-e kown o tabāhi · degargun yāft farmān-e elāhi* 1.65). See Emiko Okada and Kazuhiko Machida, *Persia bungaku bunka no data-base-ka josei no seikatsu to shikou wo chusin-ni* [*Database on Persian Literature and Culture with Special Reference to Women's Life and Thought*] (Tokyo: University of Foreign Studies, 1991).

31. Ringgren, *Fatalism in Persian Epics*, 123; cf. Francesco Gabrieli, "Note sul *Vīs u Rāmīn* di Faḫr ad-Dīn Gurgānī," *Rendiconti della R. Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Classe di scienzi morali, storichi e fologiche, ser. 6* 15 (1939): 186.

the thorny problem of fate and free will on their own: if God is active, he works through the lesser and somewhat inscrutable forces of time, happenstance, and destiny.[32]

Having described what God is not, Gorgāni then tells the story of the world's genesis. Again, the Neoplatonic concept of emanation is crucial in this account, providing the bridge across the expansive gulf that separates creation from the Creator:[33]

> First God created the substance of spiritual beings, devoid of space and time,
> And stripped their forms of matter: guides of felicity, through and through.
> He adorned them with His own light, and through them revealed His will.
> First came the angels, and thence the heavens' substance,
> And from them thence the lustrous forms, like roses in a bed of green:[34]
> Their shape is round, the finest shape, just as the finest color is lumnious.[35]
> . . . .
> From *hylē*, he brought forth the elements, each with a purpose:
> Heat that severs bonds; cold that forms them;[36]
> Damp that makes bodies malleable at the time they take shape,
> Dryness that holds them down, fixes, and rectifies.[37] (1.22–27, 50–52)

32. In this regard, I would diverge from Azinfar's reading of *V&R* as an "atheistic" text in *Atheism in the Medieval Islamic and European World: The Influence of Persian and Arabic Ideas of Doubt and Skepticism on Medieval European Literary Thought* (Bethesda, MD: Ibex Publishers, 2008), 139. Sarah Stroumsa reminds us that even the most heterodox freethinkers in medieval Islam were not formal atheists in that they denied God's existence, but rather disputed the cornerstone beliefs in revelation and prophecy; *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam: Ibn al-Rāwandī, Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, and Their Impact on Islamic Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 8–15, 121–30. See also my discussion of this issue in "'If Death is Just, What is Injustice?' Illicit Rage in 'Rostam and Sohrab' and 'The Knight's Tale'," *Iranian Studies* 48, no. 3 (2015): 395–422.

33. For a general introduction to the Islamic theory of emanation, see David C. Reisman, "Al-Fārābī and the Philosophical Curriculum," in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, ed. Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 56–60; also Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 156–60.

34. The night sky is often described as "green" in Arabic and Persian.

35. The correspondence between this passage and the treatise by Avicenna is again apparent; cf. Akhtar, "A Tract of Avicenna," 221:

> These (Spiritual Substances) were made free from Matter and devoid of energy and aptitude. God shone over them so that they became illuminated, and He irradiated them so that they became resplendent. hen then infused into their forms His own similitude and made them to display His actions. Thus each of them had, from the very beginning, the existence of an angel through whom He brought the heavens into being. Through their agency He created (by Order) divine bodies, whose figures (constellations) are excellent in their motion which is circular, and their colours are most beautiful, that is bright and shining.

36. I'm following Morrison's emendation of *payvand-hā* ("bonds") to *payvandbor* ("bond-cutter"), based on the Oxford manuscript. See *Vis & Rāmin* (*tr. Morrison*), 2.

37. R20/T2/M1:

نخستین جوهرِ روحانیان کرد   که او را نز مکان و نز زمان کرد
برهنه کرد صورت‌شان ز مادت   سراسر رهنمایانِ سعادت
به نورِ خویش ایشان را بیاراست   وزیشان کرد پیدا هرچه خود خواست
نخستین آنچه پیدا شد ملک بود   وزان پس جوهری کرد آن فلک بود
وزیشان آمد این اجرامِ روشن   بسانِ گل میانِ سبزِ گلشن
بهین شکلیست ایشان را مدوّر   چنانچون بهترین لونی منوّر

We see in this passage the familiar synthesis of Plotinian cosmogony and Ptolemaic astronomy that characterizes a good deal of the speculative thought of this milieu. The closest interlocutor may again be the *Shāhnāma*, which offers a comparable discussion of the mingling of the elements, but similar passages may be found in the doxologies of other prominent Persian masnavis in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, revealing a general propensity for abstract—one might say deist—representations of God as the Universal Intellect, as Logos, as the Limner who ornaments all creation with his beauty and fills it with yearning to return to him.[38] An especially interesting feature of Gorgāni's narrative is the encyclopedic range of his terminology: while the Aristotelean term *hylē* (Ar. *hayūlā*) was well-known in philosophical circles, it was perhaps a little obscure for a general audience, for he explains elsewhere, "*hylē* is what the scholars call forces that accept potentiality; just as God has boundless creative powers, boundless too is their potential."[39] The poet's reference to boundlessness in glossing a Greek term activates another important concept in ancient Iranian thought, for the Zoroastrian cosmogony known as the *Bundahišn* puts much emphasis on the endless light (*a-sar-rošnīh*) and boundless time (*zamān ī a-kanārag*, 1.2) contained within the supreme deity Ahura-Mazda (Ohrmazd), such that "from Boundless Time [Ohrmazd] brought forth Time of Long Dominion, which one calls 'bounded time' " (*pas az zamān ī a-kanārangīhā zamān ī dagrand-xwadāy frāz brēhēnīd ast kē zamān ī kanārangōmand gōwed*, 1.38).[40]

پدید آورد آن را از هیولی   چهار ارکان بدین هر چار معنی
از آن پیوندبر آمد حرارت   دگر پیوند کز وی شد برودت
رطوبت جسم‌ها را کرد چونان   که گاهِ شکل بستن بُد به فرمان
یبوست همچنان او را فرو داشت   بدان تقویم و آن تعدیل کاو داشت

38. Cf. Firdawsī, *Shāhnāmah*, 1:3, vv. 34–59; *Varqah va Gulshāh-i ʿAyyūqī*, ed. Zabīḥ Allāh Ṣafā (Tehran: Dānishgāh-i Tihrān, 1964), 1; ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad Asadī Ṭusi, *Garshāsbnāmah*, ed. Ḥabīb Yaghmā'ī (Tehran: Burūkhīm, 1317 [1939]), 1–3; Abū al-Majd Majdūd ibn Ādam Sanā'ī al-Ghaznavī, *Hadīqat al-ḥaqīqat wa sharīʿat al-ṭarīqah*, ed. Muḥammad Rawshan (Tehran: Nigāh, 1387 [2008]), 25–27; Niẓāmī Ganjavī, *Khusraw va Shīrīn*, ed. Vaḥīd Dastgirdī and Saʿīd Ḥamīdiyān (Tehran: Qaṭrah, 1378 [1999]), 3–5; *Haft Paykar*, ed. Vaḥīd Dastgirdī and Saʿīd Ḥamīdiyān (Tehran: Qaṭrah, 1376 [1997]), 1–6, cf. *Haft Paykar: A Medieval Persian Romance*, trans. Julie Scott Meisami (Oxford University Press, 1995), 1–4. *Varqa & Golshāh* is an interesting case: though it dates to the early eleventh century, its doxology is written in a more recent hand and its contents corresponding nearly word-for-word with the opening of Khwāju's *Homāy & Homāyun* (w. 731/1331); see François de Blois, *Persian Literature: A Bio-bibliographical Survey. Volume V: Poetry of the Pre-Mongol Period*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), 74. But the passage that follows, the older hand, is a stripped-down praise of Discourse (*sakhon*) that sounds very Neẓāminian in its outlook. Neẓāmi also devotes special chapters to the Prophet, but his depiction of God as the "Universal Intellect" (*ʿaql-e kolli*) beyond the sensory realm is certainly informed by Neoplatonic principles.

39. R20/T3/M2:

هیولی خوانَد او را مردِ دانا   به قوّت‌ها پذیرفتن توانا
چو ایزد را دهش‌ها بیکران است   پذیرفتن مرو را همچنان است

40. Faẓl Allāh Pākzād, ed., *Bundahišn: Zoroastrische Kosmogonie und Kosmologie* (Tehran: Centre for the Great Islamic Encyclopaedia, 2005), 5, 17; for similar passages, see 1.6–11, 1.41.

Regardless of whether Gorgāni was fully aware of these connections or not, it seems apparent that *V&R*, an ancient text like the *Shāhnāma*, resonates with a wide spectrum of religious and philosophical texts and traditions from late antiquity.

The picture of Gorgāni that emerges is thus one of a very learned (or eclectic) scholar, an epithet the poet applies to himself in the seventh chapter of *V&R* (7.54).[41] His breadth of erudition continues to impress as the story unfolds: Paul Kunitzsch observes that his celebrated "Description of the Night" names all but two of the forty-eight constellations enumerated in Ptolemy's *Almagest*, of which several Arabic translations had been made by the tenth century, and deems it probable that Gorgāni had recourse to a celestial globe or Bīrūnī's manual of astrology, *Kitāb al-tafhīm li-awāʾil ṣināʿat al-tanjīm* (w. 420/1029), in composing this scene.[42] The poet will later show off his knowledge of Middle Persian, explaining that the meaning of Khorasan is "the coming sun" and that Rāmin's name means "happy."[43] Such gestures raise the intriguing possibility that Gorgāni could read the Pahlavi script, a skill that was largely inaccessible to one of his background by this time; this is a topic we will address in our discussion of *V&R*'s sources.

The second chapter of *Vis & Rāmin*, a panegyric to the prophet Muḥammad, reveals other aspects of Gorgāni's religiosity that highlight important thematics of the story to come.[44] Like other narrative po-

41. Cf. Furūzānfar, *Sukhan*, 370–72; Mīnuvī, "Vīs va Rāmīn," 15; Muḥammad Jaʿfar Maḥjūb, "Naẓarī bih sayr-i ʿishq dar dāstān-i Vīs va Rāmīn," *Īrānshināsī* 4, no. 3 (1371 [1992]): 471–72, http://www.noormags.ir/view/fa/articlepage/354575.

42. Paul Kunitzsch, "The 'Description of the Night' in Gurgānī's *Vīs u Rāmīn*," *Der Islam* 59 (1982): 94–97. For the passage in question, see *Vis & Rāmin* (*ed. Rawshan*), 77–79; *Vis & Rāmin* (*tr. Morrison*), 56–58; *Vis & Rāmin* (*tr. Davis*), 51–54. Kunitzsch attempted to date the poem according to the position of the celestial bodies, but came up empty-handed, concluding that Gorgāni "inserted this horoscope, which in itself is correct as to astrological principles but which is kept void of astronomical elements pointing to fixed dates, as a literary element only, obviously with the intention of not giving the reader a hint towards a historical identification of the story told in the poem" (109). The following year, however, Otto Neugebauer proposed an amended reading of the text that allowed for a number of possible dates to be assigned, of which 31 March 968 was named as the best fit; I'm not sure how this knowledge benefits us, but it is certainly interesting. See "The Date of the 'Horoscope' in Gurgānī's Poem," *Der Islam* 60 (1983): 300.

43. See R137/T176/M117/D139 and R368/T527/M374/D491 respectively. The definition of Rāmin's name goes as follows: "He was a king of happy life and happy name, for 'Rām' in their language means 'happy' " (*shah-i khwash-zendegi buda-st o khwash-nām · ke khwad dar lafẓ-eshān khwash bovad rām*, 124.85). As for Khorasan, Gabrieli concedes that Gorgāni's etymology for the word (*xwar āsad* "the sun comes" > *xwar-āsān* "the coming sun") is "real Pahlavi, and not some vague archaic Persian"; "Note sul *Vīs u Rāmīn*," 172. The full passage reads: "What a beautiful land is Khorasan! Live there, and meet the world in ease! Anyone who knows Pahlavi knows that 'Khorasan' comes from *xwar āsad*, which means 'the sun is coming'; from there the sun arrives to Fars and Iraq. 'Khorasan' means 'the coming sun,' because from there the sun comes to Iran" (48.1–4).

خوشا جایا بر و بومِ خراسان   درو باش و جهان را می‌خور آسان
زبانِ پهلوی هر کاو شناسد   خراسان آن بود کز وی خور آسد
خور آسد پهلوی باشد خور آید   عراق و پارس را خور زو برآید
شهی خوشزندگی بودست و خوش‌نام   که خود در لفظ ایشان خوش بود رام

44. See section 4.1 for further discussion of this passage.

ems of the eleventh century (the *Shāhnāma*, *Varqa & Golshāh*, the *Garshāspnāma*), the story of Prophet's life seems a bit cursory, at least in comparison with the fulsome treatment he is given in similar poems from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. We see no references to the Prophet's family or his companions, no discussion of his virtues or character, nor even a description of his journey to heaven that became a set-piece (the *meʿrājiya*) in the masnavis of later poets like Sanāʾi (d. 535/1140), Khāqāni (d. 595/1198), Neẓāmi (d. ca. 606/1209), ʿAṭṭār (d. 618/1221), and Amir Khosrow (d. 725/1325).[45] The version in *V&R*, however, is no less effective for its brevity; indeed, it appears to be structured in such a way as to lay heavy emphasis on the themes of forgiveness and deliverance, a move that does not seem out of place for a story about two adulterers. In Gorgāni's account, Muḥammad comes to a world that has fallen to a man into loss (*gomrāhi*) and despair (*ghammi*); whether with a cross in hand, Avestan hymns on the lips, reverencing the Buddha, or bowing before the sun and moon, "all had taken the upside-down road to perdition" (*gerefta har yak-i rāh-e negunsār · ke ān rah rā be dozakh buda hanjar*, 2.7). To dispel the darkness, God endows his prophet with the sword of leadership and the miraculous language of the Qur'an, exactly what was needed for Muḥammad's mission to succeed in his circumstances: "[The Arabs'] poetry is brilliant in eloquence, and their doughty feats cannot be numbered" (*sakhon-shān dar faṣāḥat ābdār ast · honar-shān dar shojāʿat bi-shomār ast*, 2.17). When the "people of such deeds and words" (*chonān qowm-i bedān kerdār o goftār*, 2.18) recognized these proofs of prophethood, they joined Muḥammad in the battles of Badr and Khaybar and cast the idols out of Mecca. That is the extent of the story; the Prophet's biography ends after a mere seven lines. This abrupt ending allows Gorgāni to redirect his narrative back towards God, this time with the themes of benevolence and mercy fully activated within his readers' minds.

> The Prophet came and gave [God's] message, delivering a world from his wrath;
> How tender and compassionate is the Lord! Such mercy and benevolence!
> . . . .

45. Najib Mayel-Heravi, "Quelques meʿrāǧiyye en persan," in *Le voyage initiatique en terre d'Islam: ascensions célestes et itinéraires spirituels*, ed. Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi (Louvain: Peeters, 1996), 119–204; Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, "Meʿrāj i. Definition," in *EIr*, online edition (2010), accessed June 11, 2015, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/meraj-i. For some examples of this genre, see Sanāʾī al-Ghaznavī, *Hadīqat al-ḥaqīqat wa sharīʿat al-ṭarīqah*, 132–33; Niẓāmī Ganjavī, *Haft Paykar*, 10–12; Niẓāmī Ganjavī, *Khusraw va Shīrīn*, 9–14; Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, ed. Muḥammad Riẓā Shafīʿī-Kadkanī (Tehran: Sukhan, 1383 [2004]), 247–49; ʿAṭṭār, *Ilāhī nāmah*, 119–23.

O Lord! We have done what was incumbent upon us; we have committed our bodies and souls to your command:
We have accepted your religion from the Prophet, and raise our praise and thanksgiving!
But *you're* the one who molded our form, *you* composed the destiny that awaits us.
So if, at times, a sin or mistake comes from out our bodies,
Don't bring it upon our heads, don't reward us as we deserve!
For we are weak followers of you, Lord, as we are part of Muṣṭafā's community.
Though our sins be beyond all measure, we still bear hope of your grace and clemency.
. . . .
With Muḥammad at the van of your mercy, how could our hopes be denied?[46]

(2.27–28, 35–41, 48)

In addition to providing further insight into Gorgāni's religious sensibilities, this passage furnishes us with a valuable hermeneutic tool in our consideration of fate and free will in the text. Responding against the Mu'tazili position that man creates his actions, the Ash'ari and Maturidi schools of theology turned to verses in the Qur'an such as "God created you and that which you do" to argue that all action, good or ill, cannot be created by man, but are rather acquired by or imputed to him on the basis of his will.[47] The Seljuks were strident advocates of the Hanafi-Maturidi alliance of Islamic law and theology, and to see this description of God's mastery over all human action within this passage suggests, contra the suggestions of Ṣafā and Hedāyat, that Gorgāni probably was affiliated (or affiliated himself) with the ideology of his patrons.[48] But perhaps more important for our purposes, the idea that sin is ultimately

46. R23/T9/M5:

رسول آمد رسالت‌ها رسانید   جهانی را ز خشمِ او رهانید
چه بخشاینده و مشفق خداییست   چه نیکوکار و چه رحمت‌نماییست
خدایا آنچه بر ما بود کردیم   تن و جان را به فرمانت سپردیم
ز پیغمبر پذیرفتیم دینت   بیفزودیم شکر و آفرینت
ولیکن این تنِ ما تو سرشتی   قضای خویش بر ما تو نوشتی
گر ایدون کز تنِ ما گاه‌گاهی   پدید آید خطایی یا گناهی
مزن کردارِ ما را بر سرِ ما   مکن پاداشِ ما را در خورِ ما
که ما بیچارگانِ تو خداییم   همیدون ز امّتانِ مصطفاییم
اگرچه با گناهِ بی‌شماریم   به فضل و رحمتت امیدواریم
چو پیشِ رحمتت آید محمّد   امیدِ ما ز فضلت کی شود رد

47. Q37.96: *wa-l-Lāhu khalaqakum wa-mā taʿmalūn*. Cf. Louis Gardet, *EI*² (Brill Online), s.v. "Kasb," accessed June 11, 2015, http://www.paulyonline.brill.nl.proxy.uchicago.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/kasb-COM_0457.

48. For more on the Maturidi school and its development in Transoxiana, see Mustafa Cerić, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam: A Study of the Theology of Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought / Civilization, 1995) and Ulrich Ruldoph, *Al-Maturidi and the Development of Sunni Theology in Samarqand*, trans. Rodrigo Adem (Leiden: Brill, 2015). Ṣafā believed, on the basis of the doxology, that Gorgāni was a Mu'tazili; see *Tārīkh-i Adabīyāt*, 2:371. Hedāyat, on the other hand, suggested that Gorgāni was Shi'i, but the only evidence he cites to defend this claim is a line when Vis says she saw an angel clad in green (68.159), and another in which she claims no grave would accept her polluted body (111.45). See Hidāyat, "Chand nuktah," 388–389.

unascribable to the deeds of human actors but must be linked to and ultimately derive from a sometimes inscrutable divine will is a valuable concept to keep in mind when we watch the characters struggle with the question of blame and moral responsibility in the story; even before Vis and Rāmin are born, we are told that their adulterous love was willed by divine decree:

> When someone reads this story, he will know the faults of this world.
> He must not blame them, for the way of God's wisdom can never be closed.[49] (12.11–12)

This does not of course mean the lovers are any less worried about their morality of their actions, but we will see that they too adopt this language in their defense when they contemplate their fall into shame and disgrace.

1.2 The rise of the Seljuk Turks

Although this is about all we can speculate about the personal and intellectual biography of Fakhroddin Gorgāni, his career is bound up with political developments that provide a rich historical context in which to situate his work. Indeed, snippets of the history that follows can be found in the prologue of *V&R*, for Gorgāni's rise as a poet dovetails almost exactly with the rise of a military leader whose dynasty, the Seljuk Turks, would transform the ethnic, political, and religious landscape of southwest Asia over the course of the eleventh century. The Seljuks' story begins in the eastern marches of central Asia: they were descended from a branch of the Oghuz (Ar. *Ghuzz*) Turks, which in turn formed part of the Eastern Türk qaghanate with its capital south of Lake Baikal in the sixth and seventh centuries. The eighth and ninth centuries saw a great deal of internal displacement and upheaval in this region; the Türks were supplanted by the Uyghurs in 744, who fell in turn to the Kirghiz in 840 CE. In the wake of these political breakdowns, the Oghuz migrated westwards and eventually settled along the northern shores of the Aral Sea.[50] Writing for the Farighunid amirs of northern Afghanistan, the anonymous author of *The Regions*

49. R49/T45/M27/D12:

چو برخواند کسی این داستان را — بداند عیبهای این جهان را
نباید سرزنش کردن بدیشان — که راهِ حکمِ یزدان بست نتوان

50. For more on this early period and the origins of the Oghuz Turks, see Peter B. Golden, *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples: Ethnogenesis and State-Formation in Medieval and Early Modern Eurasia and the Middle East* (Wiesbaden:

of the World gives us a snapshot of how the Oghuz were perceived on the eve of their spectacular rise to power:

> The Ghūz have arrogant faces and are quarrelsome, malicious, and malevolent. Both in summer and winter they wander along the pasture-lands and grazing-grounds. Their wealth is in horses, cows, sheep, arms, and game in small quantities. . . . [They] have no towns, but the people owning felt-huts are very numerous. They possess arms and implements and are courageous and daring in war. They continually make inroads into the lands of Islam, whatever place be on the way, and (then) strike, plunder, and retreat as quickly as possible. Each of their tribes has a (separate) chief on account of their discords with each other.[51]

This was written in the year 372/982: the Buyid rulers of central Iran were enjoying a final political and cultural efflorescence under the viziership of Ṣāḥib b. ʿAbbād (d. 385/999); to the north and east, the Samanid amirs, the first great patrons of New Persian literature, were losing ground to the Turkic Qarakhanids, who had recently converted *en masse* to Islam; and the future sultan Maḥmud of Ghazna was eleven years old, probably already forming his ambitious plans for the future.[52] Upon assuming the leadership of his clan in 388/998, Maḥmud launched a decisive campaign against rival Turkic armies in Khorasan, while the Qarakhanids mopped up the remnants of the Samanid family in Transoxiana. For thirty-two years until his death in 421/1030, Maḥmud was the undisputed master of Khorasan, Sistan, and the mountains of Ghur (modern-day Afghanistan).[53]

Meanwhile, further north, an Oghuz leader named Seljuk converted to Islam, broke off from the tribal confederacy to which he belonged, and set up shop in the town of Jand, on the lower banks of the Syr Darya (Jaxartes) river. There, as the historian Rāvandi (fl. early thirteenth c.) tells us, he developed

Harrassowitz, 1992), 115–54, 205–11; Carter V. Findley, *The Turks in World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 37–50; V. M. Zaporozhets, *The Seljuks*, trans. K. A. Nazarévskaia (Hannover: European Academy of Natural Sciences e.V., 2012), 83–89; C. E. Bosworth, "The Political and Dynastic History of the Iranian World (A.D. 1000–1217)," in *The Cambridge History of Iran, Volume 5: The Saljuq and Mongol Periods*, ed. J. A. Boyle (Cambridge University Press, 1968), 15–18; Claude Cahen, *EI*[2] (Brill Online), s.v. "Ghuzz," accessed June 11, 2015, http://www.paulyonline.brill.nl.proxy.uchicago.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/ghuzz-COM_0240.

51. Vladimir Minorsky, ed., *Ḥudūd al-ʿĀlam: 'The Regions of the World,' a Persian Geography* (*372 A.H.–982 A.D.*), First published in 1937 (Karachi: Indus Publications, 1980), 100–101. I removed the numerous Persian words that were transliterated in the original.

52. For further information on these figures and dynasties, see Maurice Pomerantz, "A Political Biography of al-Ṣāḥib Ismāʿīl b. ʿAbbād," *JAOS* 134, no. 1 (2014): 15–22; D. G. Tor, "The Islamization of Central Asia in the Sāmānid Era and the Reshaping of the Muslim World," *BSOAS* 72, no. 2 (2009): 294–95; Richard N. Frye, "The Sāmānids," in *The Cambridge History of Iran, Volume 4: The Period from the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs*, ed. Richard N. Frye (Cambridge University Press, 1975), 157–59.

53. A good introduction to Maḥmud's career can be found in C. E. Bosworth, "The Early Ghaznavids," in *The Cambridge History of Iran, Volume 4: The Period from the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs*, ed. Richard N. Frye (Cambridge University Press, 1975), 164–87.

a powerful and well-trained army that he hired out in exchange for pasture-land.[54] Although this extra muscle was in great demand amidst the competing khans and sultans of the region, Seljuk and his people had the unfortunate habit of picking the losing side. They first served the Samanids until that dynasty's collapse in 389/999, then joined a rebellious scion of the Qarakhanids that was eventually crushed in a joint effort between Maḥmud and the Great Khan in Bukhara; forced to relocate to Khwarazm, they served the local prince Hārūn b. Altuntash, who decided to declare independence from the Ghaznavids and was assassinated for his troubles in the year 426/1035.[55] Now led by Seljuk's grandsons Toghrul and Chaghrı, the displaced tribe again moved southwards, looting, pillaging, and "generally terrorizing the towns of Khurāsān" as they went.[56] Although there were attempts to come to some arrangement with the new king of Ghazna, Maḥmud's son Masʿud, diplomacy ultimately failed and Masʿud sent a great army out to destroy the Seljuks in June of 426/1035. At last, the Seljuks' fortunes turned; despite unfavorable odds, they managed to inflict a crushing defeat on Masʿud's forces and seized a fortune in booty that amounted to some ten million dinars.[57] The *coup de grâce* came in 431/1040 at the battle of Dandānqān, where the depleted Ghaznavid army was utterly routed. Masʿud fled east to India, and the cities of Khorasan fell like dominoes to the victors.[58]

It is shortly after this battle that Gorgāni enters our story, for he relates in considerable detail the events of Dandānqān and its aftermath. After securing their hold on Khwarazm and Khorasan, the two

54. Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī Rāvandī, *Rāḥat al-ṣudūr va āyat al-surūr dar tārīkh-i Āl-i Saljūq*, ed. Muhammad Iqbal (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Asāṭīr, 1385 [2007]), 86–88; cf. Bosworth, "Political and Dynastic History," 18. The *Saljuqnāma*, written between 1176 and 1194 by Ẓahiroddin Nishāpuri and preserved in Rashidoddin's *Compendium of Histories*, gives the following anecdote about the negotiations between Maḥmud of Ghazna and Esrāʿil b. Seljuk; cf. Rashīd al-Dīn Ṭabīb, *The History of the Seljuq Turks from the Jāmiʿ al-tawārīkh: An Ilkhanid Adaptation of the Saljūq-nāma of Ẓahīr al-Dīn Nīshāpūrī*, ed. C. E. Bosworth, trans. Kenneth Allin Luther (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001), 31:

> Maḥmūd said, "If at some time we need an army, to what extent can you assist us?" Isrāʾīl took his bow from the weapon-bearer and, out of pride inflated by the wine and because of the boastfulness of youth, said, "When I send this bow to my people, thirty thousand skilled men will mount up immediately." The Sultan asked again, "And if more are needed?" He cast an arrow before Maḥmūd and said, "Whenever I send this arrow as a sign to my tribe, ten thousand more men will come." He continued to question in that manner, finding that a bow and three arrows would compel a hundred thousand men.

55. V. V. Bartol'd, *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion*, 3rd ed., ed. C. E. Bosworth, With an additional chapter, hitherto unpublished in English, translated [from the Russian] by Mrs. T. Minorsky and edited by C.E. Bosworth, and with furthur addenda and corrigenda by C.E. Bosworth. (Luzac, 1968), 296–99.

56. Bosworth, "Political and Dynastic History," 19; Findley, *The Turks in World History*, 68. For Turkic names, I adopt Findley's transliteration.

57. Zaporozhets, *The Seljuks*, 119.

58. Cf. Golden, *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples*, 216–21 for a concise synthesis of the Seljuks' rise to power.

brothers held a council and agreed to embark on a wave of expansion and conquest: Chaghrı remained in the east to guard their recently-won territory from any counter-attack from the Ghaznavids, while Toghrul marched west, aiming for the rich lands of the Buyid dynasty in central Iran and Iraq.[59] Each leg of this campaign is mentioned in the third chapter of *Vis & Rāmin*: in 433/1041, Toghrul entered Gorgān and secured the allegiance of the local Ziyarid princes (and possibly recruited our poet), and thence to Tabaristan along the southern shores of the Caspian Sea, forcing the local inhabitants into vassalage (3.51–60). The following year, he doubled back to Khwarazm to settle an old score with Shāhmalik, ruler of Jand and inveterate enemy of the family; there, Gorgāni tells us, the hapless king "suffered both ignoble defeat at the hands of the sultan and a wretched death as he fled" (*ham az solṭān hazimat shod be khwāri · ham andar rāh koshta shod be zāri*, 3.44).[60] Toghrul then entered Rayy in 434/1043 and made it his new capital (3.61), from whence he conducted numerous raids throughout the region:

> He sent his generals to every place, which I will recall for you in brief:
> One went to Makran and Gorgan, another to Mosul and Khuzan;
> Another to Kerman and Shiraz, another to Shustar and Ahvaz;
> Another to Arran and Armenia, spreading misery amongst the lands of the Greeks.[61]
> (3.62–65)

The bulk of these references appear to line up with specific historic events: the march against the Greeks might refer to the campaigns of Toghrul's brother Ebrāhim Ïnal, who overpowered the Kakuyids in Hamadan then launched raids against the Byzantines in 437/1046 and 439/1048, getting as far as Malazgird, Erzerum, and Trebizond; the Turkmen leader Göktash sacked Mosul in 435/1044; Toghrul's name was read in the Friday sermon in Shiraz by 445/1053.[62]

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59. Zaporozhets, *The Seljuks*, 123–24.

60. Bartol'd, *Turkestan Down to the Mongol Invasion*, 302–4; Golden, *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples*, 218–19.

61. R27/T13/M8:

به هر جایی سپهداران فرستاد	که یک یک مختصر با تو کنم یاد
سپهداری به مکران رفت و گرگان	یکی دیگر به موصل رفت و خوزان
یکی دیگر به کرمان رفت و شیراز	یکی دیگر به شُشتر رفت و اهواز
یکی دیگر به ارّان رفت و ارمن	فگند اندر دیارِ روم شیون

62. These dates have been collated in consultation with the following references: Furūzānfar, *Sukhan*, 374–77; Maḥjūb, "Muqaddamah," 16–17; Bosworth, "Political and Dynastic History," 19–45; C. E. Bosworth, *EI*² (Brill Online), s.v. "Ṭoghrïl (I) Beg," accessed June 11, 2015, http://www.paulyonline.brill.nl.proxy.uchicago.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/toghril-i-beg-SIM_7578; Zaporozhets, *The Seljuks*, 118–126.

When not conquering new territory, Toghrul was just as active building alliances. Gorgāni tells us that an envoy arrived from the court of Qarakhanid prince Arslān Khan of Kashgar (d. 439/1027), seeking an alliance against his brother Boghrā Khan (3.67–69). We also learn of a Byzantine embassy brimming with soldiers, tribute, and freed prisoners (3.70–73); according to Ibn al-Athīr, Toghrul had released the king of Abkhaz (whom he had captured the year before) without demanding ransom, and in gratitude, the emperor Constantine IX Monomachos rewarded him with many precious gifts, refurbished the mosque in Constantinople, and had the Friday sermon given in Toghrul's name.[63] In 443/1051, the Abbasid caliph Qā'im sent a robe of investiture to Toghrul, which he donned as he entered Isfahan that same year (3.79–80). A great ruby was brought to him from the Levant (3.74–78) from Naṣr al-Dawla Aḥmad b. Marwān, who submitted to Toghrul's rule in 441/1049 and sent him this gift in 446/1054. Taking all of these dates into account, Foruzānfar concludes that *V&R* must have been written in 446/1054 or a year or two later, a dating that has been accepted to the present day.[64]

Toghrul would live on for another decade, campaigning in Iraq and Armenia, crushing rebellions by various members of his family, and seeking the hand of the caliph's daughter—a remarkable life, as Bosworth says, "for one who started out as an illiterate nomad chief."[65] But we must part ways with him here, for when he left for Hamadan in 445/1053, Fakhroddin Gorgāni did not go with him. As the poet says in the prologue, "I had some work to do in Isfahan, and it occupied all my time for a while" (*marā andar ṣefāhān bud kār-i · dar ān kār-am hami shod ruzgār-i*, 7.10); he therefore stayed on as the guest of the new governor of the city, ʿAmid Abu l-Fatḥ Moẓaffar b. Moḥammad Nayshāburi. We are fortunate to have a contemporaneous account about this governor and the city he ruled, for on the eighth of Ṣafar 444 (June 9, 1052), the poet, philosopher, and Isma'ili missionary Nāṣer-e Khosrow came to Isfahan, exactly when Gorgāni would have been living there. It is a pity that he gives us no news of our poet, but he does describe the city as populous and flourishing, with clean air and water, fine buildings, a large Friday mosque, markets and caravansarais, and "no ruins to speak of." Of its governor, he writes:

63. See ʿIzz al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-tārīkh*, ed. ʿUmar Tadmurī, 11 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1997), 8:78, year 441.

64. Furūzānfar, *Sukhan*, 375–76.

65. C. E. Bosworth, *EI*^{2} (Brill Online), s.v. "Ṭoghrïl (I) Beg," accessed June 11, 2015, http://www.paulyonline.brill.nl.proxy.uchicago.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/toghril-i-beg-SIM_7578.

> When Sultan Toghrul Bey, Abu Ṭāleb Moḥammad b. Mikāl b. Seljuk (God grant him mercy) took the city, a young man from Nishapur was appointed there. He was a good secretary with fine handwriting, quiet and of pleasant countenance, and they called him Khoja ʿAmid. He was gracious, well-spoken, and generous. The sultan had commanded that he not take anything [in the way of taxes] from the people, and he was now fulfilling his duty, and those who had been scattered had returned to the city.[66]

Nāṣer-e Khosrow's account corresponds with what Gorgāni says in his preface to *Vis & Rāmin*, for while he praises Toghrul extensively for his bravery and might, and his chief minister Abu Naṣr Kondori for his wisdom, eloquence, and ready wit, Abu l-Fatḥ receives special kudos for his abilities in management and administration:

> Isfahan was like a broken limb, now healed by his royal charisma.
> It's no surprise that its trees bear fruit of praise to the Khoja this year;
> Thanks to his peace and justice, not a single rose-petal in the garden has been touched by the winter winds.
> The universal sovereign [Toghrul] always knew to whom he must entrust this task:
> If he made Isfahan sick, he's given it a knowledgeable doctor.[67] (6.10–11, 28–32)

The comparison of Isfahan to a broken limb is perhaps not out of line, for marauding tribes have a tendency to ruin the land they pass through; indeed, in 439/1048, the residents of Isfahan wrote a letter to the caliph complaining of the raids and harrassment they had suffered from the Turkmen.[68] But since those troubled times, law and order had been restored; in Gorgāni's words, Toghrul may have "sickened" Isfahan, but at least he left a good doctor behind. Daphna Ephrat notes that this same Abu l-Fatḥ was later put in charge of rebuilding Baghdad in 451/1059, a task he set to with vim and vigor: "He restored the marketplace of al-Karkh quarter, ordering its inhabitants, who had fled to *Dar al-khilafa* (the official

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66. Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Safarnāmah-i Ḥakīm Nāṣir Khusraw Qubādivānī Marvazī*, ed. Muḥammad Dabīr Siyāqī (Tehran: Zavvār, 1389 [2010]), 165–66; cf. Wheeler Thackston, *Nasir-i Khusraw's Book of Travels* [Safarnama]*: A Parallel Persian-English Text* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2001), 124–26.

و چون سلطان طغرل بیگ ابوطالب محمد بن میکال بن سلجوق رحمة الله علیه آن شهر بگرفته بود، مردی جوان آنجا گماشته بود، نیشابوی دبیری نیک با خط نیکو، مردی آهسته، نیکو لقا، و او را خواجه عمید می‌گفتند، فضل‌دوست بود خوش‌سخن و کریم. و سلطان فرموده بود که سه سال از مردم هیچ چیز نخواهند. و او بر آن می‌رفت. و پراکندگان همه روی به وطن نهاده بودند.

67. R33/T22/M14:

صفاهان بُد چو اندامی شکسته — شکست از فرِّ او گردید بسته
نباشد بس عجب کامسال هموار — درختش مدحِ برگی از گلستان
همی دانست سلطانِ جهاندار — که در دستِ که باید کردن این کار
گر او بیمار کردست اصفهان را — همو دادش پزشکِ نیک‌دان را

68. Zaporozhets, *The Seljuks*, 125.

residence of the ʿAbbasid caliphs) during the disturbances, to return . . . The governor, who supervised the construction activity, is said to have exhibited great concern for the city's welfare, winning the esteem of its inhabitants."[69] If Gorgāni is to be believed, a similar process took place in Isfahan:

> Everyone has seen the villages of Isfahan, ruined and abandoned,
> Its residents homeless, not a scrap of food to their name;
> When they heard his name, they began to return, from Kuhestan, Khuzestan, and Shiraz.
> He called them one by one to his registry, comforted them, and gave them cattle and grain.
> He did things for the land in two months' time that none believed possible.[70] (6.60–64)

Such, then, is the locale in which *V&R* was composed: a region rather devastated by recent wars between the Seljuks and the Buyids, now on the road to recovery under the *pax imperia* that endured for some fifty years under the capable hands of the Seljuks' ministers Kondori (d. 456/1064) and Neẓām al-Molk (d. 485/1092).[71] As Gorgāni tells us, about a month after Toghrul departed the city, the governor Abu l-Fatḥ summoned him to his presence and asked him what he knew about the tale of *Vis & Rāmin*: "They say it's a fantastic thing, that everyone in this country loves it" (*ke miguyand chiz-i sakht niku-st · dar in keshvar hama kas dārad-ash dust*, 7.30). Gorgāni's reply to the governor, which we shall now hear below, has perplexed and fascinated scholars for over a century.

1.3 The mysterious sources of *Vis & Rāmin*

> I replied, "It is a very beautiful story, compiled by six learned men.
> I've never seen a finer tale; it resembles nothing but a garden in bloom.
> But its language is *pahlavi*; those who read it don't know its meaning.
> Not everyone reads that language well, or understands it if they do:
> It has abundant descriptions of everything that mean little when you read aloud.
> . . . .
> In this region, they read this book to learn *pahlavi* from it,

69. Ephrat, *A Learned Society in a Period of Transition*, 24.

70. R35/T25/M15:

همه دیدند دههای صفاهان	که یکسر چون بیابان بود ویران
ز دهها مردمان آواره گشته	همه بیتوشه و بیپاره گشته
چو نامِ او شنیدند آمدند باز	ز کوهستان و خوزستان و شیراز
یکایک را به دیوان خواند و بنواخت	بدادش گاو و تخم و کارِ او ساخت
به دو ماه آن ولایت را چنان کرد	که کس باور نکردی کاین توان کرد

71. According to Ibn al-Athīr, Abu l-Fatḥ Moẓaffar also died in 456/1064, while escorting the caliph's daughter from Isfahan to Baghdad. See Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-tārīkh*, 8:192, year 456.

For the people of this clime have always enjoyed that sweet speech.

. . . .

Now the ancient bards[72] have told this story of *Vis & Rāmin*,
They showed skill in *fārsi*, for they were masters of speaking *fārsi*.
They composed a story in this way, with strange words from every tongue,[73]
Neglecting figures of thought or expression, using neither to ornament [the text].[74]
If a learned man took the trouble, it would become as beautiful as a treasury full of gems;
For this is a famous tale, with amazing stories beyond count!"[75] (7.31–35, 39–40, 50–55)

The simple phrase "but its language is *pahlavi*" (*valikan pahlavi bāshad zabān-ash*) was enough to set historians atwitter when *V&R* was discovered, for if it were indeed part of a literary corpus of which so little has been preserved, then it could offer a rare window into "the life and feelings of an epoch which, even in its simplest elements, is still wrapped in uncertainty and darkness," as Minorsky put it.[76] But the precise decoding of Gorgāni's introduction is deceptively elusive: though many studies of this passage conclude with confident pronouncements such as "the text is clear that . . . " or "there is no room for doubt that . . . " virtually none of them agree with each other in the details of their analysis. An initial point of confusion lay in the fact that Gorgāni appears to change horses mid-stream, altering

72. Literally "those who know speech," this word *sakhondānān* has been translated variously as "authorities of the past" (Morrison), "experts" (Minorsky), "hommes éloquents," (Massé), and "écrivains" (Lazard). See footnote 104 for a further discussion of my choice of translation.

73. Minorsky wonders if "tongue" (*zabān*, also meaning "language" as in English) might mean "style" in this case.

74. The words *ma'ni* and *maśal* are glossed by Morrison as "sentiments and proverbs," and by Minorsky as "conceits and proverbs." Meisami urges us to consider *ma'ni* ("meaning, sense"), especially in relation to the word *dāstān* ("story"), as analogous to the French terms *sens* and *matière*. See Julie Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry* (Princeton University Press, 1987), 88.

75. R33/T28/M17. For other translations of this passage, see Gabrieli, "Note sul *Vīs u Rāmīn*," 169–70; Minorsky, *Iranica*, 153–54; Henri Massé, "Introduction," in *Le Roman de Wîs et Râmîn* (Paris: Société d'Édition «Les Belles Lettres», 1959), 6–7; Gilbert Lazard, "La source en 'farsi' de 'Vis-o-Ramin'," *Šromebi* (*T'bilisis saxelmcip'o universiteti*) 241 (1983): 37–38.

بگفتم کام حدیثی سخت زیباست   ز گرد آوردهٔ شش مردِ داناست
ندیدم زان نکوتر داستانی   نماند جز به خرّم بوستانی
ولیکن پهلوی باشد زبانش   نداند هر که برخواند بیانش
نه هرکس آن زبان نیکو بخواند   وگر خواند همی معنی نداند
فراوان وصفِ هر چیزی شمارد   چو برخوانی بسی معنی ندارد
درین اقلیم آن دفتر بخوانند   بدان تا پهلوی از وی بدانند
کجا مردم درین اقلیم هموار   بُوَند آن لفظِ شیرین را خریدار
کنون این داستانِ ویس و رامین   بگفتند آن سخندانانِ پیشین
هنر در فارسی گفتن نمودند   کجا در فارسی استاد بودند
بپیوستند ازین سان داستانی   درو لفظِ غریب از هر زبانی
به معنی و مثل رنجی نبردند   برو زین هردوان زیور نکردند
اگر دانندهای در وی برد رنج   شود زیبا چو پر گوهر یکی گنج
کجا این داستانی نامدارست   در احوالش عجایب بیشمارست

76. Minorsky, *Iranica*, 155.

the language of his source from *pahlavi* to *fārsi* halfway through his introduction. The metrical value of the two words is identical, so there must be some intention behind the change (or so one hopes!), but both terms encompass a bewildering range of possible meanings. From this basic riddle, the questions multiply like wet gremlins: what "clime" is he talking about, and how could the story be popular there if no one could read it? Who are these "six learned men" (*mard-e dānā*) who "compiled" the book in *pahlavi*, and what is their relation with the "ancient bards" (*sakhondānān-e pishin*) who "told" the story in *fārsi*? And if these fellows' *fārsi* was so good, why was it full of strange and incomprehensible words? To take the cake, how much of this talk about old books and ancient languages is just a tactic to lend the poem more gravitas, and render the poet's feat more impressive?[77] Scholars have debated these questions extensively, and a full report of their respective ideas and divergences would take many pages indeed; but the gist of the argument can be summarized in the following paragraphs.[78]

To begin, a quick discursus on *pahlavi* and *fārsi* is in order: in contemporary usage, *pahlavi* means Middle Persian, the language of the Sasanian empire (224–651 CE), although specialists make the further distinction between the language ("Middle Persian") and the script ("Pahlavi"); *fārsi*, on the other hand, denotes New Persian, the literary language written in the Arabic script that emerged in tenth-century Khorasan.[79] In this schema, *pahlavi* and *fārsi* play diachronic roles akin to those of Middle and Modern English. But if we move further back in time, the terms start to shift around: the former can also mean Parthian (*pahlawānag* > *pahlavi*), the language of the Arsacid empire (247 BCE–224 CE) based in the northern regions of Iran—a tongue related to but distinct from the Middle Persian (*pārsig* > *pārsi* >

77. On this last point, see Dick Davis, "The Problem of Ferdowsi's Sources," *JAOS* 116, no. 1 (1996): 49.

78. The main studies of this passage I consulted are: Furūzānfar, *Sukhan*, 382; Gabrieli, "Note sul *Vīs u Rāmīn*," 168–172; Hidāyat, "Chand nuktah," 382–84; Mīnuvī, "Vīs va Rāmīn," 17–18; Mary Boyce, "The Parthian *Gōsān* and Iranian Minstrel Tradition," *JRAS* 1957, nos. 1/2 (1957): 37–38; ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn Zarrīnʹkūb, "[Review: *Vīs & Rāmīn*]," *Sukhan* 9, no. 10 (1337 [1958]): 1015–18; Maḥjūb, "Muqaddamah," 18–22; Ṣafā, *Tārīkh-i Adabīyāt*, 2:336, 2:374; Minorsky, *Iranica*, 152–55; "Vīs-u Rāmīn (IV)"; David Kobidze, "On the Antecedents of Vis-u-Ramin," in *Yádnáme-ye Jan Rypka: Collection of Articles on Persian and Tajik Literature* (Prague; The Hague; Paris: Academia; Mouton & Co., 1967), 89–93; Jan Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, ed. Karl Jahn (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1968), 177–79; Magali T'odua, "Yik dū sukhan dar bārah-i vīzhigī-hā-yi sūzhah-i dāstān-i Gurgānī," in *Vīs va Rāmīn* (Tehran: Bunyād-i Farhang-i Īrān, 1349 [1970]), xxi–xxv; Lazard, "La source en 'farsi' de 'Vis-o-Ramin'"; Aḥmad Tafaẓẓulī, *Tārīkh-i adabīyāt-i Īrān pīsh az Islām* (Tehran: Sukhan, 1376 [1997]), 76, 310–11; Ḥamīd ʿAbd Allāhiyān, "Girdāvardah-i shish mard-i dānā: nukātī dar bāb-i dāstān-i Vīs va Rāmīn," *Adabīyāt-i Dāstānī* 6, no. 46 (1377 [1998]): 122–125; Blois, *Bio-bibliographical Survey*, 141–42; Habib Borjian, "The Extinct Language of Gurgān: Its Sources and Origins," *JAOS* 128, no. 4 (2008): 681–707.

79. A good survey of these terms can be found in the still-classic *LHP*, 1:77–82.

fārsi) spoken by the Sasanians in the southern province of Pars, the origin of our word for Persia.[80] In this case, the distinction between the two terms is not so much temporal as it is geographic, something akin to the medieval division of France into the *langue d'oc* and the *langue d'oïl*.

This ambiguity thus allows multiple routes for interpretation, but some early scholars fell into the trap of reading these terms in their relatively stable modern sense. Foruzānfar was confident that when Gorgāni says *pahlavi*, he means "Pahlavi"; despite the fact that the script was growing abstruse even before the Arab conquest, and that by the fifth Islamic century its knowledge was largely limited to the Mazdaean priesthood, he argues that "some" Iranians still knew the language and could read it (Ṣafā optimistically amends this to "many"), especially those who hailed from the remote and mountainous regions by the Caspian Sea where Islamization was a slow and protracted process.[81] To bolster this claim, he cites a compatriot of Gorgāni's, the Ziyarid prince Kaykāvus, who claims to have read a saying of the prophet Zoroaster from "a book of the ancient Persians in Pahlavi script."[82] Foruzānfar's conviction that Gorgāni had access to an old book in Pahlavi and knew how to read it has been accepted to various degrees by a number of later scholars, including Gabrieli, Kobidze, Ṣafā, Boyce, Tafażżoli, Kappler, and Borjian. There was, in addition, a fair amount of speculation as to whether this "book" was in prose or verse: Gabrieli presumed the latter, guessing that Gorgāni simply did not see anything poetic about the archaic Middle Persian prosody.[83]

Other scholars, meanwhile, thought the whole idea balderdash. "Who could believe such a thing?" scoffed Italo Pizzi; "It's the same way that Pulci claims to have found the story of Margutte in Arabic, Persian, Chaldaen, Syriac, Hebrew, Greek and Latin books; and no one believes him."[84] In his view, *V&R* was

80. Cf. Prods Oktor Skjærvø, "Middle West Iranian," in *The Iranian Languages*, ed. Gernot Windfuhr (New York: Routledge, 2009), 196–278.

81. Furūzānfar, *Sukhan*, 372, n. 1 and Ṣafā, *Tārīkh-i Adabīyāt*, 1:131–33; cf. also Hugh Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate: A Political History* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), 28–30.

82. ʿUnṣur al-Maʿālī Kaykāvūs ibn Iskandar ibn Qābūs, *Qābūs nāmah*, ed. Ghulām Ḥusayn Yūsufī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i ʿIlmī va Farhangī, 1390 [2011]), 101: *dar ketāb-i az ān-e pārsiān be khaṭṭ-e pahlavi khwāndam*. We might also observe that Kaykā'us, the author of the *Book of the Birth of Zoroaster* (*Ketāb-e mowlud-e Zartosht*), claims to have based his tale on an account from a "royal book in Pahlavi script" which was in the possession of a Zoroastrian priest (*mōbad*), who commissioned him to versify it in "Persian" writing (*khaṭṭ-e dari*). De Blois notes that it closely corresponds with the biographies of Zoroaster found in the Middle Persian *Dēnkard* and the *Epistles of Zādsparam*; see *Bio-bibliographical Survey*, 152.

83. Gabrieli, "Note sul *Vīs u Rāmīn*," 172.

84. Italo Pizzi, *Storia della Poesia Persiana* (Turin: Unione tipografico-editrice, 1894), 2:88: "Ma chi può credere tutto cotesto? È la stessa maniera del nostro Pulci che dice d'aver trovato la storia di Margutte in libri arabi, persiani, caldaici,

just another of the local *racconti volgari* in which "the heroes who were once high models of valor and virtue became petty adventurers, and the wise and beautiful heroines made themselves into indecent little tabbies."[85] ʿAbdolḥosayn Zarrinkub came to a similar set of conclusions: he maintains that *pahlavi* meant for Gorgāni's audience the regional dialects of Fahla, that is, Isfahan, Rayy, Hamadan, Nehavand, and Azerbaijan, presumably in contradistinction to *fārsi* (but whether he means by this the language of Fars or Khorasan is unclear); examples of poetry written in this dialect are found in the *fahlaviyāt* of Bābā Ṭāher (eleventh c.?) and ʿAyn al-Qożāt Hamadāni (d. 526/1131).[86] He thus concludes that *V&R* was nothing more than a local folktale (*az adabiyāt-e maḥalli*) and endorses Arthur Christensen's characterization of the story as "an epic of pure fiction."[87] His invocation of the oral element is quite pertinent to this discussion, but probably not in the way it was intended: in situating *V&R* within Fahla (Media to the Greeks), one of the core territories of the Arsacid dynasty, Zarrinkub lends support to the claim by Vladimir Minorsky that *V&R* was originally a Parthian tale, the very argument he had intended to refute.

Minorsky was neither pleased nor persuaded by this latter attempt to deflate his theories, pointing out that the *fahlaviyāt* that Zarrinkub mentions are nothing at all like *Vis & Rāmin* and asking pointedly, "If 'Pahlavi' refers to the *fahlaviyāt*, what need would there have been to study the local speech for the people who naturally spoke it from their childhood?"[88] Nevertheless, he was disinclined to believe that

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siriaci, ebraici, greci e latini: e nessuno gli crede." It is worth noting that even in the Georgian translation of *V&R*, the account of the "ancient text" is told in such a way as to emphasize the poet as being the only one capable of unraveling the arcane "P'halauri" language and bringing its secrets to light; see Wardrop, *Visramiani: The Story of the Loves of Vis and Ramin*, 2.

85. Ben Edwin Perry, *The Ancient Romances: A Literary-Historical Account of Their Origins* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 4; Pizzi, *Storia della Poesia Persiana*, 2:85–86: " . . . laddove anche ogni cosa grande fu rimpicciolita, e gli eroi che furono già alti modelli di valore e di virtù, diventarono volgari avventurieri, e le eroine più belle e savie se fecero pettegole indecenti da trivio."

86. Zarrīnʹkūb, "[Review: *Vīs & Rāmīn*]," 1016. Shams-e Qays, too, makes a distinction between the *dari* poetry that provides the basis for his analysis and the "mistakes" found in the *fahlavi* poetry of Hamadan; this can be compared with Nāṣer-e Khosrow's recollection of his encounter with Qaṭrān of Tabriz, who "recited good poetry, but didn't know Persian (*fārsi*) well." See Shams-i Qays, *Kitāb al-muʿjam fī maʿāyīr-i ashʿār al-aʿjam*, ed. Muḥammad Qazvīnī and Mudarris Raẓavī (Tehran: Dānishgāh-i Tihrān, 1338 [1960]), 175; Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Safarnāmah*, 9; also section 2.1. For a thorough discussion of the *fahlaviyāt*, see Aḥmad Tafaẕẕulī, "Fahlavīyāt," in *EIr*, online edition (1999), accessed June 11, 2015, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/fahlaviyat.

87. Zarrīnʹkūb, "[Review: *Vīs & Rāmīn*]," 1016. It seems that Zarrinkub might have slightly misunderstood Christensen, for although the latter does consider *V&R* to have no basis in history, he nonetheless concedes that it came from a Middle Persian source. See Arthur Christensen, *The Epics of the Kings in Ancient Iranian Traditions*, trans. Farrokh Vajifdar (Bombay: K. R. Cama Oriental Institute, 1991), 30.

88. Minorsky, "Vīs-u Rāmīn (IV)," 279. In Zarrinkub's defense, Shams-e Qays does actually make a connection between *V&R* and the *fahlaviyāt*, saying that Gorgāni's work uses the same meter as this indigenous form of poetry that was sung (*malḥun*) to melodies called *ōrāman*; this, I think, is more evidence that points to the oral transmission of *V&R* by professional minstrels,

Gorgāni would have worked from a Middle Persian source.[89] He instead figures that the "six wise men" (*shesh mard-e dānā*) and "experts" (*sakhondānān*) to whom Gorgāni refers were Zoroastrians who had created a prose crib of the original for the purpose of teaching the ancient tongue to new generations; but as a typical product of academia, the prose was bland, stilted, and bristling with strange jargon, which explains why Gorgāni speaks of these "masters" of Persian (*fārsi*) "with definite irony."[90] Maḥjub, in turn, had his doubts: why would the poet complain about the difficulty of reading the source material if there was already a Persian translation available to him? But he too was reluctant to believe that knowledge of the Pahlavi script was a realistic option for Gorgāni, and so he followed the lead of Hedāyat and Minovi to suggest that the text was in some kind of *pāzand*, that is, its script was Arabic, but the language was Middle Persian. This also requires a bit of a stretch, for *pāzand* usually refers to Middle Persian written in the Avestan alphabet, not the Arabic; but the idea in any case is that when Gorgāni complains that the "masters" of *fārsi* composed a tale filled "with strange words from every tongue," he means that it was a (somewhat) phonetic transcription of Middle Persian in the Arabic character. To Gorgāni's eyes, the text would have looked strange indeed, employing a vocabulary quite removed from the literary language of Khorasan and employing conventions of style and prosody that were centuries out of date. That would explain his pledge at the end of the introduction:

> I'll tell the story as best I can, and cleanse it of its meaningless words;
> For those words have become obsolete, their time is past.[91] (7.58–59)

As far as I can tell, the squabble between Maḥjub and Minorsky boils down to semantics, for in any case, their postulated source is a text using the Arabic script to transcribe a language that is either Middle Persian or very archaic New Persian; the line between the two, at a certain point, is difficult to make out.

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which we will discuss below. See Shams-i Qays, *Kitāb al-muʿjam fī maʿāyīr-i ashʿār al-aʿjam*, 104.

89. A somewhat unexpected move, considering his arguments elsewhere that Pahlavi was still in use in eleventh-century Gorgan.

90. Minorsky, *Iranica*, 154. Bausani, Pagliaro, and Rypka all agreed that Gorgāni's source must have been a horrendous New Persian translation from the Pahlavi, although the latter scholar, like T'odua, speculates that the translation "was composed in syllabic metre with an appropriate style of rhyme and must therefore have appeared to Gurgānī and to his contemporaries, who were no longer familiar with these principles, as a product devoid of art. See Alessandro Bausani and Antonio Pagliaro, *La letteratura persiana* (Sansoni, 1968), 385; Rypka, *HIL*, 178–79.

91. R38/T29/M18. Minorsky acknowledged that the *pāzand* theory was an "interesting suggestion," but still preferred his own view that Gorgāni's source was an antiquated New Persian translation. See "Vīs-u Rāmīn (IV)," 275.

بدان طاقت که من دارم بگویم   وزان الفاظ بی‌معنی بشویم
کجا آن لفظها منسوخ گشتست   ز دوران روزگارش در گذشتست

A far more complex element had yet to be considered: the oral background and circulation of the text. In her well-known article on the Parthian minstrel tradition, Mary Boyce names *Vis & Rāmin*, along with *The Memorial of Zarēr* and some sections of the *Shāhnāma*, among the famous lays that were likely to have been performed by this professional class.[92] She takes this hypothesis further in another article, suggesting that the "heroic" section of *V&R*, namely the battle between Mobad and Vis's father Qāren, could have been drawn from the old songs and annals that recorded Meherdates's struggle against Gotarzes II, an event that took place in the year 50 CE: "A lay would certainly have been composed at the time by a gōsān [minstrel] of the Kārin family to honor his brave stand, and this was presumably handed down by his descendants and eventually, to please the family, drawn on to embellish the locally popular tale of Vis and Rāmin."[93] The traces of *V&R* we find in our sources, scanty as they are, lend Boyce's hypothesis further support, for the earliest reference we have to the story is found in a verse by the Abbasid poet Abu Nuwās (d. ca. 198/813) dedicated to his friend Behruz b. Ruzbeh. While complaining of his friend's neglect, the poet invokes numerous terms and traditions associated with the ancient Persians, such as the names of their great kings, the feasts of Mehrgan and Nowruz, the Zoroastrian angels, and various kinds of wine, until he concludes:

> By the secrets they read in the Avesta, the book of Zoroaster, prophet of the Magi,
> And the stories they tell of Sharwin of Dastab, and the lays of Rāmin and Vis;
> When you spoke to me and gave back my soul, I was burned by your cruelty.[94]

Commenting on these lines, Abu Nuwās's redactor Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī (d. 360/971) writes that Sharwin of Dastabi (a village near modern-day Qazvin) "is a story that is sung about days of yore" (*uḥdūthatun*

92. Boyce, "The Parthian *Gōsān*," 18, 36–37.

93. Mary Boyce, "Gōsān," in *EIr*, online edition (2002), accessed June 11, 2015, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/gosan. A similar process was at work in the compilation of the *Shāhnāma* tradition, in which long ballads recounting an episode in a king or hero's life were sutured together to produce the lengthy narratives that ended up in the *Shāhnāma* and similar epics; see Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Ḥamāsah΄sarā-yi bāstān," *Sīmurgh* 5 (2537 [1978]): 3–27; also the important study by Kumiko Yamamoto, *The Oral Background of Persian Epics: Storytelling and Poetry* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), esp. 53–80.

94. Mujtabā Mīnuvī, "Yik-i az fārisīyāt-i Abū Nuvās," *Majallah-i Dānishkadah-i Adabīyāt, Dānishgāh-i Tihrān* [*Revue de la Faculté des Lettres, Université de Téhéran*] 1, no. 3 (1333 [1954]): 66–67. Another version of this poem is found in Abū Nuwās, *al-Nuṣūṣ al-muḥarramah*, ed. Jamāl Jumʿah (London: Riyāḍ al-Rayyis, 1994), 122–23, but it is substantially different from that provided by Minovi and most of the Persian words are garbled.

بما يتلونَ في البستاق رمزاً　　كتابِ زَرَدُّشٍ داعي المجوسِ
وما يتلونَ في شروين دَستَبي　　وفِرجَردات رامينٍ وويسِ
لَمَا كَلَّمتَني ورددتَ نفسي　　فإنّي من جفائكَ في رسيسِ

jarat fī qidami l-zamāni yutaghannī bi-hā), and that Vis and Rāmin is likewise "a well-known story among them [the Persians]" (*uḥdūthatun lahum maʿrūfah*); furthermore, he glosses the word "lays" (*firjardāt*, Mid. Pers. *fragard*) as something "akin to odes" (*ka-l-qaṣāʾid*).[95] A century later, the names of Vis and Rāmin appear again in three lines recorded by Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (d. 502/1108) in his book *The Ready Replies of Cultured Men*, in which the residents of Isfahan request the following song from their cup-bearer:

> Sing us a song, O serving-boy, and do it well! Refrain from singing Arabic tunes!
> We are a gathering of Arabs, noble and proud, so sing us a Persian song!
> And give us to drink an ancient vintage, such as Vis served Rāmin both morning and night![96]

We also have a report of Rāmin and King Mobad—with no mention of Vis—from the anonymous *Compendium of Histories and Tales* (w. 520/1126), which names the latter as a vassal of the Sasanian king Shāpur I (r. 240–70 CE) who ruled over Khorasan and Media.[97] In light of these clues, a number of scholars have suggested that there were multiple versions of the *Vis & Rāmin* cycle that could have found their way into the work we have today. Ḥamid ʿAbdollāhiān proposes that Gorgāni's *Vis & Rāmin* weaves together two similar but distinct narratives about an old king's rivalry with his younger brother and an unhappy queen's fling with the court minstrel; Magali T'odua tallies up a list of narratorial glitches to conclude that many oral recensions of the poem (*revāyat*s) must have been in circulation to provide Gorgāni with his extensive and self-contradicting source material. He furthermore noticed a general tendency towards characterizing Rāmin as a "rude and wandering minstrel" (*navāzanda-ye qalandar o velgard*), even when such a description ran counter to his facts before us in the text; he therefore imag-

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95. Mīnuvī, "Yik-i az fārisīyāt-i Abū Nuvās," 69, 75–76. The word *fragard* is also used in Middle Persian to describe "sections" or "books" from compilations of religious literature; see Blois, *Bio-bibliographical Survey*, 141–42; Almut Hintze, "Avestan Literature," in *The Literature of Pre-Islamic Iran*, ed. Ronald E. Emmerick and Maria Macuch (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 38, 66.

96. Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *Muḥāḍarāt al-udabāʾ wa-muḥāwarāt al-shuʿarāʾ wa-al-bulaghāʾ*, ed. ʿUmar Ṭabbāʿ (Beirut: Dār al-Arqam, 1999), 1:820; Mīnuvī, "Vīs va Rāmīn," 20; Mīnuvī, "Yik-i az fārisīyāt-i Abū Nuvās," 77. In this edition, the names have been corrupted into *Wabis* (وبس) and *Dāmīn* (دامين); I expect the editors were not aware of *Vis & Rāmin* and therefore made their best guess at the names. The lines run as follows:

غَنِّنا يا غُلامَنا وأَمِهْنا وتَنَكَّبْ غناءَكَ العربيَّا
إِنَّنا مَعْشَرٌ من العَرَبِ الـ عزِّ كرامٌ فغنِّنا الفارسيا
وأَسْقِناها مدامَةً نازِعَتْها ويسُ رامينَ بُكْرةً وعَشيّا

97. Sayf al-Dīn Najmʹābādī and Siegfried Weber, eds., *Mujmal al-tavārīkh va al-qiṣaṣ: Eine persische Weltgeschichte aus dem 12. Jahrhundert* (Neckharhausen: Deux Mondes, 2000), 74: *Mobad barādar-e Rāmin ṣāḥeb-e ṭaraf-i bud az dast-e Shāpur; be Marv neshasti, va Khorasān o Māhān be farmān-e u bud.*

ined Rāmin as a kind of Robin Hood, a legendary figure of whom many tales and legends were told.[98] Reflecting on the thick interaction between storytelling and writing in medieval literature, François de Blois offers a compelling suggestion for how the lovers might have existed outside of Gorgāni's work:

> The existence of a Middle-Persian poem (or poems) on the subject is evidently implied . . . but this may refer not to a poetic version of the whole story but rather to a collection of songs put into the mouths of the two lovers. Something similar would seem to be implied by the verse of Rūmī's which asks whether the reader has not seen the *dīwān*s of Wīs and Rāmīn (*dawāwīn i Wīsah u Rāmīn*) or heard the tales (*ḥikāyāt*) of Wāmiq and ʿAdhrā. There may thus well have been '*dīwān*s' of the two lovers, alongside the story of their adventures, in the same way that there is an (Arabic) *dīwān* of Majnūn alongside the story of his romance with Lailā.[99]

Yet de Blois, to come full circle, is also an advocate of the "Pahlavi book" theory with which we began this survey: "the fact Gurgānī has evidently based his poem directly on a Middle-Persian book and not (like Firdausī or Asadī) on documents already relatively far removed from their Sasanian sources goes a long way towards explaining the decidedly Zoroastrian flavour of so much of what we find in it."[100] This position might seem counterintuitive, given the many arguments raised against the likelihood that Gorgāni would have known how to read the Pahlavi script, and that it is precisely the existence of an oral tradition that obviates the need for some kind of archaic text in the first place; however, Gilbert Lazard offers an interpretation of Gorgāni's introduction that unifies the menagerie of disparate terms and allows the oral and written elements to exist side-by-side. As Lazard explains, the term *pahlavi*, laden with connotations of the "heroic" days of yore, expanded over time to encompass the language of the Sasanians, who were the only Iranian dynasty before Islam that really stuck in historical memory.[101] Over the same span of time, the semantic range of *pārsi/fārsi* also broadened to become the analogue of the Arabic term *ʿajam*, that is, the "language of the Iranians" in contradistinction to that of the Arabs; when the court language of Khorasan was intended, it was specified as *dari* or *fārsi-ye dari* ("the *fārsi*

98. ʿAbd Allāhiyān, "Girdāvardah," 123; T'odua, "Yik dū sukhan," xxiv–v; see also Maḥjūb, "Muqaddamah," 87–88.

99. Blois, *Bio-bibliographical Survey*, 141–42.

100. ibid., 142; see also François de Blois, "Pre-Islamic Iranian and Indian Influences on Persian Literature," in *General Introduction to Persian Literature*, ed. J. T. P. de Bruijn (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 344.

101. The Achaemenid kings were largely forgotten, save for the legendary war between Darius III (*Dārā*) and Alexander; while the Sasanians had effectively repressed the memory of their Arsacid predecessors. Boyce observes that around the fourth century CE we stop seeing rock inscriptions in Parthian, suggesting that the Sasanians only patronized (or even allowed) the use of Middle Persian from then on; see *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 116–17.

of the court").[102] Thus, Gorgāni's distinction between *pahlavi* to *fārsi* is not meant to draw a temporal line between Middle and New Persian, but to first indicate that the text compiled by the "wise men" was written in a difficult script (*pahlavi*) and strange tongue, and then to explain how the "ancient bards" (or "écrivains anciens" in Lazard's translation), who were masters of the *Iranian* (*fārsi*) language of that era (i.e., the Sasanian), told a story that is now in need of an aesthetic overhaul. As Lazard's translation choices suggest, he is also committed to the idea of "the Pahlavi *book*," perhaps in exclusion to all else, as the source of *V&R*; this interpretation is sufficient to at least allow the existence of *a* Pahlavi book, while leaving room open for other sources to play a role.

My own observations lead me to support the idea that *V&R* existed in both written and oral form, very much in the manner described by de Blois and following Lazard's interpretation of the introduction.[103] In Chapter 5, we will consider the internal evidence that suggests a context of recitation and performance; the central part of *V&R*, in particular, leaves one with the impression of a flexible storytelling structure that could expand or contract to suit the constraints of the performance event. At the same time, there are intertextual dimensions of the text that plug into the macro-horizons of expectation found in written narratives about lovers, expectations that are only fully realized over course of multiple episodes relayed in sequence; these will be discussed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. The language of Gorgāni's introduction is suggestive of this dual heritage: it presents *V&R* as a "book" (*daftar*) that has been "compiled" (*gerd āvarda*) from the "story" (or perhaps more generally, "talk," *ḥadiṡ*) of the famous lovers, a body of literature once related by the "ancient bards" (*sakhondānān-e pishin*) who were masters at "speaking" or "reciting" in the language of the Iranians.[104] Gorgāni describes how "the people of

102. Frye, in contrast, posits *dari* as the archaic and simple Persian of the Samanid court and *fārsi* as the arabized and ornate Persian cultivated by the Qarakhanids. See "Development of Persian Literature under the Samanids and Qarakhanids," in *Yádnáme-ye Jan Rypka: Collection of Articles on Persian and Tajik Literature* (Prague: Academia, 1967), 70–73.

103. And, more broadly, walking along the pathways laid by Hanaway and Rubanovitch in their scholarship on Persian storytelling and romance: William L. Hanaway, "Persian Popular Romances Before the Safavid Period" (PhD diss., Columbia, 1970), "Formal Elements in the Persian Popular Romances," *Review of National Literatures* 2 (1971): 139–161; Julia Rubanovich, "The Reconstruction of a Storytelling Event in Medieval Persian Prose Romance: The Case of the *Iskandarnāma*," *Edebiyât* 9, no. 2 (1998): 215–248, "Aspects of Medieval Intertextuality: Verse Insertions in Persian Prose *Dāstāns*," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 32 (2006): 247–268, "Metaphors of Authorship in Medieval Persian Prose: A Preliminary Study," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 12, no. 2 (2009): 127–135, "Orality in Medieval Persian Literature," in *Medieval Oral Literature*, ed. Karl Reichl (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 653–679, "Tracking the *Shahnama* Tradition in Medieval Persian Folk Prose," in *Studies in Persian Cultural History*, ed. Charles Melville, Gabrielle van den Berg, and Sunil Sharma, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 11–34.

104. I have struggled to find a good translation for *sakhondānān*, as I find "experts," "authorities," and "écrivains" all a little misleading. I would have said "poets," as *sakhon* often carries that meaning of high and elevated speech, but Gorgāni draws

this clime" (I would guess Isfahan) read (*bekhwānand*) the book to learn Pahlavi from it, which he takes pains to describe as a language that few people can decipher. The aural aspect of the language is also addressed, for when you read the words aloud (*bar khwāni*), they don't bear much meaning. These details, striking enough in their specificity that I doubt them to be stock descriptors, promote a scenario that does not insist on the tale either as a lost relic or as a local folktale, but as a living tradition in which both written and oral forms played a significant role in its development and transmission. The recognition that *Vis & Rāmin* can be a composite work made up of these various elements might reduce the friction between those scholars whose goal, it seems, was to locate a single source or *ur-text* for the poem to the exclusion of other possible influences.

1.4 The *Nachleben*

Whatever form or forms *Vis & Rāmin* had taken up to this point, it is clear that Gorgāni's versification of the tale was a resounding success for his audience, for both the poem and its author are favorably recalled in a wide array of sources in the centuries following its composition. The earliest citation of the poem is found in the tale of *Samak-e 'Ayyār*, a prose romance that was circulated in southwestern Iran (and most likely beyond) by professional storytellers in the early years of the Seljuk empire;[105] the recension we have, probably dating to the first half of the twelfth century, quotes three lines from the "Ten Letters" that Vis writes to Rāmin, a passage that was clearly one of the most popular in the poem's history.[106]

a clear distinction between what these people did and the "poetry" (*shā'eri*) that he purports to do in his version. Massé's "hommes éloquents" is my favorite of the bunch, but I might go out on a limb and speculate that the people Gorgāni could be referring to with this phrase are the minstrels and storytellers of yore, the "masters" of the Iranian (*fārsi*) verbal arts who had long performed this story, even if the records they left behind were filled with strange and obsolete words; hence I opted for "bards."

105. I guess on this area of circulation based on the names of the poem's narrators, one from Arrajan and the other from Shiraz, both towns in southwestern Iran; however, the poem was probably circulated further west in Seljuk territories, as it features numerous Turkish names and the main character hails from Aleppo; see Marina Gaillard, "Samak-e 'Ayyār," in *EIr*, online edition (2009), accessed June 11, 2015, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/samak-e-ayyar.

106. Farāmarz ibn Khudādād Arrajānī, *Samak-i 'Ayyār*, ed. Parvīz Nātil Khānlarī, 6 vols. (Tehran: Āgāh, 1363–64 [1984–85]), 1:20; cf. Mīnuvī, "Vīs va Rāmīn," 18 and Minorsky, *Iranica*, 192. The lines correspond with vv. 6–8 in Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī, *Vis & Rāmin* (*ed. Rawshan*), 265. I must make a few emendations to Minorksy's reference, which reads: "On fol. 86 of the unique MS. of the Bodleian (Bod. Ouseley 379, f. 88) three verses are quoted from the poem of *Fakhr-i Gurgānī*, corresponding to verses 301, 302, and 300 on p. 358 of Minovi's edition." These are actually vv. 200–2 in Minovi's edition, and the citation of the manuscript (which strangely names two different folios) does not seem to be correct; Alastair Watson at the Bodleian Library has very kindly sent me photos of ff. 86v–88r to look at, but these belong to a different part of the narrative altogether, after Samak

Around the same time, the poet and critic Neẓāmi ʿAružī, who traveled widely throughout Khorasan and Transoxiana, places Gorgāni at the head of his list of poets who served the House of Seljuk in his *Four Discourses* (w. 551/1156).[107] Sixty years later, Ṣadroddin Ḥasan Neẓāmi of Nishapur (fl. 614/1216), a courtier to the kings of Ghur and their clients in India, included sixty-four lines of *V&R* in the *Crown of Great Deeds*, his three-volume history of the Delhi sultanate.[108] Moḥammad ʿOwfi, a native of Transoxiana writing in Lahore, named Gorgāni a "consummate sage" and praised his "perfect virtue, beautiful artistry, and utmost taste and sensitivity" in his biographical dictionary of poets entitled *The Cream of the Crop* (w. 617/1220).[109] Back in Shiraz under the Salghurid atabegs, Shams-e Qays, the author of the *Summa* (w. ca. 637/1240), repeatedly cites *Vis & Rāmin* along with *Khosrow & Shirin* as an exemplar of the *hazaj* meter,[110] and a few decades later, the poet Fariddodin Esfarāyeni (d. after 663/1264), living in the same city under the same rulers, composed the following verses vaunting himself over four major poets, a move that suggests that Gorgāni was still held in high esteem:

> He's powerless to describe you, he's hopeless at praising you;
> he's helpless in commending you, just as he's baffled by my poetry.
> The first is Mokhtāri of Ghazna; the second is Ferdowsi of Tus;
> the third is Fakhri of Gorgan; the fourth is that poet of Shirvan [Khāqāni].[111]

Two major events in *V&R*'s *Nachleben* took place in the latter half of the twelfth century. The first occurred in Georgia, possibly during the reign of Queen Tamar (1184–1213), when the entirety of Gorgāni's text was translated into magnificent Georgian prose and soon became one of the foundational works of secular literature in that language, an episode that might not have seemed very important for Per-

has entered the story. I guess that the citation is more likely to be found in the first thirty folios, right after Khorshidshāh has seen Mahpari and fallen ill in his love-sickness.

107. Niẓāmī ʿArūẓī, *Revised Translation of the Chahár Maqála ("Four Discourses")*, ed. Edward G. Browne and Muḥammad Qazvīnī (London: Luzac, 1921), 30. His name is slightly corrupted as "Farrokhi" instead of "Fakhri"; see Minorsky, *Iranica*, 192; Blois, *Bio-bibliographical Survey*, 144.

108. This history covers the reigns of the kings Moʿezzoddin Moḥammad b. Sām (d. 602/1206), Qoṭboddin Aybak (d. 607/1210), and Shamsoddin Iltutmish (d. 633/1236). See ʿAlī Riẓā Imāmī, "Abyāt-i Vīs va Rāmīn dar Tāj al-Maʾāṣir," *Shibh-i qārrah: farhangistān-i zabān va adab-i fārsī* 1, no. 1 (1392 [2013]): 239–254, accessed June 11, 2015, http://persianacademy.ir/fa/sg01.aspx.

109. ʿAwfī, *Kitāb-i Lubāb al-albāb*, 2:240; cf. *Lubāb al-albāb*, 418. For the complete Persian text and English translation of this and subsequent notices that mention Fakhroddin or *V&R*, see Appendix B.

110. Shams-i Qays, *Kitāb al-muʿjam fī maʿāyīr-i ashʿār al-aʿjam*, 82, 104, 175; Mīnuvī, "Vīs va Rāmīn," 18.

111. ʿAwfī, *Lubāb al-albāb*, 709. Meter: *hazaj sālem mos̄amman* [⏑ – – – | ⏑ – – – | ⏑ – – – | ⏑ – – –].

شود در وصفِ تو عاجز بُوَد نعتِ تو مضطر — شود در مدحِ تو خیره چنان کز شعرِ من حیران
یکی مختاریِ عزنی دوم فردوسیِ طوسی — سوم فخریِ گرگانی چهارم شاعرِ شیروان

sian literary history at the time, but ultimately held enormous implications for the long-term survival of the poem.[112] During that same period, and just around the corner in the city of Ganja (modern-day Azerbaijan), the celebrated poet Neẓāmi composed the romance of *Khosrow & Shirin* (w. 587/1191), a monumental work that both attests to *Vis & Rāmin*'s impact in Persian literature up to that point and signals the beginning of its gradual eclipse. This story had already been told by Ferdowsi in the *Shāhnāma*, but Neẓāmi adopted the meter of *V&R* and worked many of its landmark episodes into his text, such as the hero's unfaithful fling with a mistress, the minstrels performing songs before the king, and the dramatic debate between the two lovers as a blizzard swirls about them.[113] Like Gorgāni, Neẓāmi was interested in exploring the inner anxieties and complex moral dilemmas of his characters, who seem incapable of shaking off the memory of the traumatic events of the prior tale. The women, in particular, are haunted by the memory of Vis's adultery; for despite Khosrow's many infidelities and her own attraction to Farhād, Shirin is very careful to maintain her chastity.[114] To do otherwise, her mother says, would earn her the kind of fame she'd be better off without.

> If Khosrow makes a move on you, and finds you drunk and heedless in love,
> You'll lose your good name as did Vis, and grow famous throughout the world for your filthy ways.[115] (120/10–11)

Neẓāmi, it so happens, was an exact contemporary with the French poet Chrétien de Troyes (indeed, the two authors occupy an analogous position in the romance genre within their respective traditions),

112. Kaladze, "Georgian Translation," 140–42; Alek'sandre Gvaxaria, "Notes on the Persian Text of Gorgani's Vis o Ramin," in *Ex Oriente: Collected Papers in Honour of Jiří Bečka*, ed. Adéla Křikavová and Luděk Hřebíček (Prague: Czech Academy of Sciences, Oriental Institute, 1995), 53–55. David Kobidze suggests that the translation was done earlier prior to the reign of Queen Tamar, probably in the first half of the twelfth century; see "On the Antecedents of Vis-u-Ramin," 91.

113. Maḥjub provides a thorough review of the many adaptations of and references to *V&R* in *Khosrow & Shirin* in "Muqaddamah," 91–98.

114. The comparison of Vis and Shirin has been a favorite topic in Persian-language scholarship on *V&R*, which tends towards the consensus that the chastity of Shirin was posed as a corrective to the adultery of Vis. See ʿAlī Akbar Shahābī, *Niẓāmī: shāʿir-i dāstānsarā* (Tehran: Ibn Sīnā, 1337 [1958]), 203; Sayyid Ẓiyāʾ al-Dīn Javādī, "Sharm va āzarm dar dū as̱ar-i ghanāʾī," *Kayhān-i Farhangī* 145 (1377 [1998]): 23–25, http://www.noormags.ir/view/fa/articlepage/16524; Mūsā Pīrī, "Girih dāstānī dar Khusraw va Shīrīn va Vīs va Rāmīn," *Kayhān-i Farhāngī* 195 (1381 [2003]): 70–73, http://www.noormags.ir/view/fa/articlepage/19479; Mūsā Pīrī, *Sākhtār´shināsī-i muqāyasah´ī-i manẓūmah´hā-yi Vīs va Rāmīn va Khusraw va Shīrīn* (Zahedan: Taftān, 1385 [2006]); Shukūh Barādarān, "Muqāyisah-i Vīs va Rāmīn va Khusraw va Shīrīn," *Rushd-i Āmūzhish-i Zabān va Adab-i Fārsī* 92 (1388 [2010]): 21–23, http://www.noormags.ir/view/fa/articlepage/821576.

115. Niẓāmī Ganjavī, *Khusraw va Shīrīn*, 120.

وگر در عشق بر تو دست یابد　　تو را هم غافل و هم مست یابد
چو ویس از نیکنامی دور گردی　　به زشتی در جهان مشهور گردی

and an interesting parallel can be drawn between the uneasy relationship between *K&S* and *V&R* and that evinced by Chrétien's *Cligès* (w. ca. 1176) towards the tale of *Tristan & Iseut*. In Chrétien's story, the heroine Fenice is faced with the similar situation of being married to a king she does not love, but she insists to her beloved Cligès, on the suggestion that they elope: "I shall never leave with you in such a manner, for then the entire would would speak of us as they speak of Tristan and Iseut the Blonde . . . who would then believe that I preserved my virginity from your uncle? They'd take me for a stupid hussy, and you for a madman" (5244–47, 54–57).[116] A similar struggle between love and honor is active in the case of Shirin, who again remembers Vis as the example to avoid.

> When Shirin saw Khosrow fallen into witless intoxication,
> She reeled for a moment, unsure what to do. She said to herself,
> "If I don't quit his room right now, I won't have to face the pain of separation;
> But if I stay, and submit to his impulses, I'll become as infamous as Vis in the world."[117]
> (302/6–9)

Over time, the story of *Vis & Rāmin* grew into an established topos for exploring the erotic and irrepressible tension between the licit and illicit in later works of Persian literature.[118] About twenty years after Neẓāmi, Faridoddin ʿAṭṭār (d. 618/1221) devoted an episode of his *Elāhināma* to the tragic tale of "Fakhri Gorgāni and the Sultan's Slave," a creative reimagining of the poem's genesis. Fakhri is presented as a fine poet, courteous man, and loyal servant to Maḥmud of Ghazna who unexpectedly falls in love

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116. Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligès*, ed. Charles Méla and Olivier Collet (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1994), 360–63; cf. David Staines, *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 151–52:

> Ja ovec vos ensi n'irai,
> Car lors seroit par tot le monde
> Autresi com d'Yseut la Blonde
> Et de Tristen de nos parlé
> . . . .
> De vostre uncle qui querroit dons
> Que li fuse si en pardons
> Pucele estorse et eschapee?
> Por trop baude et por estapee
> Me tendroit l'en et vos por fol.

117. Niẓāmī Ganjavī, *Khusraw va Shīrīn*, 302.

چو شیرین دید خسرو را چنان مست — ز پای افتاد و شد یکباره از دست
ز بیهوشی زمانی بی‌خبر ماند — به هوش آمد به کارِ خویش در ماند
که گر نگذارم اکنون در وثاقش — ندارم طاقتِ زخمِ فراقش
و گر لَختی ز تندی رام گردم — چو ویسه در جهان بدنام گردم

118. Mīnuvī, "Vīs va Rāmīn," 18–19; Maḥjūb, "Muqaddamah," 91–102.

with his master's slave-boy. Torn between passion for the boy and fidelity to his liege, he delays the erotic encounter even after receiving the sultan's blessing; in his longing for surety, he inadvertently causes the gruesome death of his beloved, who is burned into ashes as Fakhri hems and haws outside the sultan's door. The poet, mad with pain and grief, retreats to the wilderness and pours his suffering into the story of *Vis & Rāmin* as a private act of penance.[119] While this anecdote has little to do with the lovers Vis and Rāmin themselves, it reenacts in short form some of the most disturbing thematics of their story: an anxious regard for protocol in the face of a love of doubtful legitimacy, the unexpected and uncontrollable violence hidden within desire, and the ongoing search for a satisfying way to express the pain of loss and suffering. However medieval readers may have responded to ʿAṭṭār's "story of the story," Mojtabā Minovi was so bothered by it he had to excuse himself from repeating it before his readers: "I fear that were I to relate this tale, one of my readers would complain that these stories are against morality and common decency!"[120]

Although *Vis & Rāmin* had been read, copied, translated, and alluded to in a variety of texts from the Caucuses to Transoxiana to India, the fourteenth century marked a turning-point in its fortunes. Neẓāmi's romances were wildly successful throughout the Persianate literary world, so much so that they set the standard for generations of poets to recast and imitate; meanwhile, the story of *V&R* would never again be taken up in Persian. As copies grew scarce and details of the story faded from memory, Vis and Rāmin joined the ranks of other legendary lovers as archetypes whose story embodied the highs and lows of passionate attachment, especially in the work of the Ilkhanid poets Saʿdi of Shiraz (d. 690/1291) and Khwāju of Kerman (d. ca. 750/1349).[121] But unlike couples like Layli and Majnun or Yusof and Zolaykhā, who learned to exercise nearly superhuman control over their desires, the protagonists of *V&R*

119. ʿAṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, 193, v. 1895. Cf. Hellmut Ritter, *Das Meer der Seele: Mensch, Welt und Gott in den Geschichten des Farīduddīn ʿAṭṭār* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 365, ch. 24, "Worldly love within the bonds of law and society" (*Die irdische Liebe mit sozialen und rechtlichen Bindungen*). To read the story in its entirety, see the Proem: The Tale of Fakhri and the Slave-Boy; the Persian original is located in Appendix D.

120. Mīnuvī, "Vīs va Rāmīn," 16:

شیخ عطار در الهی‌نامهٔ خود داستان عجیبی از عشق و عاشقی فخرالدین گرگانی نقل می‌کند که می‌ترسم اگر حکایت کنم
یکی از خوانندگان شکایت کند که این قصه‌ها بر خلاف اخلاق و ادب است.

121. See Maḥjūb, "Muqaddamah," 99, 101–2. For further discussion of these archetypes, see Charles Pellat and J. T. P. de Bruijn, *EI*² (Brill Online), s.v. "Madjnūn Laylā," accessed June 11, 2015, http://www.paulyonline.brill.nl.proxy.uchicago.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/madjnun-layla-COM_0608.

were never entirely absolved from the stigma of their sexual transgression. In one of the supplications (*monājāt*) in his *Maśnavi-ye Maʿnavi*, Jalāloddin Rumi (d. 672/1273) urges his readers to take warning from the lovers' fixation on carnal pleasure:

> Those who love dolls sullied by makeup made designs on the other's blood and soul.
> Read *Vis & Rāmin*, read *Khosrow & Shirin*, read what these fools did in their frenzy!
> For when lover and beloved have passed on, nothing remains of them or their passion.
> When God the Pure brings nothing together,
> he makes nothing the lover of nothing.[122] (5.1205–8)

Similar comments on the scandal of *Vis & Rāmin* continued into the next century: writing in Ilkhanid Shiraz, the sufi poet ʿEmād Faqih (d. 773/1371–72) uses the lovers as a foil for admonishment in his *Book of Love*, which tells how "from Vis's drunken glance, the inebriate lovers grew infamous throughout the world" (*ze chashm-e mast-e u ʿoshshāq-e makhmur · be shukhi gashta dar āfāq mashhur*) and urges the reader to repent of his sins while he still can: "Say you atone right here and now! for tomorrow is not the time to beg forgiveness" (*zabān-e maʿẕarat bogshāy injā · ke vaqt-e ʿoẕrkhwāhi nist fardā*).[123] The couple's notoriety could also be used in humorous ways: the satirist ʿObayd-e Zākāni (d. ca. 770/1370), a contemporary of ʿEmād, defines the "horned ram" as "a man whose wife reads the story of *Vis & Rāmin*."[124]

Though the lovers' fame was undiminished, access to their tale grew increasingly restricted with the passage of time and ongoing changes in literary taste. Ḥamdollāh Mostowfi (d. ca. 744/1334), for example, says nothing about Gorgāni in his *Select History*, save that he was a contemporary of the Seljuk sultan Toghrul Bey with some "fine poems," including *V&R*, to his name; either he had not seen the poem, or he did not think it worthy of quotation.[125] A century later, the biographer Dowlatshāh Samarqandi

122. Maulana Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *Maṡnavī*, ed. Muḥammad Istiʿlāmī (Tehran: Zavvār, 1370 [1990]), 5:63.

عـاشـقـانِ لـعـبـتـانِ پـر قَـذَر　　کـرده قـصدِ خـون و جانِ هـمـدگـر
ویس و رامین خسرو و شیرین بخوان　　که چه کردند از حَسَد آن ابلَهان
که فنـا شد عاشق و معشوق نیز　　هم نه چیزند و هواشان هم نه چیز
پـاکالـهی کـه عَـدَم بـر هـم زَنَـد　　مـر عَـدَم را بـر عَـدَم عـاشق کُـنَـد

123. See the *Maḥabbatnāma* of ʿAlī ibn Maḥmūd ʿImād Faqīh, *Panj ganj*, ed. Rukn al-Dīn Humāyūn Farrukh (Tehran: Dānishgāh-i Millī-i Īrān, 2536 [1977]), 176–77.

124. T'odua, "Yik dū sukhan," xxv; Niẓām al-Dīn ʿUbayd Zākānī, *Kulliyāt-i ʿUbayd Zākānī*, ed. Muḥammad Jaʿfar Maḥjūb (New York: Bibliotheca Persia Press, 1999), 329: *al-quch va-l-shākhdār: ān ke zan-ash qeṣṣa-ye Vis o Rāmin khwānad.* Cf. Niẓām al-Dīn ʿUbayd Zākānī, *Obeyd-e Zakani: Ethics of the Aristocrats & Other Satirical Works*, trans. Hasan Javadi (Washington, D. C.: Mage Publishers, 2008), 70.

125. Ḥamd Allāh Mustawfī Qazvīnī, *Tārīkh-i guzīdah*, ed. ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn Navāʾi (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1960), 743. Interestingly, the *History* also mentions Mobad "of *Vis & Rāmin*" as having ruled Khorasan and Mazandaran before the rise of the Godarzid branch of the Parthians, a useful connection for Minorsky's arguments. See Appendix B.

(d. 913/1507) twice misattributes the story, first to Neẓāmi ʿAruži and then to Neẓāmi of Ganja.[126] His contemporary ʿAbdorraḥmān Jāmi (d. 898/1492) at least got the author's name right in his *Bahārestān*, but his placement of Gorgāni between Khāqāni and Neẓāmi of Ganja is more than a century off-date, and he adds that the physical book is "lost and unobtainable these days" (*dar in ruzegār mahjur o nāyāb*).[127] A few decades after Jāmi's death, the Ottoman sultan Süleyman Kanuni "the Magnificent" commissioned the poet Lāmiʿī (d. 938/1531) to create a Turkish version of the tale, but it took an inordinate while for his agents to even procure a copy; and when the poet finally had the manuscript before him, he was galled to find it a "colourless story of feeble versification" and altered so many core elements that the end result had little in common with its source, save the names of its protagonists.[128] Perhaps thanks to this effort, a fair copy of *V&R* nonetheless entered the royal library of Mehmet III (r. 1595–1603).[129] The final mention of the work in the Ottoman context occurs in the enormous list of books compiled by Kātip Çelebi (d. 1068/1657), who writes that *V&R* was a Parthian story versified by Fakhri of Gorgan, supposes some vague relation with Neẓāmi ʿAruži (repeating Dowlatshāh's mistake), and concludes by mentioning the Turkish translation by Lāmiʿī.[130] Although these details are for the most part accurate, their terse and summary presentation suggests a general lack of interest in what was by now a historical curiosity; poetry had moved on to bigger and better things.

Nonetheless, Gorgāni's poem did exert considerable influence in Persian literature; as Davis notes, the mere fact that *V&R* was an important source for Neẓāmi guaranteed it a prominent role in the history

126. Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *The Tadhkiratu 'sh-Shuʿará* (*"Memoirs of the Poets"*), ed. Edward Granville Browne (London: Luzac & Co.; Brill, 1901), 60, 130–31.

127. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī, *Bahāristān va rasāʾil-i Jāmī*, ed. A"lokhon Afsaḣzod, Muḥammad Jān ʿUmarʹuf, and Abū Bakr Ẓuhūr al-Dīn (Tehran: Mīrāṡ-i Maktūb, 1379 [2000]), 142–43. This statement made its way into a later translation of ʿAlishēr Navāʾī's *Majālis al-nafāʾis*, which Minorski later repeated in error; see Alisher Navoiĭ, *Taẕkirah-i majālis al-nafāʾis*, ed. ʿAlī Aṣghar Ḥikmat (Tehran: Kitābkhānah-i Manūchihri, 1363 [1985]), 333; Minorsky, *Iranica*, 152; Tourkhan Gandjeï, "The Genesis and Definition of a Literary Composition: The Dah-nāma ('Ten Love Letters')," *Der Islam* 47 (1971): 59.

128. See Charles Rieu, *Catalogue of the Turkish Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1888), 175, Add. 24,963; Gandjeï, "Dah-nāma," 60. The poet writes, *gechilmish gerchi choq efsūn u neyrang · velīkin naẓm sust efsāne bīrang*. Cf. Minorsky, *Iranica*, 189–90; T'odua, "Yik dū sukhan," xxv.

129. The dating of this manuscript varies in the two catalogues of the Bibliothèque Nationale consulted. See Appendix A for details.

130. Kâtip Çelebi, *Kitāb kashf al-ẓunūn ʿan asāmī al-kutub wa-al-funūn*, ed. Şerefeddin Yaltkaya and Kilisli Muallim Rifat, 4 vols. (Istanbul: Maṭābiʿ Wikālat al-Maʿārif al-Jalīlah, 1941–1947), 2:2025; Kâtip Çelebi, *Kashf al-ẓunūn ʿan asāmī al-kutub wa-al-funūn*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā, 7 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīyah, 2008), 3:540. Cf. Ṣafā, *Tārīkh-i Adabīyāt*, 2:370–71; Minorsky, *Iranica*, 189.

of the Persian romance.[131] But other traces, less immediately obvious yet perhaps more pervasive, can also be found in those "early specimens of this kind of composition" that Wardrop observed: the ten love-letters of Vis and the love-lyrics of Rāmin. The former took on a life of its own as a spin-off genre in the fourteenth century, not in direct reference to *V&R* but as a venue for innovative works of dialogic literature composed in the "debate" (*paykār* or *monāẓera*) tradition that flourished throughout the Ilkhanid and Timurid periods. The new genre became known as the "Ten Letters" (*dah-nāma*) with numerous contributions by ʿAṭā'i (*ʿOshshāqnāma*, w. ca. 680/1281 and often mistakenly attributed to ʿErāqi),[132] Homām-e Tabrizi (*Ṣoḥbatnāma*, w. 684/1285),[133] Owḥadi (*Manṭeq al-ʿoshshāq*, w. 706/1306), Amir Ḥosayni Heravi (*Si-nāma*, w. 706/1306), Ibn Naṣuḥ (*Maḥabbatnāma*, w. 736/1335),[134] Roknoddin Ṣā'en Samnāni (*Toḥfat al-ʿoshshāq*, w. 751/1350), ʿObayd-e Zākāni (*ʿOshshāqnāma*, w. 751/1350), Shāhshojāʿ (*Rūḥ al-ʿāsheqin*, w. 768/1366), ʿEmād Faqih (*Maḥabbatnāma*, w. 766/1364), Ibn ʿEmād (*Rowżat al-moḥebbin*, w. 794/1392), Ḥariri (*Maḥbub al-qolub*, w. 800/1397),[135] ʿAyshi (*ʿEshratnāma*, w. 812/1405), and at least four additional titles in Turkish.[136] Khwāju, who seems to have been an aficionado of the old romances, not only placed a "Ten Letters" scene in his *Gowharnāma* but also wrote two responses to *V&R* and *K&S* with his *Homāy & Homāyun* and *Gol & Nowruz*. The "lyric-in-the-romance" performances by Rāmin also saw renewed interest during this period, often coinciding with the "Ten Letters" genre: Khwāju's contemporaries Salmān Savāji (d. 763/1362) and ʿObayd-e Zākāni (d. ca. 770/1370) interpolated ghazals within the masnavi framework of *Jamshid & Khorshid* and the *ʿOshshāqnāma*, respectively.[137]

131. See Dick Davis, "Introduction," in *Vis and Ramin*, trans. Dick Davis (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), xxxi–xxxii.

132. See Julian Baldick, "The Authenticity of ʿIrāqī's ʿUshshāq-nāma," *Studia Iranica* 2 (1973): 67–78; an English translation of the poem is found in Arthur John Arberry, *The Song of Lovers* (Oxford University Press, 1939).

133. Cf. Nasrollah Pourjavady, "Stories of Aḥmad al-Ghazālī 'Playing the Witness' in Tabrīz (Shams-i Tabrīzī's interest in *shāhid-bāzī*)," in *Reason and Inspiration in Islam*, ed. Todd Lawson (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), 217.

134. Nasrollah Pourjavady, "Literary Debates in the Safīna-yi Tabriz," in *Safina Revealed: A Compendium of Persian Literature in 14th-Century Tabriz*, ed. Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab and Sen McGlinn (Leiden University Press, 2010), 138.

135. For the identification of the author, see Maḥjūb, "Naẓarī bih sayr-i ʿishq dar dāstān-i Vīs va Rāmīn," 511, n. 37ر; Maḥbūba Khurāsānī and Farīda Dāvūdī-Muqaddam, "Taḥlīl-i dahnāmahʹhā-yi adab-i fārsī az dīdgāh-i anvāʿ-i adabī," *Matn Pazhūhī-yi Adabī* 50 (1390 [2011]): 27.

136. Mīnuvī, "Vīs va Rāmīn," 19; Gandjeï, "Dah-nāma," 60–65; Maḥjūb, "Naẓarī bih sayr-i ʿishq dar dāstān-i Vīs va Rāmīn," 510–11, n. 37. For entries on these poets, see Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tadhkirah*, 210 (Owḥadi), 225 (Amir Ḥosayni), 254 (ʿEmād Faqih), 225 (Ibn Naṣuḥ), 246 (Samnāni), 316 (Ibn ʿEmād). For a recent investigation into the formal elements of the genre and a survey of the works cited, see Khurāsānī and Dāvūdī-Muqaddam, "Taḥlīl-i dahnāmahʹhā."

137. Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tadhkirah*, 246. Cf. Furūzānfar, *Sukhan*, 378; Maḥjūb, "Muqaddamah," 98–102; Franklin D. Lewis, "Reading, Writing, and Recitation: Sanā'i and the Origins of the Persian Ghazal" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1995), 48–49; J. T. P. de Bruijn, "Ḵᵛāju Kermāni," in *EIr* (2009), online edition, accessed June 11, 2015, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/kvaju-kerman-poet-and-mystic; Robert Dankoff, "The Lyric in the Romance: The Use of Ghazal in Persian and

A survey of the anthologies, prosopographies, and personal notebooks kept by the intelligentsia of the thirteenth century onwards confirms that the letters and lyrics of *V&R* were the most regularly cited and copied portion of the poem until the modern period; whatever else critics might have thought of the story, it seems that the eloquence and rhetorical beauty of these passages was received with universal acclaim.[138] These citations also provide us with something of a barometer to gauge the changing criteria by which poetry was judged as time marched along. For example, the *Crown of Great Deeds* was compiled at a time when the poem was still relatively popular and accessible; the letters and lyrics are there, but so too is the sex-and-violence: the erotic gazing at the assembled queens of the realm, the great battle fought between Mobad and Viru, and Rāmin's triumphant coronation ceremony all make an appearance in this work.[139] In contrast, the *Safina* of Abu l-Majd of Tabriz, compiled a century later (the entry on *Vis & Rāmin* was made on Saturday, 17 Rabīʿ II 721 AH = 24 May 1321 CE), shows a different aesthetic at work: following some citations from the *Shāhnāma*, we find a contiguous selection of *V&R* entitled "On Vis's writing the 'Ten Letters' to Rāmin" (*goftār andar nebeshtan-e Vis be Rāmin dah nāma*), which covers the bulk of Vis's letters and her subsequent lament, ending with the poignant coda, "No doubt the soil of the earth is better than me, for it has a springtime, and I never will" (*hamānā khāk dar giti ze man beh · ke u rā nowbahār ast o man neh*).[140] It is a substantial section of the poem, amounting to about seven hundred lines of verse, and while there is a fair amount of divergence from the edited version by Moḥammad Rowshan, the core of the text is the same: the lines follow the same sequence, many long passages are

Turkish Maṣnavīs," *JNES* 43, no. 1 (1984): 9–10; Daniela Meneghini, "ʿObayd Zākāni," in *EIr* (2008), online edition, accessed June 11, 2015, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/obayd-zakani.

138. Some recent Persian studies of *V&R* devote themselves to a stylistic study of the "Ten Letters," attesting to its ongoing prestige in contemporary criticism; see, for example, Ruqīyah Rustamī, "Barʹrasī-i vīzhagīʹhā-yi adabī dar nāmahʹhā-yi ʿāshiqānah-yi Vīs va Rāmīn-i Asʿad-i Gurgānī," *Ḥāfiẓ*, no. 85 (1390 [2011]): 27–35, http://www.noormags.ir/view/fa/articlepage/890222/; Ismāʿīl Tājbakhsh and Hīvā Ḥasanpūr, "Sabk shināsī-i dahʹnāmah-i Vīs va Rāmīn-i Fakhr al-Dīn Asʿad Gurgānī," *Sabk shināsī-i naẓm va naṣr-i fārsī* 13 (1390 [2011]): 183–200, http://fa.journals.sid.ir/ViewPaper.aspx?ID=136725.

139. Imāmī, "Abyāt-i Vīs va Rāmīn dar Tāj al-Maʾāṣir," 244–52.

140. Abū al-Majd Muḥammad ibn Masʿūd Tabrīzī, *Safīnah-yi Tabrīz*, with an introduction by ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn Ḥāʾirī and Nasrollah Pourjavady (Tehran: Markaz-i Nashr-i Dānishgāhī, 1381 [2003]), 554–59; for the dating of this entry, see ibid., xxxiii. The cited passage corresponds to *V&R* 81.2–83.75 in *Vis & Rāmin* (*ed. Rawshan*), 257–87. A *safina*, along with the nearly analogous *jung* and *bayāż*, is a kind of private notebook, what the English called "commonplace books," that authors compiled for their personal use and reference; this particular example contains citations from 209 books and epistles that touch on every aspect of literary, religious, and scientific knowledge the author would have had reason to refer to. For more on this kind of book, see Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, "Casing the Treasury: The Safīna-yi Tabrīz and its Compiler," in *Safina Revealed: A Compendium of Persian Literature in 14th-Century Tabriz*, ed. Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab and Sen McGlinn (Leiden University Press, 2010), 16–22; Firuza Abdullaeva, "What's in a Safīna?," in *Safina Revealed: A Compendium of Persian Literature in 14th-Century Tabriz*, ed. Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab and Sen McGlinn (Leiden University Press, 2010), 59–62.

repeated verbatim, and there are no glaring lacunae.[141] This suggests that at least this section of *V&R* was popular enough that it continued to be copied in its entirety well into the Ilkhanid period, a time when, as we saw, readers were fond of poetry framed around the exchange of speeches and debates. This scene is followed by some classic moments in the romances of Neẓāmi Ganjavi: the story of Farhād's love for Shirin in *Khosrow & Shirin*, Majnun's pilgrimage to Mecca in *Layli & Majnun*, and the "Story of the Yellow Pavilion" in the *Haft Paykar*, further suggesting that, at least for this individual, the "Ten Letters" of Gorgāni's work were a landmark achievement in the tradition of the Persian romance, something that deserved to rub shoulders with giants like Neẓāmi and Ferdowsi.[142]

Thus, even as the whole of *Vis & Rāmin* fell out of general circulation, a certain core, with the "Ten Letters" at its center, continued to be passed down and appreciated, probably due to the emotional intensity of this point in the narrative and the many quips, quotables, and proverbs that decorate its lines.[143] Even though he did not have the full work at hand, Jāmi dubbed Gorgāni "one of the exemplary poets of the age" (*az amāśel o afāżel-e ruzgār ast*) and included eight such verses in his *Bahārestān* to demonstrate the poet's eloquence.[144] Interestingly, every single one of the quoted verses are taken from Mobad's rants and lectures at Vis; perhaps Jāmi identified with him on some level. The Safavid poet Ṣā'eb Tabrizi (d. 1086–87/1676) records seven verses from *V&R* in his personal notebook (*bayāż*) with a similar eye for pith and profundity, citing memorable quotes like: "Casting felt into water is easy, but not so pulling it back out!"[145] Forty lines are cited in *The Seven Climes* (w. 1002/1593), a biographical-geographical encyclopedia by Aḥmad Amin Rāzi, of which about half are taken from the "Ten Letters" and the remainder from other rhetorical highlights, such as Vis's laments, Rāmin's lyrics, and the narrator's meditations on the world's transience.[146] Reżāqoli Khan Hedāyat (d. 1250/1871) expands on this trend in his book *The As-*

141. Namely interpolated lines, deleted lines, and variant readings. Seven of the titles correspond with the titles in Rowshan's edition, but occasionally we see notable differences; the fifth letter is entitled "On the suffering of the beloved's cruelty" (*andar jafā bordan az dust*) in the critical edition, but the *Safina* reads "On the beloved's greatness" (*andar bozorgvār-e dust*). Of course, these variations may simply reflect what the compiler saw as the dominant themes of these passages.

142. *Safīnah-yi Tabrīz*, 560–567; cf. Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, "Literary Works in Tabriz's Treasury," in *Safina Revealed: A Compendium of Persian Literature in 14th-Century Tabriz*, ed. Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab and Sen McGlinn (Leiden University Press, 2010), 121–24 and Appendix A.

143. Lists of the proverbs in *Vis & Rāmin* can be found in Hidāyat, "Chand nuktah," 410–13; Muḥaqqiq, "Yād′dāsht-hā," 461–62; Maḥjūb, "Muqaddamah," 58–63; *Vis & Rāmin* (*ed. Rawshan*), 501–10.

144. Jāmī, *Bahāristān va rasā'il-i Jāmī*, 142–43.

145. Muḥammad ʿAlī Tarbīyat, "Mathnavī va mathnavī guyān-i Īrānī," *Mihr* 5 (1316 [1937]): 434; Maḥjūb, "Muqaddamah," 101.

146. al-Rāzī Amīn Aḥmad, *Haft iqlīm*, ed. Javād Fāḍil (Tehran: Kitābfurūshī-yi ʿAlī Akbar ʿIlmī, [1960?]), 3:103–5.

sembly of the Eloquent: unlike the *Safina* of Abu l-Majd, which mostly quoted from the "Ten Letters" but presented them in their original sequence, the seventy-seven lines that Hedāyat quotes are essentially a compilation of "greatest hits" in which runs of even two consecutive lines are rare; the majority of the citations are again from Vis's letters, with additional "singles" from Rāmin's speeches, his royal testament, and the narrator's panegyrics thrown in.[147] These later works offer a striking example of the extent to which *V&R* was rearranged, epitomzed, and redacted by these later readers, when it was noticed at all. Loṭfʿali Āẕār Bigdeli's *The Fire-Temple* (w. 1174/1760), for example, only describes Gorgāni—in a rather self-evident move—as one of the poets from Gorgan.[148]

While few copies of the poem remained in Iran, the entirety of the poem continued to be preserved on the outskirts of the Iranian world, where Persian was not the native spoken language. In Georgia, *Visramiani* remained a beloved text and played an important role in the formation of a classical canon by an emerging nationalist movement, but this development went unnoticed among the Persian-speaking literati.[149] The other major refuge for the poem's survival was in India, where the many courts and urban centers under Mughal rule attracted waves of talented émigrés from Iran, promoted the study of Persian among local elites, and sponsored the wide-scale collection, preservation, and production of Persian-language books.[150] Thus, aside from the one Ottoman manuscript preserved in the library of Mehmet III, all surviving copies of the poem are of Indian provenance. But even in this bibliophilic milieu, it does not seem that *V&R* was that widely copied; writing in 1935, the curator of manuscripts at the University of Bombay describes it as a "celebrated romantic Persian poem," but adds that "complete copies of the poem are rare."[151]

147. Hidāyat, *Majmaʿ al-fuṣaḥā*, 1:934–36. It is also worth mentioning how much of Hedāyat's biographical information on Gorgāni is rooted more in legend than in fact, for he mistakenly places the poet in the reign of the Seljuk sultan Moḥammad b. Maḥmud (d. 555/1160) and provides an elaborate version of ʿAṭṭār's story from the *Elāhināma* to explain the circumstances of his life.

148. Āẕar, *Ātishkadah*, 2:804.

149. Gvaxaria, "Notes on the Persian Text of Gorgani's Vis o Ramin," 55; Kaladze, "Georgian Translation," 141.

150. Mario Casari, in *India xiv. Persian Literature*, online edition (2004), accessed June 11, 2015, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/india-xiv-persian-literature-in-india; Paul Losensky, *Welcoming Fighānī: Imitation and Poetic Individuality in the Safavid Mughal Ghazal* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 1998), 1–2, 194; Annemarie Schimmel, *Islamic Literatures of India* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1973), 1, 26–38; Jeremiah P. Losty, *The Art of the Book in India* (London: The British Library Board, 1982), 74–85; Ishtiyaq Ahmad Zilli, "Development of *Inshā* Literature till the End of Akbar's Reign," in *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture*, ed. Muzaffar Alam, Françoise 'Nalini' Delovye, and Marc Gaborieau (New Delhi: Centre de Sciences Humaines, 2000), 327–44.

151. ʿAbd al-Ḳādir Sarfarāz, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Arabic, Persian, and Urdu Manuscripts in the Library of the University of Bombay* (Bombay: University of Bombay, 1935), 220, no. 137; cf. Kaladze, "Georgian Translation," 140. Writing in 1954,

Many more details of this late stage of the poem's *Nachleben* are provided in a valuable entry in *The Garden of Poets*, an anthology by Vāleh Dāghestāni (d. 1170/1756). Unlike the author of *The Fire-Temple*, who spent his life in central Iran, Vāleh emigrated to India and entered the service of the Mughal king Moḥammadshāh, where he clearly had access to a full(ish) copy of the poem. His reaction to Gorgāni's work, quoted in full below, provides a fascinating insight into how early modern readers might have responded to the poem, and the extent to which literary tastes had changed over the centuries:

> Although the poetry of *Vis & Rāmin* comes across to this writer as plain (*sāda*) from beginning to end, the truth is that despite this simplicity and lack of ornamentation, it still possesses incredible power and maturity, and its excessively plain passages are forgivable, considering that this was the beginning of the art form. Back then, the beauty of the brides of speech had not yet been adorned by the ornaments of artifice; they were like bewitching beauties perched under tents in the desert with no desire for kohl or makeup, waiting to ensnare dejected hearts. Despite this, so much ease and fluency is preserved in this book that it cannot be described; the truth of my words will be clear to those who are knowledgeable in the ways of discourse.
>
> To cut to the chase, though I promised at the beginning of this book that I wouldn't present famous masnavis for reasons I there mentioned, but would only excerpt little-known masnavis that will seldom be recorded, this masnavi too, though its name is famous, is difficult to obtain, and for that reason I have selected and transcribed here about seven hundred verses. This poem is six thousand lines in full; one half of this has been anthologized.[152]

The current critical editions of *V&R* actually run at about nine thousand lines, suggesting that even the copy available to Vāleh was substantially smaller than what had been available to the Georgian translator of the poem in the twelfth century.[153] More interesting still are the passages Vāleh chooses to cite: the first half of the quotations are again a collection of "greatest hits," drawing lines from all over the poem as we saw in *The Assembly of the Eloquent*. However, the cited passages are almost entirely taken out of the speeches (*maqālāt*) delivered between various characters: the Nurse to Vis, Rāmin to the Nurse, the Nurse to Rāmin, Vis to Mobad, and so on. This is followed by excerpts from the story's "core," as we found in the *Safina* of Abu l-Majd and *The Seven Climes*: Rāmin's meeting with Vis in Mobad's moonlit garden, his subsequent betrayal of her and his marriage to Gol, Vis's ten letters, and the lovers' final showdown in

Mojtabā Minovi ("Vīs va Rāmīn," 13) says that it had been three hundred years since the poem had fallen into obscurity.

152. ʿAlī Qulī Khān Vālih, *Taẕkirah-i Riyāẓ al-shuʿarāʾ*, ed. Muḥsin Nājī Naṣrʾābādī, 5 vols. (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Asāṭīr, 1384 [2005]), 3:1550–51. For the Persian text, see Appendix B.

153. To be precise, there are 9,045 verses in the Rowshan edition, 9,038 in T'odua and Gvaxaria, 8,904 in Maḥjub, and 8,905 in Minovi. See *Vis & Rāmin* (*ed. Rawshan*), 379.

the blizzard.[154] Nearly all of Vāleh's citations, whether individual lines or connected episodes, focus on the passages of direct speech in the poem, either in the form of letters, lyric songs, soliloquies, or back-and-forth dialogues, a fascinating insight into the aesthetic appeal of *V&R* that we will explore further in Chapter 5.[155]

1.5 Recovery, revulsion, and revision

Thus it was through India that *Vis & Rāmin* came to the attention of European readers. In 1854, the Austrian orientalist Alois Sprenger announced his discovery of an "old Persian legend" in Calcutta; about a decade later, Captain William Nassau Lees, a examiner in Arabic, Persian, and Urdu for the British government, published the first printed edition of *V&R* on the basis of this manuscript with the help of his assistant, Munshi Ahmad Ali.[156] Meanwhile, other copies and fragments of the poem were being purchased or collected (or looted) by European orientalists, diplomats, and soldiers: one manuscript was brought to the newly-founded University of Bombay (est. 1857), another to the Bodliean Library (Elliot Collection 273); an anthology containing part of the "Ten Letters" episode was seized as booty by a soldier after the battle of Ghazni in 1839 and ended up in the British Museum. About ten years after Lees's edition was published, Karl Heinrich Graf compared it against the manuscripts held at Oxford and Berlin and produced a partial translation; the first steps towards a critical edition were underway.[157] Graf's article set the pattern for many studies to come: it begins with an introduction of the manuscript tradition, dedicates a few paragraphs to evaluating the work's literary quality and merits, then offers the reader a brief summary of the poem's plot and aesthetic merits (or demerits), illustrated by some translated passages. Reading through the poem's preface, Graf believed that the text was a composite

154. A smaller selection from this core is also visible in a manuscript held by the British Museum (Add. 12,560), which focuses on Rāmin's betrayal and Vis's love-letters to him. See Appendix A.

155. I must add a word of thanks to the creators of *Nowsokhan* (http://www.nosokhan.com/) and the *Thesaurus Indogermanischer Text- und Sprachmaterialien* (*TITUS*) *Project* (http://titus.fkidg1.uni-frankfurt.de/texte/etca/iran/niran/npers/visrp/visrp.htm, both sites accessed 11 June 2015) for making this part of the research possible by putting digital and searchable versions of *Vis & Rāmin* online for public use. Without their aid, tracking down the locations of these disparate lines would have taken a long, long time.

156. Alois Sprenger, "Bibliographische Anzeigen: Literarische Notizen," *ZDMG* 8 (1854): 608; Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī, *Wís o Rámín: a Romance of Ancient Persia, Translated from the Pahlawi and rendered into Verse by Fakhr al-Dín, As'ad al-Astarabádi, al-Fakhri, al-Gurgáni*, ed. William Nassau Lees and Munshi Ahmad Ali (Calcutta: Printed at the College Press, 1865).

157. Karl Heinrich Graf, "Wîs und Râmîn," *ZDMG* 23 (1869): 375–433.

work, a Middle Persian original recast into New Persian; but on an aesthetic level, neither recension offered much to admire:

> The extensive commentary, exposition, and description, based on idealized images and similes, likely belong to the more recent redactor, who only seldom attempts an explicit depiction of events. The original, in contrast, shows a certain coarseness of taste, closely connected with the content, that repels our finer moral sensibilities, but to which the later redactor did not object. Although it adopts a moralizing tone, morality is altogether lacking, and from the perspective of how it depicts social customs, the story serves as a poor illustration of the panegyrics that long ago gave the idealistic Greeks, perhaps taken by the Persians' admirable [literary] style or the admonitions of the Zend Avesta, the "Persian love for truth." Neither the original story nor the later redactors seem to have any interest in truthfulness; the national character seems in this respect to have been one and the same irregardless of the period. The only noble characters present, as we see it, are the king, who is constantly denied, betrayed, and ultimately killed by sheer bad luck, and his stepbrother and vizier Zard, who is treacherously murdered. Not so Rāmin or Vis, despite all the exuberant praise and musk-scented descriptions of beauty upon which the poet dwells.[158]

Vis & Rāmin, in other words, is marred by a basic incongruity between its subject matter and its diction; like a smutty painting set in a gilded frame, the story's coarseness is only highlighted by the moral pretensions that decorate its borders, eliciting our sympathy for the story's villains while the hero and heroine only arouse our revulsion. A similar reaction is found in another essay published some thirty years later by Baron R. von Stackleberg: guided by Aristotelean expectations of "the tragical sin of Mobad" in demanding the hand of an unborn girl, he was disappointed by what he considered a farcical ending in which the king is slain by a boar and the deceitful lovers assume the throne, a denouement that "does not coincide with our view about the issue of the tragic crime and its expiating." Its only literary

158. Graf, "Wîs und Râmîn," 378. Many thanks to Rodrigo Adem for helping me decipher the writer's archaic style.

> Dem jüngern Bearbeiter gehören wohl die oft weitschweifigen Betrachtungen und Erörterungen, die in gesuchten Bildern un Vergleichungen sich ergehenden Beschreibungen, sährend er es nur selten versteht auschaulich zu erzählen und zu schildern; dagegen gehört schon der ältern Erzählung, als eng mit dem Inhalt verbunden, eine gewisse Rohheit der Gesinnung an, die unser eineres sittliches Gefül abstösst, an welcher aber der Berbeiter keinen Anstoss genommen hat. Trotz moralisirender Phrasen kommt doch die Moral überall zu kurz, und vom Standpunkte der Sittenschilderung betrachtet bildet die Erzählung eine üble Illustration zu den Lobsprüchen, welche einst die idealisirenden Griechen, vielleicht durch die liebenswürdigen Formen der Perser bestochen, vielleicht nur af Grund der Ermahnungen des Zendavesta, der Wahrheitsliebe der Perser ertheilten . . . Von einer Pflicht der Wahrhaftigkeit scheint weder die ursprüngliche Erzählung noch der neuere Berbeiter ein Bewusstsein zu haben, der Volkscharakter scheint vielmehr in dieser Hinsicht zu jeder Zeit einer und derselbe gewesen zu sein. Als edlere Charaktere nach unsern Begriffen erscheinen nur der immer und überall belogene und betrogene und zuletzt durch einen blossen unglücklichen Zufall umgekommene König und sein Steifbruder un Wesir der verrätherisch gemordete Zerd, nicht aber Râmîn oder Wîs, trotz allen von dem Dichter aufgebotenen überschwenglichen Lobeserhebungen und moschsduftenden Schönheitsbeschreibungen.

merits, he concludes, lie in "the simplicity and *naïveté* with which various deceits and stratagems (of the lovers) are told," but "the chief importance of *Vis-u Rāmīn* consists in its characterization of ancient Persian culture."[159]

These comments contributed to a consensus that grew as more and more scholars, their curiosities piqued, began to peruse the poem: though *V&R* may be an important source for ancient Iranian linguistics, philology, and history, it was truly an awful read.[160] Theodor Nöldeke deemed it "a poem whose aesthetic value I cannot judge much higher than its morals," and Italo Pizzi's hatred of the poem was such that it inspired him to the sublime heights of invective, *un vero furore demolitorio* as Gabrieli puts it: "the stupidest, clumsiest, and most tasteless poem to ever emerge from the hands of a miserable poetaster," "a vulgar book for vulgar folk," "inane, tasteless, scandalous, prurient, bizarre, and grotesque," "a tawdry work unworthy of anyone who even remotely deserves the name of poet," and other colorful descriptions abound in his review.[161] He ends his rant with a martyr's apology: the only reason that compelled him to slog through "more than nine thousand clumsy, halting verses" was because there were some scholars who (having never read the poem, he suspects) had assigned it some amount of literary value. He concludes with this parting shot: "If it were up to me, I would want nothing but to return to its ignoble station this poem that has been undeservedly elevated by too many degrees."[162] Pizzi was not alone in his wish, nor in his rancor; Vaḥid Dastgerdi, who edited the works of Neẓāmi Ganjavi, suggested that the latter poet was driven to write his masnavis out of a desire to save Persian literature from the

159. See Baron R. von Stackelberg, "Neskol'ko slov o persidskom epose 'Visa i Ramin'," *Drevnosti Vostochnye* 2, no. 1 (1896): 10–23. My summary is cited from translations in Minorsky, *Iranica*, 190–92 and Kaladze, "Georgian Translation," 139. Stackelberg has a second article dedicated to unusual words in *V&R*, which is a very interesting read for linguists, as it draws comparisons between the lexicons of Greek, Armenian, and Persian; see Baron R. von Stackelberg, "Lexicalisches aus 'Wīs ō Rāmīn'," *ZDMG* 48 (1894): 490–497.

160. Even more sympathetic readers of the poem, such as Gabrieli and Minorsky, maintained that "the chief importance of *Vīs-u Rāmīn* consists in its characterization of ancient Persian culture," Minorsky, *Iranica*, 190; cf. Gabrieli, "Note sul *Vīs u Rāmīn*," 187.

161. Theodor Nöldeke, *Das iranische Nationalepos*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1920), 52, §32, note 4: "In recht unerfreulicher Weise zeigt sich die Lust an wochenlangem Zechen von Mann und Weib im Wīs u-Rāmīn, einem Gedichte, dessen ästhetischen Wert ich nicht viel höher schätzen kann als seine Moral." Pizzi, *Storia della Poesia Persiana*, 2:88: "Il più sciocco, inetto e insipido poema che sia mai uscito dalle mani d'un miserabile poetastro"; "libro del volgo e fatto per il volgo"; "ecco le cose puerili e scipite, le sconcie e indecenti, le strane e grottesche, onde bellamente s'infiora questo poema, che lo mostrano lavoro volgare e indegno di chiunque, anche per poco, meriti nome di poeta." For Gabrieli's bemused response to this outburst, see Francesco Gabrieli, "Sul poema persiano Vīs u Rāmīn," *Annali, Istituto Orientale di Napoli N.S.* 1 (1940): 254.

162. Pizzi, *Storia della Poesia Persiana*, 2:89–90: "Quanto a noi, non abbiam voluto che ricondurre al suo umile posto questo poema che già s'era indebitamente elevato di troppi gradi."

scandal that was *Vis & Rāmin*:

> In his romances *Khosrow & Shirin* and *Layli & Majnun*, Neẓāmi brought love and chastity to the utmost level of perfection, as if stirred to action by Gorgāni's versification of *Vis & Rāmin*, which is in truth a disgusting fable, a book hostile to the edicts of law and religion and an enemy of the history of Iran's moral grandeur. Determined to repair the damage of that criminal and degenerate work, he decided to safeguard the morality of Iran with tales of love, chastity, and purity. . . . Although *V&R* was published recently in a misguided error, it will certainly never become famous, and will soon resume its path toward the halls of oblivion.[163]

While not all critics found *Vis & Rāmin* so abhorrent, few could welcome it without some qualification. Hermann Ethé, the archivist at the Bodleian Library, credited Gorgāni with inaugurating the *romantische Epik* in Persian literature, in which "the dialogue of the protagonists is not about the struggle between light and darkness or truth and falsehood, but rather on their spiritual and emotional lives, especially the various states of the heart."[164] Nonetheless, he concludes that Neẓāmī of Ganja is the superior poet thanks to his chaste morals and nobility of expression.[165] Francesco Gabrieli published two articles that sought to provide a more judicious review than that of Pizzi, but he could not help complaining of the "interminable laments," "prolix declamations," and "tedious melodrama" that gummed up an already monotonous plot: "These adventures, whatever they were in the Pahlavi version, are in Fakhroddin the

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163. Vaḥīd Dastgirdī, *Ganjīnah-i Ganjavi yā daftar-i haftum-i ḥakīm-i Niẓāmī-yi Ganjavī* (Tehran: ʿIlmī, 1318 [1940]), مو–مه:

> نظامی در نظمِ خسرو و شیرین و لیلی و مجنون عشق و عفت را به سرحدِ کمال تعریف و توصیف و ترویج کرده و گویی از نظم کردن فخر گرگانی ویس و رامین را که در حقیقت افسانه‌ایست زشت و کتابیست دشمنِ ناموس و خصمِ تاریخِ عظمتِ اخلاقیِ ایران بی نهایت متأثر شده و خواسته کسرِ آن بزه‌کاری و جنایت را با افسانه‌های عشق و عفت و پاکی جبران سازد و عظمتِ اخلاقیِ ایران را نگاهبانی کند. . . . و در این اواخر هم گرچه با اشتباهکاری طبع و نشر شده ولی باز هم مسلم شیوع نخواهد یافت و راهِ طاقِ نسیان را پیش خواهد گرفت.

Such sentiments have persisted to the present day; in 2008, one critic described *V&R* as an "insult to the Iranian race" (*nowʿ-i taḥqir be ʿonṣor-e irāni*) and believes, in a statement remarkably similar to Dastgerdi's, that "any reader, upon opening this book, will confine it to the dark-room of his forgotten memories" (*har khʷānanda-i bā goshudan-e in ketāb, ān rā be tārik-khāna-ye farāmushi-hā-ye ḥāfeẓa-ye khʷish bāz pas rānad*). See Javādī, "Sharm va āzarm," 21.

164. Hermann Ethé, "Neupersische Litteratur," in *Grundriss der iranischen Philologie*, ed. Wilhelm Geiger and Ernst Kuhn, vol. 2 (Strasbourg: K. J. Trübner, 1895–1904), 239:

> Wie in den heroischen Teilen des Schahname die Keime zu all den späteren historischen Epen, so liegen auf der anderen Seite in den vielen bestrickenden Liebesepisoden desselben, vorzugsweise in den mit dem ganzen Zauber der Poesie umwobenen Romanzen von Zāl und Rūdābe und Bēzhan und Manīsche diejenigen der romantischen Epik, d. h. des poetischen Liebesromans, in welchem es nicht auf die äussere Bethätigung heroischer Kühnheit und herausfordernden Männertrotzes im Kampf um Licht und Wahrheit gegen Finsternis und Lüge, sondern auf das innere Geistes- und Gemütsleben der handelnden Personen abgesehen ist, vor allem auf die leidenschaftlichen Wallungen des menschlichen Herzens.

165. ibid., 241.

most boring and awkwardly told as one can imagine."[166] He especially disliked the poem's characters, whom he likened to wooden marionettes—illogical, incoherent, and guided by an "infantile naïveté."[167] Iranian scholars, with the exception of Dastgerdi, tended towards a more favorable estimation of *V&R*, but often relied on the same aesthetic sensibilities as its detractors. Foruzānfar admits to a certain prolixity (*eṭṭenāb*) in the work, which he blamed on the Pahlavi original, but he admired Gorgāni as an iconoclastic free-thinker, a romantic before the Romantics: "His heart is consumed with burning sentiments, the cup of his thought is brim-full and cannot but overflow. He does not speak out of his own will; he does not fret about rhyme; he doesn't bother to observe the principles of others; he eschews complex sentences and difficult words that do not accord with the sensitive natures and delicate thoughts of lovers, and that would lessen the brilliance of love's thematics."[168] Ṣādeq Hedāyat was also impressed by Gorgāni's skill at handling the inner lives of his characters, comparing his achievement with that of *Lady Chatterly's Lover*; some years later, Amin Banāni would repeat this comparison and add *Madame Bovary* to the list of kindred spirits.[169] In general, it seems that the poem's most salient feature for these early readers, for better or for worse, was its use of lyrical asides, which were marked by an indisputable rhetorical brilliance and emotional power, though whether the product of an impassioned genius or overwrought courtly artifice remained up to debate.

Meanwhile, work on editing the poem continued, thanks to some fortuitous breakthroughs in the manuscript tradition. The first scholars of *Vis & Rāmin* had had to content themselves with Indian manuscripts that were often in bad condition and scarcely a century older than they were; however, Charles Henri-Auguste Schefer (d. 1898), a translator, diplomat, and book-collector who traveled widely in the service of the Ottoman Empire, acquired the copy that had been made for the library of Sultan Mehmet

166. Gabrieli, "Note sul *Vīs u Rāmīn*," 175: "Or queste avventure, quali che siano state nel modello in pahlavī, sono in Faḫr ad-dīn quanto di più monotono e goffamente raccontato si possa immaginare."

167. ibid., 176–77; see also Gabrieli, "Sul poema persiano Vīs u Rāmīn," 254.

168. Incidentally, Gorgāni himself complains that the poem "has abundant descriptions of everything that mean little when you read aloud" (*farāvān vaṣf-e chizi bar shomārad · che bar khwāni basi maʿni nadārad*, 7.35); but one would assume, then, that whatever *eṭṭenāb* remained in the poem was there by his design. See Furūzānfar, *Sukhan*, 369:

> دلِ او به آذرفشانی مشغول و پیمانهٔ فکرش لبریز و از فیضان ناگزیر است، به دلخواهِ خود نمی‌گوید، قافیه نمی‌اندیشد و رعایتِ اصولِ دیگران را واجب نمی‌داند، جمله‌های پیچیده و کلماتِ درشت را که از رونقِ معانیِ عشقی می‌کاهد و با طبعِ لطیف و خاطرِ نازکِ عاشقان سازگار نیست به کار نمی‌برد.

169. Hidāyat, "Chand nuktah," 382; Amīn Banānī, "Az Vīs va Rāmīn tā Khusraw va Shīrīn," *Irānshināsī* 4 (1991): 712.

III and brought it to the Bibliothèque Nationale. Moḥammad Qazvini alerted Minovi to the existence of this copy and sent him a facsimile: the result was the 1935 edition of *V&R*, or the "misguided error" as Dastgerdi called it. Minovi's student, Moḥammad Ja'far Maḥjub, revised this edition in 1959 in consultation with the Calcutta text, adding an extensive introduction and indices.[170] This was followed by an even more remarkable collaborative effort that took the Georgian *Visramiani* into account. As the oldest "copy" to survive in full, no one doubted that it would be a valuable resource for establishing a robust edition of the poem; but the degree of its importance was only realized when scholars began to collate the manuscripts required for a critical edition of the Georgian text.[171] The translation had always been famous for a certain kind of rhythmic phrasing and parallel structures that stood out from other prose works of this period, and on top of this, editors noticed that one manuscript was peppered with small circles at regular intervals whose function remained unknown. Comparison with the Persian revealed that these circles corresponded with the break between the hemistichs of the original poetry, prompting the philologist Nikolai Marr to announce, "The translation is so faithful to the Persian original that the Georgian text represents a band, as it were, of strings of individual phrases reproducing the Persian poem distich after distich, verse after verse."[172] Alek'sandre Gvaxaria and Magali T'odua, who were involved in this project, tell us that the comparison of the Georgian translation with the available Persian manuscripts was enormously beneficial for both texts, correcting hundreds of corruptions in the former and numerous lacunae and misreadings in the latter.[173] The two scholars then teamed up with Mojtabā Minovi and Moḥammad Rowshan to put forth a new edition of *V&R* in 1970 with a full critical apparatus, which to my mind is still the best scholarly edition of the poem.[174] The Georgian text, Rowshan writes, remained important for his "final polishing" (*ārāyesh-e nehā'i*) of *V&R*, which he published in 1998.[175]

170. See Mujtabā Mīnuvī, "Yād´dāsht," in *Vis and Rāmin* (Tehran: Beroukhim, 1314 [1935]), i–ii; Zarrīn´kūb, "[Review: *Vīs & Rāmīn*]," 1015; Maḥjūb, "Muqaddamah," 103–5.

171. See Jemshid Giunashvili, "Visramiani," in *EIr*, online edition (2013), accessed June 11, 2015, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/visramiani.

172. Nikolai Marr, *Iz gruzino-persidskih literaturnyh svjazej* (Leningrad [St. Petersburg]: Zapiski Kollegii Vostokovedov, 1925), 137; translated by and cited from Maja Mamatsašvili and Džamshid Giunašvili, "On the Centenary of the First Edition of *Visramiani*," in *Georgica I*, ed. Luigi Magarotto and Gianroberto Scarcia, Quaderni del Seminario di Iranistica, Uralo-Altaistica e Caucasologia dell'Università degli Studi di Venezia 22 (1985), 122–23.

173. Gvaxaria, "Notes on the Persian Text of Gorgani's Vis o Ramin," 55; Magali T'odua and Alek'sandre Gvaxaria, "Pishguftār," in *Vīs va Rāmīn* (Tehran: Bunyād-i Farhang-i Īrān, 1349 [1970]), xxviii.

174. ibid., xix; Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī, *Vis & Rāmin* (*eds. T'odua and Gvaxaria*).

175. *Vis & Rāmin* (*ed. Rawshan*), 16.

Thanks to this happy conjunction of circumstances and the dedication of a large number of people—not least that Georgian scribe who created such a successful adaptation of the poem in his own language so long ago—we now have a very good edition of *Vis & Rāmin* to work with, a near miracle given the poem's status a century ago. The philological work, of course, goes on: in 1990 and 1995, articles by Jamshid Giunashvili and Alek'sandre Gvaxaria suggest a number of further amendments in comparison with the Georgian text; in 1999, Jamila Akhiāni offered another series of corrections, and just two years ago, ʿAlireżā Emāmi published an article with more changes suggested on the basis of the thirteenth-century *Tāj al-ma'āṡer*.[176] Following up on Stackleberg's 1894 article, a 1988 dissertation by Susan Friedman conducted an extensive linguistic analysis of the poem, offering new insights into the pronunciation and grammatical function of now-obsolete particles in Early New Persian.[177]

1.6 Welcome to the conversation

As good critical editions of *Vis & Rāmin* became available, and as awareness of and interest in the poem increased, a slow but steady proliferation of articles, essays, and book chapters dealing with the work has appeared over the past fifty years. These various forays have generally clustered around a number of established themes, sub-conversations that revolve around common points of interest. As such, these various colloquies are rarely in dialogue with one another: were we to envision the world of *V&R* scholarship as a (small) house, we would find a room for the historians and philologists, a room for the European medievalists, a room for those into gender and sexuality, and so on. Other discussions have been established on the basis of region and language; anglophone, continental European, Persian, and russophone studies all have their internal audiences. To say there is no overlap would be a gross exaggeration, but one might imagine that while some individuals, the hosts of the party, have been able to mingle in a number of conversations, others have preferred to stay where they know the crowd. This section will

176. Jemshid Giunashvili, "Sukhanī chand dar bārah-i matn shināsī-yi manẓūmah-i Vīs va Rāmīn-i Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī," *Iranshenasi* 2, no. 1 (1990): 125–134; Gvaxaria, "Notes on the Persian Text of Gorgani's Vis o Ramin"; Jamīlah Akhyānī, "Taṣḥīḥ-i chand bayt az «Vīs va Rāmīn»," *Kitāb-i Māh-i Adabiyāt va Falsafah* 23/24 (1378 [1999]): 46–48, http://www.noormags.ir/view/fa/articlepage/34910; Imāmī, "Abyāt-i Vīs va Rāmīn dar Tāj al-Ma'āṣir." I have noted these amendments in my Rowshan edition of *V&R* and mention them when they come up in citation.

177. Susan Lynne Friedman, "Some Morphological and Phonetic Characteristics in the Language of *Vis-u Ramin*" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1988).

attempt to map out the major "rooms" of this recent scholarship and provide a snapshot of the field in its current state. As was mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, a surprising amount of material can be unearthed when one goes looking, and I dare not claim to provide here a comprehensive list of every publication to do with *V&R*, for not only do new sources keep coming to my attention, but there are some conversations that have largely been carried out in languages inaccessible to me, Russian and Georgian in particular. Nonetheless, I hope to offer a reasonably accurate survey of the kinds of questions that have been asked of the text, and the kinds of answers furnished, up to the present day.

Origins

Probably the oldest and most prominent conversation in *V&R* studies is interested in the antiquity of the poem and its value as a historical artifact. Scholars had long known that the poem was (or claimed to be) descended from some antique text, but no one was really sure how far back it went, or if the claim was to be believed at all. To address this question, Vladimir Minorsky published a four-part series of articles from 1946 to 1962, in what probably remains the signature study of the poem in English. Conducting a meticulous survey of the names, places, and events in the poem, he concluded that *V&R* dates to the Parthian era, probably the first century CE; he specifically links the family of Mobad "Manikān" ("son of Manizha") to Bēzhan b. Gēv b. Gōdarz II, known in Greek as Γωταρζης Γεοποθρος (*Gōtarzēs Geopothros*), who ruled over Hyrcania (Gorgan) from ca. 38–51 CE.[178] This view, as we saw, did not go uncontested: Pizzi and Zarrinkub denied the work any antiquity at all, thinking it instead a local legend that Gorgāni reworked into the literary Persian of Khorasan. Zarrinkub, along with Stackleberg and later Yunus Jaffrey, suggested potential links with India, particularly between Rāmin and Rām of the *Ramayana*, an interesting idea that Minorsky dismissed as "vague and haphazard" and has yet to receive any further consideration.[179] Other scholars did not deny the ancient origins of the poem, but believed that it had

178. Minorsky, *Iranica*, 180–86. For more on this figure and his connection with Gorgan, see Mary Boyce, "Gotarzes Geopothros, Artabanus III, and the Kingdom of Hyrcania," in *Vaiatio Delectat: Iran und der Westen*, ed. Reinhard Dittmann et al. (Munster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2000), 155–166.

179. Zarrīn′kūb, "[Review: *Vīs & Rāmīn*]," 1017; Minorsky, *Iranica*, 191; Yunus Jaffery, *History of Persian Literature* (Delhi: Triveni Publications, 1981), 129–52; for a refutation of Zarrinkub's views, see Minorsky, "Vīs-u Rāmīn (IV)," 282.

been so radically altered in Gorgāni's hands that there was little left of the original to be found.[180] In 1959, Marjian Molé wrote an article attempting to tie *V&R* more closely to the immediate historical circumstances of its composition, where he perceived a clear overlap between the events of the poem and the events of Toghrul's career.[181] Minorsky again had his reservations, wondering what patron would appreciate being compared to an old king who was first cuckolded and then overthrown by his brother, but the idea of *V&R* as a political commentary became a standing theme in mid-century Soviet scholarship, running from Bertel's to Braginskij, Orbeli, and Gafurov, that saw Gorgāni as an anti-establishment or satirical writer, a trend that was only reversed in 1970 with the work of Vera Nikitina.[182] By and large, however, these voices have been in the minority; most scholars have accepted the Parthian dating, which has allowed further innovative studies to take place.

The first of these was by Mary Boyce in her landmark study of minstrelsy in ancient and medieval Iran; as one of the few works that employs the Parthian word *gōsān* to describe its minstrels, *V&R* plays an important role in Boyce's study, which both relied on Minorsky's arguments and reinforced his central claims.[183] Speaking of minstrels, Claude-Claire Kappler analyzed what she considered a key scene in *V&R*—the *gōsān*'s song about King Mobad, which we will discuss in Chapter 4—to bring out possible parallels between Rāmin's overthrow of Mobad and the sacrifice of the primordial man and bull found in Book Three of the *Bundahishn*, a necessary act for the revitalization of the world; these intriguing connections lead her to suggest that we read *V&R* as a kind of "cosmic *geste*" in line with Mazdean cosmology.[184] Another study linking the thematics of *V&R* with Zoroastrian ideas is found in Helmer Ringgren's 1952 monograph *Fatalism in Persian Epics*, in which the author proposed to identify what aspects of fatalistic thought in the *Shāhnāma* and *Vis & Rāmin* go back to pre-Islamic Iranian culture and what is traceable to Islamic influence. Ringgren sought to answer this through an analysis of different conceptualizations of Fate: as Time (*ruzgār*, *zamān*, *dahr*); as the heavens (*āsmān*, *sepehr*, *falak*); as an alloted

180. This was explicitly stated by Ṣādeq Hedāyat, even though his article is chock-full of interesting observations about the pre-Islamic substratum of the poem. See "Chand nuktah," 383–89.

181. Marijan Molé, "«Vīs u Rāmīn» et l'histoire seldjoukide," *Annali, Istituto Universitario Orientale Di Napoli N.S.* 9 (1959): 1–30.

182. Kaladze, "Georgian Translation," 139.

183. Boyce, "The Parthian *Gōsān*."

184. Claude-Claire Kappler, "Présence du mazdéisme dans le roman de Gorgâni, *Vîs o Râmîn*," *Dabireh* 1 (1991): 39–54.

portion (*bakht*); as the Arabic loanwords *qadar* and *qaḍā'*. He systematically compares these terms with Pahlavi texts that address the same themes, producing a helpful concordance of fatalistic passages in *Vis & Rāmin* and their analogues in Pahlavi literature. However, his analysis of the text's *attitude* towards fate is left for the final pages, where he concludes that the fatalism of *V&R* is not true "in the real sense of the word," but "modified and mitigated by the belief in a God who acts righteously."[185] *Vis & Rāmin*'s ties with the world of late antiquity are further explored in a little study tucked in the appendices of Graham Anderson's *The Novel in the Graeco-Roman World*, which locates the root of both the *Vis & Rāmin* and the *Tristan & Iseut* cycle in the ancient story of the Egyptian king Sesonchosis (also called Rameses > Rāmin) and his wife Isis (> Vis).[186] More recently, Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh compared the romances of *Vis & Rāmin* and *Bizhan & Manizha* to produce some exciting conclusions about types and genres of literature distinctive to the Parthian and Sasanian periods of Iranian history; this was followed up by Zorqāni's *Literary History of Iran*, a study rich in both theoretical exercises and massive tables that chart out various schemata of types, genres, subgenres, sources, and texts of every documented work of pre-Islamic Iranian literature.[187] Meanwhile, Dick Davis has published a number of essays that have read the early Persian romances against the themes, structures, and topoi of the Greek novels, again producing numerous and valuable insights and breaking new ground for comparative work.[188]

Genre

Another general theme in *V&R* studies has been its place within the literary canon, and this too has been a "settled" question for a long time (perhaps too long). We recall that over a century ago, Hermann Ethé named *V&R* as the first example of what has generally been called the "romantic epic" tradition in Persian literature, and this quickly became the consensus in virtually all the literary historiography since. Such seniority did little to redeem the poem among its many detractors: rather, it came to be seen as the

185. Ringgren, *Fatalism in Persian Epics*, 130. For a review of this book, see Mary Boyce, "Review of *Fatalism in Persian Epics* by Helmer Ringgren," *JRAS*, nos. 3/4 (1953): 159–60.

186. Graham Anderson, *Ancient Fiction: The Novel in the Graeco-Roman World* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1984), 224–26.

187. Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Bīzhan va Manīzhah va Vīs va Rāmīn," *Īrān shināsī* 2, no. 2 (1990): 273–298; Mahdī Zurqānī, *Tārīkh-i adabī-i Īrān va qalamraw-i zabān-i Fārsī* (Tehran: Sukhan, 1388 [2009]), 79, 198–99, 231–32, etc.

188. Dick Davis, *Panthea's Children: Hellenistic Novels and Medieval Persian Romances* (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 2002); "Greece ix. Greek and Persian Romances," in *EIr* (2002), online edition, accessed June 11, 2015, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/greece-ix; "Introduction," xx–xxviii.

unfortunate first try that was thankfully improved upon by later practitioners.[189] E. G. Browne was quite dubious of Gorgāni's talents, but he dutifully repeated Ethé's sentiments in his *Literary History of Persia*; Bausani agreed that *V&R* was the "first poem of its genre," but maintained that it was "incomparable with the meticulous dramas we see in Neẓāmi"; Rypka considered *V&R* "an insult to Islamic morality and in fact to every other religion," but nevertheless placed it along with the newly-discovered *Varqa & Golshāh* at the head of the "romantic epos" tradition; Ṣafā credits Gorgāni with founding an important "school" of narrative (*maktab-e qābel-e tavajjohi-ye dāstānsarā'i*); Bürgel's introduction to the "romance" concludes that "for all its literary importance, Gorgāni's epic was to be surpassed by the works of the twelfth-century poet Neẓāmi, by far the greatest figure in the field of the Persian romance"; and in a recent survey of Persian literature, Aḥmad Tamimdāri lists *V&R* as the first example of the "love masnavi," but complains again of its tedium and literary deficiencies.[190]

It seems to have become a tenet of faith that whatever was the relationship between Gorgāni and Neẓāmi, the latter was in every way the better poet. In a recent book entitled *A Structuralist Comparison of the Stories of Vis & Rāmin and Khosrow & Shirin*, Musā Piri embarks on a point-by-point reading of the two stories to compare their strengths and weaknesses. On one hand, his study is a detailed catalogue of the many scenes and motifs in common between the two works, further testifying to the obvious value of reading them alongside each other; but on the other hand, I will frankly admit to a certain frustration I felt at the inevitable conclusion that came at the end of every discussion: in panegyric and eulogy, Gorgāni is banal, Neẓāmi sublime; in describing their characters, Gorgāni is sensational, Neẓāmi judicious; in moral points and lessons, Gorgāni is coarse, Neẓāmi noble; in their treatment of love, Gorgāni is salacious, Neẓāmi pristine; in poetic language, Gorgāni is laborious, Neẓāmi exalted; in concluding their stories, Gorgāni is clumsy, Neẓāmi masterful.[191] It should be obvious that I think this narrative needs re-examining; I am certainly not one to deny Neẓāmi's poetic gifts, nor his central place in the canon,

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189. This has been most bluntly put by Dastgirdī, *Ganjīnah*; Shahābī, *Niẓāmī: shā'ir-i dāstānsarā*, 203, and Javādī, "Sharm va āzarm," but it is indeed the general consensus.

190. Browne, *LHP*, 2:274–75; Bausani and Pagliaro, *La letteratura persiana*, 387; Rypka, *HIL*, 177; Ṣafā, *Tārīkh-i Adabīyāt*, 2:336; J. Christoph Bürgel, "The Romance," in *Persian Literature*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (Albany, NY: Bibliotheca Persica, 1988), 166; Aḥmad Tamīm´dārī, *Kitāb-i Īrān: tārīkh-i adab-i Pārsī: maktab´hā, dawrah´hā, sabk´hā va anvā'-i adabī* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Bayn al-Milalī al-Hudā, 1379 [2000]), 92, 232.

191. Pīrī, *Sākhtār´shināsī-i muqāyasah´ī-i manẓūmah´hā-yi Vīs va Rāmīn va Khusraw va Shīrīn*.

but I believe we do *V&R* and the other early romances a great disservice by measuring them against his work, for these poems are striking examples of literary innovation, intellectual profundity, and artistic beauty in their own right. They are also all quite different from one another, which affords us an excellent opportunity to think again about what we mean by "romance," "romantic epic," "love-story," or any other like manner of terms: what makes these diverse texts part of a genre, and why? A rigorous evaluation of what genre is, how we use it, and the pressures it can exert on a work (or vice-versa) is a powerful tool that enables much of the literary analysis in this dissertation, a point we shall discuss in detail in Chapter 2. One effort in this direction was carried out by Amin Banāni, who in his call for a reappraisal (*dobāra-negari*) of the dominant structures and aesthetics of medieval Persian masnavis, reminded readers of the importance of reading the poetry through medieval eyes. Though he too grumbles about the "boring debates and conversations" (*monāẓera-hā vo monāqesha-hā-ye malāl-angiz*) woven throughout the text, he insists that their rhetorical polish represents a fundamental element of the poet's craft in Gorgāni's milieu; this would provide a basis for appraisal and comparison that is both fair and aware.[192] He was right, of course; as we have seen, the debates, letters, and conversations were by far the most popular passages of the poem throughout its long and mottled reception.

Another productive way to frame *Vis & Rāmin* is in terms of time and geography. As we have already seen, one of the closest interlocutors for this text is in fact the *Shāhnāma*, a conversation that makes perfect sense given that both works are drawn from ancient Iranian sources and were cast into New Persian verse by two poets from the same part of the world in a relatively short period of time. Helmer Ringgren utilized this connection in his study of fatalism cited above, and we have briefly visited some of the common features of the two poems' doxologies in this chapter, but a further study by M. A. Eslāmi-Nodushan exists that opens up many more roads for exploration. Contra Kobidze, the author contends that Gorgāni was fully aware of and heavily influenced by Ferdowsi's work and identifies a number of themes and topics in which the two poets appear to share a similar worldview; these include their discussion of wisdom (*kherad*), the personification of lust (*āz*) as a demon, matters of fate and free will, scenes of feasting and wine-drinking, the paramount importance of oaths (*sowgand*), the praise of chivalry, the occultation of

192. Banānī, "Az Vīs va Rāmīn tā Khusraw va Shīrīn," 711.

kings, and specific details regarding treasuries and fire-temples.[193] This excellent survey only scratches the surface of a veritable mine of connections that still wait to be uncovered, and while this dissertation has foregrounded the issue of genre in order to enable a diachronic comparison between love-stories in different traditions, I can affirm that *Vis & Rāmin* and the *Shāhnāma* are kindred texts in that they present their readers with many of the same existential problems and dilemmas, coupled with the same attention to interiority and psychology that makes them such compelling reads, even though they do so in different ways; as Eslāmi-Noshudan writes, "There is no book in the Persian language that is both so close to and so distant from the *Shāhnāma* as *Vis & Rāmin*."[194] One need only compare the experiences of temptation, trial, exile, and martyrdom that mark the stories of Vis and Siāvakhsh to see one such example of this; the story of Mobad, too, resonates very much with Ferdowsi's grim take on the inherent weaknesses of kingship.[195] In short, this is a very promising point of inquiry that would surely open up still more possibilities for the way we do literary analysis and history once it is pursued.

Tristan & Iseut and comparative literature

The first two rooms have been fairly amenable spaces, where most individuals generally agreed with one another. Meanwhile, a heated argument was going on down the hall over the question as to whether or not *Vis & Rāmin* had anything to do with the story of *Tristan & Iseut*.[196] Since the discovery of *V&R* in

193. Islāmī-Nudūshan, "Vīs va Rāmīn va Shāhnāmah," 22–36; Kobidze, "On the Antecedents of Vis-u-Ramin," 93.

194. Islāmī-Nudūshan, "Vīs va Rāmīn va Shāhnāmah," 19: *hich ketāb-i dar zabān-e fārsi nist ke mānand-e Vis o Rāmin ānqadr be Shāhnāma nazdik o ānqadr dur bāshad*.

195. These are themes that I have explored somewhat independently of one another, but the resonance may come out in reading Cross, "If Death is Just" in tandem with Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.

196. The works under review in this section consist of: Graf, "Wîs und Râmîn"; Rudolf Zenker, "Die Tristansage und das persische Epos von Wîs und Râmîn," *Romanische Forschungen* 29, no. 2 (1911): 321–369; Schoepperle; Max Unger, "The Persian Origins of 'Parsifal' and 'Tristan'," *The Musical Times* 73, no. 1074 (1932): 703–705; Massé, "Introduction," 11–12; Helaine Newstead, "The Origin and Growth of the Tristan Legend," in *Aurthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History*, ed. Roger Sherman Loomis (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959), 123–33; Franz Rolf Schröder, "Die Tristansage und das Persische Epos 'Wis und Ramin'," *Germanisch-romanische Monatsschrift* 42 (1961): 1–44; Minorsky, *Iranica*, 194–95; Peter Dronke, *Medieval Latin and the Rise of European Love-Lyric*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968); Pierre Gallais, *Genèse du roman occidental: essais sur Tristan et Iseut et son modèle persan* (Paris: Tête de Feuilles, 1974); L. Polak, "Tristan and Vis and Ramin," *Romania* 95 (1974): 216–234; Edna Baehre-Waldherr, "Fakhr ud-Dīn Gurgānī, Vis und Rāmīn und Gottfried von Strassburg, Tristan und Isolde: ein Vergleich" (PhD diss., State University of New York, Buffalo, 1977); Paul Kunitzsch, "Are There Oriental Elements in the Tristan Story?," *Vox Romanica* 39 (1980): 73–85; M. Tchikovani, "Les relations typologiques entre trois romans du moyen-age: Tristan et Iseult, Abessalom et Etheri, Vis et Ramin," *Acta Ethnographica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 19 (1985): 353–368; W. Ann Trindade, "Tristan and Wis and Ramin: The Last Word?," *Parergon* 4, no. 1 (1986): 19–28; W. J. McCann, "Tristan: the Celtic and Oriental Material Re-examined," in *Tristan and Isolde: A Casebook*, ed. Joan Tasker Grimbert (New York: Gar-

Europe, scholars have noticed striking parallels, not only in the basic story of a love triangle, but also in specific themes and episodes common to both works: the bed-trick, the lovers' sojourns, the hero's disguises and minstrelsy, the role of the go-between, the exchange of tokens, the symbol of the boar, the unfaithful affair with Gol/Iseut of the White Hands, the ordeal by fire. In 1911, Rudolf Zenker examined these parallels in detail and considered a number of routes by which the story was transmitted to Europe; but as this study appeared at precisely the same time as Gertrude Schoepperle's landmark study on *T&I*'s origins, Zenker's thesis was ignored or rejected by the majority of his colleagues.[197] Nevertheless, periodic attempts were made to reassert this claim: in 1932, Max Unger published a short article connecting the Tristan and Parzifal legends with Persian stories; Franz Schröder re-ignited the debate in 1961; and in the 1970s Haug, Polak, and Gallais all defended the plausibility of Persian and Arabic sources in the story.[198] Running against a wall of skepticism, these scholars found themselves reaching beyond *Vis & Rāmin* to make ends meet (quite literally); since the happy ending of the Persian tale does not map onto the tragic deaths of *Tristan & Iseut*, Schröder and Gallais both argued that the Arabic tale of *Qays & Lubnā*, which ends in such a death, had been grafted onto the story as it traveled westwards. Scholars of Persian literature were generally doubtful of this idea, although Minovi and later Davis mused that perhaps *V&R* could have entered Europe through contact with the Crusaders in Seljukid Anatolia.[199] Such

land, 1995), 3–35; Kāẓim Dāmghānī-Thānī, "Muqāyisah-i «Vīs va Rāmīn» va «Trīstān va Īzūt»," *Kayhān-i Farhangī* 218 (1383 [2004]): 64–68, http://www.noormags.ir/view/fa/articlepage/9679; Davis, "Introduction," xxxiii–xlii; ʿAlīriẓā Shādārām and Farhād Durūdgariyān, "Muqāyisah-i Trīstān va Īzūt va Vīs va Rāmīn," *Pazhūhish'hā-yi Adabī* 29/30 (1389 [2011]): 71–90, http://www.noormags.ir/view/fa/articlepage/982207; Dick Davis, "A Trout in the Milk: *Vis and Ramin* and *Tristan and Isolde*," in *Erin and Iran: Cultural Encounters between the Irish and the Iranians*, ed. Houchang Chehabi and Grace Neville (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 44–53.

197. Gertrude Schoepperle Loomis, *Tristan and Isolt: A Study of the Sources of the Romance*, 2nd ed. (New York: B. Franklin, 1960). Trindade, "Tristan and Wis and Ramin: The Last Word?" and McCann, "Tristan: the Celtic and Oriental Material Re-examined" both have good summaries of this debate.

198. The question of "oriental" story-elements in European literature, whether ancient or medieval, is an ongoing topic of interest; to name just two examples, see Franklin D. Lewis, "One Chaste Muslim Maiden and a Persian in a Pear Tree: Analogues of Boccaccio and Chaucer in Four Earlier Arabic and Persian Tales," in *Metaphor and Imagery in Persian Poetry*, ed. Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 137–203; Angelo Michele Piemontese, "Tracce del romanzo di Artù in testi narrativi persiani," in *Medioevo romanzo e orientale: Macrotesti fra Oriente e Occidente*, Medioevo romanzo e orientale (Napoli: IV Colloquio Internazionale, 26-29 ottobre 2000, Rubbettino, 2003), 295–312.

199. Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī, *Vis & Rāmin* (*tr. Morrison*), xvii. Lewis's study also suggests that "during the Crusader era the literary cultural currents in the Mediterranean which carried the flotsam and jetsam of the 'sea of story' along with other more tangible commodities, generally circulated from the east to the west" ("One Chaste Muslim Maiden and a Persian in a Pear Tree," 138). The argument that the medieval Mediterranean world was a fecund site for this kind of literary transmission has been persuasively argued in a number of studies: Dorothee Metlitzki, *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); María Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987); Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study*

conjectures were dismissed by Paul Kunitzsch, who argued that without any direct textual evidence, no further discussion is possible. W. Ann Trindade relaxed this harsh judgement slightly by acknowledging that oral transmission is the more likely medium for motifs to have entered the story; but if this is the only scenario we have to work with, we are left again at an impasse:

> If both the Tristan versions and the two oriental stories in question themselves belong to a mixed oral-written transmission, and both categories draw upon the repertoire of international tale-telling, then the question of influences becomes a very blurred issue. . . . It seems then that there is little mileage left in the "oriental sources of Tristan" (or even oriental influences) until and unless someone comes up with new texts, specific proposals about transmission and new and relevant background information about the alleged sources themselves.[200]

Many years later, Dick Davis renewed the case for the "trout in the milk" in his translator's introduction to *V&R* and then in a subsequent article published in 2015, where he argues that even in the absence of direct transmission, all the circumstantial evidence points to some kind of connection between the two texts. The article offers probably a more persuasive (and less cherry-picked) list of grounds for comparison than what had previously been on display: Davis argues that not only the individual episodes but their arrangement and narrative trajectory are more or less the same in both works, that the poems' diverse geographies (the sea vs. the desert) fulfill parallel functional roles, and that the name *Iseut* might be derived from *Wīsat*, the Arabic pronunciation of Vis's full name *Visah*. In addition to these intriguing suggestions, Davis invites us to consider another French romance, *Cligès*, as a potential (and long overdue) point of comparison with *V&R*; I am particularly impressed with the determination shown by Vis and Fenice alike to control the terms and logistics of their outwardly illegitimate affair. These are all very fruitful points of comparison, regardless of whether or not the question of "origins" is ever settled, as they establish sites for theoretical thinking and literary analysis for scholars of medieval literature across the board. Probably the best example of this kind of work is set by Peter Dronke, who begins

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of Mediterranean History (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000); David Abulafia, "Mediterraneans," in *Rethinking the Mediterranean*, ed. William Harris (Oxford University Press, 2005), 64–93; Karla Mallette, *European Modernity and the Arab Mediterranean: Toward a New Philology and a Counter-Orientalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010). See also the edited collections by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ed., *Cultural Diversity in the British Middle Ages: Archipelago, Island, England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Suzanne Conklin Akbari and Karla Mallette, eds., *A Sea of Languages: Rethinking the Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History* (University of Toronto Press, 2013).

200. Trindade, "Tristan and Wis and Ramin: The Last Word?," 27. W. J. McCann came to a similar conclusions in his survey of the debate published in 1995.

his *Medieval Latin and the Rise of the Medieval Love-Lyric* by rejecting the popular notion that the troubadours of eleventh-century France "discovered" a new conception of love, suggesting instead "that the feelings and conceptions of *amour courtois* are universally possible, possible in any time or place and on any level of society."[201] His interest in courtly love as a particular kind of "experience" and "sensibility" allowed him to reach far beyond the usual range of sources to make some fascinating claims about the broad architectonics of courtly experience, such as his observation that "*amour courtois* becoems, as it were, the dominant constructive principle of an entire romance, a poem of epic stature" in Shota Rustaveli's *The Man in the Panther's Skin*—an insight that has proven very productive for my own meditations on thematics and genre.[202] His remarks that *Vis & Rāmin* participates in this conversation due to its shared "attitude to love" are also inspiring.[203]

The ongoing *V&R*/*T&I* debate illustrates the kind of pitfalls one may encounter when comparing texts from across a wide geographical or temporal range. Thankfully, I have very little at stake in proving whether or not *V&R* was a source for medieval European romances, nor even the other way around in the following chapter, where I compare *V&R* against the web of Greek, Arabic, and Middle Persian stories that similarly took up (romantic) love as their "constructive principle," as Dronke put it. The objections of the textualists, of course, remain relevant: how does one presume to bring in a story from fourth-century Anatolia and compare it to another from eleventh-century Khorasan without firm evidence that readers actually knew these various texts? Although we do have the occasional glimpse of a paper trail, and the consensus that *V&R* originates in late antiquity provides further ground to stand on, I ultimately prefer to bracket the search for text-to-text influence and opt instead for a descriptive and analytical approach that brings out the enduring commonalities between distinct but interconnected literary traditions. Regardless of who was the source of what, these texts are good to think with side by side, and if we let go of the historical preoccupation with origins, we may find ourselves better attuned to the profound ways in which literary traditions can speak to one another across space and time.

201. Dronke, *Medieval Latin and the Rise of European Love-Lyric*, 2.
202. ibid., 16.
203. ibid., 23.

Society and psychology

The second half of the twentieth century also saw renewed attempts to make sense of Vis's notorious adultery. In the late 1960s, the Georgian scholar David Kobidze rejected the characterization of *V&R* as a satirical work, which was the dominant theme of the Soviet scholarship he was responding to, and instead presents it as a celebration of the family:

> [*V&R*] is a great song of love and friendship. Its keynote is that the groundstone on which the family rests is genuine love, and where this is lacking there can be no real family. . . . Vis obeyed the call of nature. And yet she cannot be blamed for that. Rather than remaining the life-long captive of Mōbad who had never been her real husband in the true meaning of the word, she chooses to love Ramin, this eventually producing a sweet and happy family.[204]

No one to the extent of my knowledge has cared to respond to this claim; but another interesting discussion of "family values" (or lack thereof) appeared in the mid 1980s with two articles by Minoo Southgate entitled "Conflict between Islamic Mores and Courtly Romance in *Vīs and Rāmīn*" and "*Vīs and Rāmīn*: An Anomaly Among Iranian Courtly Romances." The titles themselves speak volumes about Southgate's approach to the text; in both articles, she portrays *V&R* as an outlier that defies literary convention and religious propriety with its "bold depiction and glorification of adulterous love."[205] This, in her view, is the reason for the story's decline, which she marks as occurring at the end of the thirteenth century due to growing religious fanaticism, increased intolerance of Zoroastrians and the pre-Islamic Iranian past, "uneasy feelings" towards the incestuous relationships between Vis, Viru, and Rāmin, and above all, a misogynist rejection of the "immodest, wilful, and independent women" of the story.[206] The romance's celebration of sexually active women who openly pursue their desires lies at the heart of Southgate's reading of the poem, epitomized in her description of its heroine:

> Sexually precocious by almost any standard, Vīs grows wilful after reaching puberty, causing the Nurse to worry that she might take a lover. Vīs is quick to fall in love with Vīrū. Separated from him, she takes Rāmīn as her lover, inticed [*sic*] by the promise of sexual pleasure. Having enjoyed Rāmīn, she loses all modesty.[207]

204. Kobidze, "On the Antecedents of Vis-u-Ramin," 89.
205. Minoo S. Southgate, "Conflict between Islamic Mores and the Courtly Romance of Vīs and Rāmīn," *Muslim World* 75 (1985): 17.
206. ibid., 20.
207. ibid., 21 A nearly identical characterization can be found in Minoo S. Southgate, "'Vīs and Rāmīn': An Anomaly among Iranian Courtly Romances," *JRAS*, no. 1 (1986): 44.

Southgate also suggests that the sexual freedom and personal autonomy enjoyed by the women of the story must have been a historical reality of the Parthian period that faded away with the Islamicization of Iran, leading to the general substitution of women for boys in Persian amatory lyric.[208] Drawing from statements by ethicists and poets like Kaykāvus, Ghazāli, Ṭusi, Jāmi, and Neẓāmi, she argues that with its idealization of a sexually active female beloved, *V&R* runs contrary to the norms of its society, an "anomaly" within the Persian tradition, its author "unconstrained by didacticism."[209] While it is true that *V&R* treats sensitive subjects like adultery, incest, and female sexual desire in a language that is more explicit than later romances, and that the adulterous lovers are generally portrayed in a positive light, I fear that this reading glosses over some crucial episodes in the story: to assume that the mere presence of adultery signifies an *ipso facto* mark of the author's approval of it ignores the numerous passages in which the characters express their personal sense of shame, lament their public disgrace, and fear the impending damnation of their soul.

As to Gorgāni's anti-didactic stance, Julie Scott Meisami would heartily disagree; indeed, she writes that commentators who "attempt to explain [*V&R*] away as a celebration of carnal passion or as a testament to predestination have signally failed" in their attempts to explicate the text, for they "assume the centrality of the love story and ignore the poem's broader implications." In her view, *V&R* is not really a story about love at all, but rather "the story of the replacement of one sovereign by another." The poem, therefore, is an extremely didactic text, a political allegory that provides an *exemplum* to its royal audience of worthy and unworthy practices of kingship:

> The king, embodying the ultimate degree of public responsibility as well as of private virtue, provides the romance writer with an exemplary figure by means of which to examine the relationship between public and private conduct; while the signal importance of love in both spheres, and the absorbing interest this topic holds for all classes of men, gives rise to

208. Southgate, "Conflict," 18, 21–22. This was not an unusual narrative to explain the ubiquity of male beloveds in Persian erotic writing; see Heshmat Moayyad, "Lyric Poetry," in *Persian Literature*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (Albany, NY: Bibliotheca Persica, 1988), 137; Rypka, *HIL*, 86; Robert Surieu, *Sarv-é Naz: An Essay on Love and the Representation of Erotic Themes in Ancient Iran*, trans. James Hogarth (Geneva: Nagel, 1967), 65–66, 172; Julien Cheverny, *L'interdit sexuel: Les jeux du relatif et du variable* (Paris: Hermann, 2013), 1:219–22.

209. Southgate, "Anomaly," 40. A contrast to this argument is found in Barādarān's comparison of *V&R* with *K&S*, where she concludes that Gorgāni is the misogynist who treats women as sexual objects, weak-willed, lacking inner value, and created for the pleasure of men, while Neẓāmi predictably corrects this image with his chaste, modest, and righteous Shirin; see "Muqāyisah-i Vīs va Rāmīn va Khusraw va Shīrīn," 23.

its centrality as a motivating factor in romance.[210]

Thus, the love-story element of *V&R* is viable only insofar as it is situated within a Neoplatonic schema in which love is an all-encompassing ethical, moral, and political system that, once mastered, will guide the lover towards an ideal state of self-governance and mastery over others; in this account, the lead figure of *V&R* is Rāmin, who is guided by his love for Vis to overcome his concupiscent nature, overthrow the tyrannical Mobad, and assume the mantle of just kingship. While Meisami's reading does resonate very much with the final chapters of *Vis & Rāmin*, the starting premise that the poem is only interested in kings and kingship effects a striking imbalance in her treatment of the female characters. While she does acknowledge that Vis "allows herself to return [Rāmin's] love only after due deliberation," she otherwise devotes her efforts to tracing Rāmin's maturation into a perfect lover/king and Mobad's failure to do so, following the trajectory she establishes in Neẓāmi's romances *Khosrow & Shirin* and *Haft Paykar*.[211] In order to work, these arguments assume and depend on a totally static beloved who must serve as a benchmark to judge the relative progress of the heroes. This inertia is palpable in Meisami's description of Vis as "the pivot of the action," the "beam," the "point of reference" around whom the fortunes of Rāmin and Mobad revolve.[212] It is not necessarily a bad assumption to treat the heroine as a flat and unchanging entity, for as we shall see, it runs deep within the tradition itself: but I think it overlooks one of the most important and compelling features of *Vis & Rāmin*, namely Vis's dynamism as the female lead.

The studies of Southgate and Meisami represent some of the most recent serious engagements with the story of *V&R*, and both their arguments will be taken up in subsequent chapters. For the moment, however, I would like to note an interesting commonality between the two works, evident within their nearly diametrically opposed conclusions. While Southgate's analysis depends on the activity of women in the story, Meisami's is concerned with the rate of progress in the men. These two approaches produce radically different, but similarly distorted, perspectives on the central intrigue of the story, Vis's adultery with Rāmin: Southgate expands the transgression to the point that *V&R* is a story about libertinism, sensuality, and debauchery, while Mesami diverts it into an allegorical reading concerned with kingship,

210. This and the previous two citations are from Julie Scott Meisami, "Kings and Lovers: Ethical Dimensions of Medieval Persian Romance," *Edebiyât* 1, no. 1 (1987): 3–4.

211. Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 143.

212. ibid., 140.

virtue, and proper rule, to the extent that the affair is little more than an outward symbol of Mobad's general inadequacy as a ruler. In both cases, Vis's sexual activity is either hyperbolized or minimized, blown up or covered up. I hope, in the chapters to come, to seek a middle ground: sex, I believe, *does* matter, and illicit desire *is* a central theme of the story; but we must not let these concerns distract our attention from other and perhaps more subtle issues that are also at work.

A valuable contribution in this regard is an article by Maḥjub published in 1992 under the title "The Journey of Love in *Vis & Rāmin*." After introducing some of Gorgāni's general talents as a poet, especially his manifold interests in philosophy, language, astronomy, and the human psyche, he provides the reader with a scene-by-scene outline of the major events of the story. The close reading is superb; with a keen eye, Maḥjub brings out many of the fundamental sites of tension and paradox in the story, especially in regards to the tangled relationship between Vis, Mobad, and Rāmin. His is one of the few analyses to take Vis's love for Rāmin as a "journey" and not a given; realizing that Vis is adamantly opposed to an affair with Rāmin (and it is amazing how often this is overlooked!), he provides a detailed and compelling explication of how the Nurse and Rāmin must wear down her defenses, bit by bit, until she is essentially forced into a love-affair that she never wanted. He is also refreshingly sensitive to the dynamics of gender inequality in the story, indicating the numerous social pressures placed upon Vis of which her lover is both free and oblivious. Those familiar with his article will find that I pursue a very similar line of inquiry in Chapter 3; a major difference is that Maḥjub drives his analysis through character, and is thus quite comfortable talking about the internal thoughts, feelings, and the "womanly intuition" of a fictional character; my study depends more on the generic and intertextual expectations that condition Vis's actions and reinforce her dilemmas as the adulterous heroine.[213] This reading is an excellent introduction to the complex treatment of love in *V&R* and does much to dispel the many negative assumptions that have accumulated around the work. A similar treatment is found in Khaleghi-Motlagh's magnificent article whose far-reaching investigation into the literary genres of pre-Islamic Iran belies its unpresuming title "*Bizhan & Manizha* and *Vis & Rāmin*." Like Maḥjub, he observes that Vis is guided by an internal set of principles that make it difficult for us to view her adultery as the product of a hedonistic

213. See, for example, statements like the following: "But even saying this, Vis does not truly believe her own words" (*ammā khʷod-e Vis dar del bedin sokhanān eʿteqād-e rāsekh nadārad*); Maḥjūb, "Naẓarī bih sayr-i ʿishq dar dāstān-i Vīs va Rāmīn," 494.

worldview, concluding his discussion with a glowing verdict: “By describing the internal struggles of Vis between the two great and contrary forces of love and pride, Gorgani . . . has gifted Persian literature with a peerless masterpiece; Vis is basically the most masterful creation of a woman in all of Persian letters”; high praise indeed from the same scholar who complained of “those lustrous women in other Persian epic stories who sometimes dare to exercise liberties—and even commit sins—in their golden cages.”[214]

Writing around the same time as Maḥjub and Khaleghi-Motlagh, Kappler produced two articles that pull the focus away from plot and character and consider instead the structural and symbolic elements at work in the poem. In “Beauty in *Vis & Rāmin*,” she draws from Zoroastrian concepts about the “pure” and the “mixed” to consider Vis as a goddesslike figure for whom Rāmin must purify himself in a kind of rite of initiation.[215] The article is abundant with insightful observations and provocative readings that encourage the critic to look beyond the surface level of “what happened” to consider some of the profound issues buried within: the “magic power” of Vis’s beauty, a quality that renders her simultaneously angelic and demonic; the problem of “freedom” and self-liberation; and the mysteries of effacement through recognition. Though she does not refer to these scholars’ work, Kappler is touching on a similar claims made about the Greek novels as secularized mystery texts; her discussion of Rāmin as transcending from one state to another (especially through an Avicennan “refinement” of his desire) also works well with Meisami’s arguments.[216] The other article, “How to Love Another Like One’s Brother . . . ?” turns to address the question of incest, which is again far more pervasive than its literal aspect suggests. Vis first marries her brother, then has an affair with her milk-brother; in every relationship, she has a double, with two “mothers” in Shahru and the Nurse, two “fathers” in Qāren and Mobad, and two “brothers” in Rāmin and Viru. Rāmin’s role with his “parents” is equally complex: on one side is his brother, who is also his father, Mobad; on the other, his surrogate mother, the Nurse, with whom he has a sexual encounter.

214. Khaleghi-Motlagh, “Bīzhan va Manīzhah,” 278–79; Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh, *Women in the Shāhnāmeh: Their History and Social Status within the Framework of Ancient and Medieval Sources*, ed. Nahid Pirnazar, trans. Brigitte Neuenschwander (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2012), 19–20.

گرگانی . . . با توصیف کشمکش درونی ویس میان دو نیروی عظیم و متضاد عشق و غرور، شاهکار بی‌نظیری به ادبیات
فارسی هدیه کرده است. اصولاً ویس استادانه‌ترین آفرینش زن سراسر ادب فارسی است.

215. Claude-Claire Kappler, “La beauté dans ‘Vîs Et Râmîn’: puissance transformatrice, appel à l’eveil,” in *Gott ist schön und er liebt die Schönheit / God is Beautiful and He Loves Beauty*, ed. Alma Giese and J. Christoph Bürgel (Bern: P. Lang, 1994), 305–329.

216. For an introduction to this literature, see Roger Beck, “Mystery Religions, Aretalogy and the Ancient Novel,” in *The Novel in the Ancient World*, ed. Gareth Schmeling (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 131–150.

While previous commentators have alternated between disgust and bemusement in their consideration of this topic, Kappler takes up the dynamic of the love triangle to argue that the story relates Vis's "passage" from one family to another, from love of a brother to love of an outsider, drawing in equal measure from Zoroastrian ideas about consanguinity and Lévi-Straussian notions of the symbolic in structural anthropology. Many of her arguments are convincing, others less so, but they are all fascinating and offer a excellent starting point to think about motherhood, fatherhood, and sibling love and rivalry as undeniably active presences in the text. We will be revisiting many of her insights down the road.[217]

The structures of power and kinship that Kappler brings to light lend themselves well to psychoanalytic readings of the poem. A very interesting example of this is found in a short essay in a book by Sudhir Kakar and John Munder Ross that places *V&R* against many other love-tales, such as *Romeo & Juliet*, *Layli & Majnun*, *Tristan & Iseut*, *Oedipus*, *Hamlet*, and *Radha & Krishna*. While the room for detailed textual analysis is limited in such a broad survey, this study nevertheless brings out interesting observations about the characters' ability to recognize and diagnose the mental traps they have fallen into, even when they cannot find a way out of their dilemmas: Mobad, for example, is plagued by "the father's guilt at being stirred by a daughter's beauty," while Vis is "quite aware of her own ambivalence towards Ramin but feels impelled to act as if her love for him was indeed blind."[218] There are also two studies in Persian I am aware of, Zamānzāda's *Psychoanalysis of the Images of Love in Persian Literature*, which naturally has a whole chapter devoted to *V&R*, and an article entitled "Analysis of Mobad's Character in *V&R* on the Basis of Jung's Theories." The first of these studies seems a titch formulaic to me: the author writes that "from the psychologist's perspective, each one of the characters in this story are symbols of a person or a complex." Thus Mobad, the father figure, is a symbol of the id supressed by the superego; Zard, his brother and counselor, represents the superego; Vis is a symbol of the Electra complex (the mother-daughter rivalry to possess the father); and so on. As the mother, Shahru desires her son and therefore enacts the marriage between brother and sister so as to attain him by proxy; the Nurse likewise arranges the affair between her two surrogate children to assuage her longing for Rāmin. Through this analysis, the study concludes that the poem celebrates the victory of love over sin by killing off the sexually re-

217. Claude-Claire Kappler, "*Vîs et Râmîn*, ou comment aimer un autre que son frère . . . ?," *Luqmân* 7, no. 2 (1991): 55–80;
218. Sudhir Kakar and John Munder Ross, *Tales of Love, Sex, and Danger* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 108–22.

pressed Mobad and replacing him with the uninhibited Rāmin.[219] The basic argument in the second article is that the most influential factor on Mobad's behavior is the negative and destructive anima that prevents him from connecting with his fully-fledged masculine self (in the Jungian sense), trapping him in a state of permanent immaturity; as a result, he is prone to anger, anxiety, fear, self-sabotage, illogical behavior, effeminacy, and vulnerability to womanly tricks.[220] While it is beyond my expertise to pass judgement on the theoretical grounding of these studies, they strike me as providing potentially very useful methods for teasing out some of the complex questions about selfhood and desire that will be at the forefront of our own analysis in Chapters 3 and 4.

At this point, we may bring our tour to a close. As I hope to have shown in this chapter, the story of *Vis & Rāmin* is every bit as deserving of our attention as Wardrop claimed a century ago: far more than a resource for philological and historical data, the text in and of itself is a rich and complex work of literature, offering many topics of interest and rewarding investigation from a variety of angles. In addition, again to cite from Wardrop, the peculiar circumstances of its history give it an especial claim to our "universal attention" as scholars of comparative literature; as an ancient text that lies at the nexus of multiple literary traditions, its relationship with the elusive genre of the "romance" is a worthwhile point of investigation, both for the insights that the intertextual angle brings to our close reading of the text, and to deepen our understanding of the ebb and flow of ideas, motifs, and storytelling structures in the ancient and medieval Near East.

219. Javād Zamān′zādah, *Ravānkāvī-i ṣuvar-i ʿishq dar adabīyāt-i Fārsī* (Bethesda, MD: Kitābfurūshī-i Īrān, 1994), 120–127.

220. Muḥammad Kāẓim-Kahdūnī and Maryam Buḥrānī, "Taḥlīl-i shakhṣīyat-i Mūbad dar Vīs va Rāmīn bar asās-i naẓarīyāt-i Yūng," *Muṭāliʿāt-i Īrānī* 15 (1388 [2009]): 223–238.

Chapter 2

Finding Romance

> So in regard to fairy-stories, I feel that it is more interesting, and also in its way more difficult, to consider what they are, what they have become for us, and what values the long alchemic processes of time have produced in them.
>
> —J. R. R. Tolkien[1]

In the early eleventh century, a number of poets, centered around the court of Maḥmud of Ghazna, began to relate the loves of famous couples using a poetic form called the masnavi, whose regular rhyme and meter was most conducive for storytelling. The first of these narratives appeared as embedded episodes within the *Shāhnāma* of Ferdowsi; shortly thereafter, Maḥmud's poet-laureate ʿOnṣori composed three love-stories that stood on their own as independent works, of which only one, *Vāmeq & ʿAẕrā*, survives in fragments. This was followed by the story of *Varqa & Golshāh* by the otherwise unknown ʿAyyuqi, and Gorgāni's *Vis & Rāmin*, which came about a decade after the Ghaznavids fell to the Seljuks in the 1040s.[2] Taken as a whole, these poems are usually said to mark the advent of the romance, or the romantic epic, in Persian literature; after this initial flurry of activity, this genre did not see much development until Neẓāmi of Ganja burst upon the stage in the late twelfth century with his *Quintet* (*Khamsa*) of five poems, four of which are typically counted among the greatest romances in Persian:

1. J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," in *The Monsters and the Critics: And Other Essays*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: Allen & Unwin, 1983), 120.

2. This account, of course, is only as reliable as the data we have; there were no doubt other poets who composed similar masnavis but whose names and works are lost to us. For a thorough list of all the known masnavis we have on record, see Tarbīyat, "Mathnavī va mathnavī guyān-i Īrānī." The article is regrettably hard to find and out of date, but it is quite comprehensive. See Table 5 in this chapter for a revised version of this list as it pertains to the early period.

Khosrow & Shirin, *Layli & Majnun*, the *Haft Paykar*, and his two books of the *Eskandarnāma* (the stories of Alexander). The phenomenal success of Neẓāmi's work established a canonical place for the romance from then onwards, with master poets like Amir Khosrow, Khwāju, Jamāli, Jāmi, Navā'i, and Hātefi among many others trying their hand at the genre, using the *Quintet* as their point of departure.[3]

So the story goes; but like any historical narrative, the points of commencement and closure are difficult to nail down—and more difficult to justify—when brought under scrutiny.[4] What does the "romance" mean in this context, and what is its place *vis-à-vis* other genres in our broader conception of Persian literature? Does this tradition truly "begin" in the eleventh century, or are there precursors, either in Persian or in neighboring literatures, that might enrich our picture of its contours and trajectory? And what of its internal development: what are the pitfalls of treating these early works as mere stepping-stones on the teleological road to Neẓāmi? If we enter the discussion already convinced that the latter poet represents the pinnacle of the genre—a model that did not even exist when the early poems were composed—we will certainly curtail our ability to study these works on their own terms.[5] We might therefore, and with no offence intended, politely ask Neẓāmi to step out of the room for a moment while we get to know his less illustrious forebears: where they came from, what were the narratives they sought to tell, how they hoped to do so, and whom they were trying to impress. Having listened to their stories, we may then begin to ascertain if and how these texts are participating in a common discourse.[6]

3. The scope of Neẓāmi's influence is indeed stunning; for a list of literary responses to Neẓāmi's *Quintet*, which numbers in the hundreds, see Abū al-Qāsim Rādfar, *Kitābshināsī-i Niẓāmī Ganjavī* (Tehran: Pazhūhishgāh, 1371 [1992]), 205–36.

4. Introductions to the development of this genre can be found in Rypka, *HIL*, 162–66, 177–79, 212–13; Bosworth, "Political and Dynastic History," 42–44; Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 77–87; Bürgel, "The Romance."

5. On the other side of the historical continuum, I do not doubt that scholars of romance poetry after Neẓāmi would take issue with the presentation of his work as the peak of the genre, pointing out that his "imitators" produced work that is every bit as worthy of study and appreciation as their source of inspiration; see, for example, Paola Orsatti's discussion of how the story of *Khosrow & Shirin* was taken in fresh and unexpected directions by Amir Khosrow, Jamāli, and Hātefi, among others: "Ḵosrow o Širin," in *EIr*, online edition (2006), accessed June 11, 2015, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/kosrow-o-sirin.

6. A similar study of the romance genre was completed only a few years ago in a superb dissertation by Pasha Mohamad Khan, "The Broken Spell: The Romance Genre in Late Mughal India" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2013), which takes up the topic on the other end of the temporal spectrum, a time when the romance was subject to increasing criticism from reformers as a moribund art form devoid of literary value and social utility; pp. 17–28 provide a discussion of the historical equivalence drawn between the indigenous terms for "story" (*dāstān*, *qiṣṣa*, *ḥekāyat*) and the "romance" and treat its theorization as a kind of world literature, and pp. 36–63 offer a rich theoretical discussion of the Indo-Persian romance, drawing from thinkers such as Derrida, Cohen, Todorov, and Genette.

Determining the common link that binds these texts together may not be as straightforward a task as conventional wisdom holds, for when we look closely, we find that they are a motley crew indeed, set in locales from all over the map and with special ties to "popular legend" and "naturalized non-Iranian traditions."[7] We catch a whiff of the Aegean in the story of *Vāmeq & ʿAẕrā*, which takes place in the isle of Samos and is populated by characters with names like Foloqrāṭ, Ifoqus, Heghsefuli, and Nakhmenus (that is, Polycrates, Ibycos, Hegesipyle, and Anaximenes); *Varqa & Golshāh*, whose author claims to have found amidst "the books and chronicles of the Arabs," is set in the realm of Arabia Petraea (something like modern-day Jordan), with men and women from Damascus, Yemen, and Medina traveling across its pages.[8] Even the love-stories in the *Shāhnāma* are drawn from a wide range of Iranian lore, with various cycles distinct to the regions of Sistan, Khorasan, and Media.[9] Given this heterogeneity, we might do well to pause and reconsider the precise terms of our generic categories: is there anything specifically "Persian" about the Persian romance, or is it part of a much larger literary network, with relatives, neighbors, or even direct ancestors in other traditions? Such diffusion and diversity is by no means inimical to the study of a tradition; indeed, Barbara Fuchs argues that the romance, if conceived in a certain way, "becomes especially useful as we recognize the bewildering variety of texts that have been described as classical romances."[10] We begin with the hope, then, that such an approach will prove effective in writing a literary history in which Persian is woven into a broader intertextual narrative, establishing a framework that allows us to see lines of similarity and continuity despite apparent differences. In so doing, we seek not to rewrite our literary history from the ground up, but to bring our account into sharper focus; as Northrop Frye writes, "the purpose of criticism by genres is not so much to classify as to clarify such traditions and affinities, thereby bringing out a large number of literary relationships that would not be noticed as long as there were no context established for them."[11]

7. Julie Scott Meisami, "Genres of Court Literature," in *General Introduction to Persian Literature*, ed. J. T. P. de Bruijn, A History of Persian Literature 1 (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 253.

8. Tomas Hägg and Bo Utas, *The Virgin and her Lover: Fragments of an Ancient Greek Novel and a Persian Epic Poem* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 18; ʿAyyūqī, *Varqa va Gulshāh*, 5.

9. Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Bīzhan va Manīzhah," 286–89; Saghi Gazerani, "Old Garment from a New Tailor: The Reception and Reshaping of Epic Material in Early Medieval Iran," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 6, nos. 1–2 (January 2013): 178–196.

10. Barbara Fuchs, *Romance* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 31.

11. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton University Press, 1957), 247–48.

Of course, one cannot cast the net too wide; devising appropriate criteria for choosing which texts to consider is an important first step. To wit, many of the heroic *gestes* in early Persian literature feature romantic interludes, but they are usually excluded from the classical list of romances, for reasons that are often assumed but rarely spelled out. For example, Khaleghi-Motlagh names the stories of *Goshtāsp & Katāyun*, *Zāl & Rudāba*, and *Bizhan & Manizha* as part of the "romance" (*dāstān-e ʿāsheqāna*) genre in Parthian times, but admits that the latter work "had to lose many ingredients unsuited to the heroic world before it was admitted into the epic literature."[12] While it is altogether likely that these episodes existed as stand-alone tales, it seems that something essential about them changed as they were deployed to fit new narrative contexts. Maḥjub agrees with Khaleghi-Motlagh's assessment, explaining that neither *Zāl & Rudāba* or *Bizhan & Manizha* in the *Shāhnāma* can be considered romances "in the full and complete meaning of the word"; the story of Zāl and Rudāba is not told for its own sake, but to set the stage for the birth of the great hero Rostam, and the affair between Bizhan and Manizha turns into a pretext for Rostam to display his *ʿayyāri*, his chivalry and cunning, when the lovers run into trouble.[13] Southgate comes to much the same conclusion, writing that "these stories are not independent romances but rather episodes in a larger epic whose main concern is war and the heroism of men, not passionate love."[14] Genre, it seems, is a malleable thing, as dependent on intertextual factors as it is on its own content, and this double existence of the love-stories in the *Shāhnāma* as potentially taking part in both the "epic" and "romance" raises further questions for us to address: what is the relationship between the two categories, and when and how do they interact to form the "romantic epic"?

Taking yet another step back, we might interrogate the terms of our discussion and ask ourselves how well they are fitted to provide a cogent analysis of these texts. The anxiety that we might slip into inappropriate naming, and thence into anachronistic thinking, is certainly not limited to the field of Persian medieval literature: no writer of what we now call a French *romance* had the slightest idea of the term as a generic category. The Old French *romanz*, in its original usage, could refer to any kind of

12. Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Bīzhan va Manīzhah," 289; Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Bīžan," in *EIr*, online edition (1989), accessed June 11, 2015, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bizan-son-of-giv.

13. Maḥjūb, "Naẓarī bih sayr-i ʿishq dar dāstān-i Vīs va Rāmīn," 469: *ammā hich yek az do dāstān-e akhir dāstān-e ʿāsheqāna be maʿni-ye vāqeʿi vo tāmm o tamām-e kalema nist.*

14. Southgate, "Anomaly," 40; see also Davis, *Panthea's Children*, 38.

account (*conte*, *estoire*) that was written in the vernacular as opposed to Latin, with little indication of the individual work's theme or content—as Fuchs writes, it would be like designating the Loeb Classical Library as a genre.[15] For some critics, this can be enough to break the deal: if authors or readers did not have a name for a particular form or type of writing, the logic goes, it simply could not have existed in their minds.[16] According to this nominalist approach, the only way to reconstruct how medieval authors saw their work is to sift through whatever terms happen to appear in the literature until we may produce an authentic articulation of their literary consciousness. Such a requirement would not get us very far in our discussion of *V&R*, however, for, as in the French case, the early romances rarely call themselves anything other than a "story" (*dāstān*, *ḥadiṡ*, *qeṣṣa*), and there is no indication within the extensive body of classical Arabic and Persian literary theory that categories like "epic" or "romance" were ever conceived of. Yet perhaps such literalism is unnecessary, as Julie Orlemanski writes: "A generic term is not the same thing as genre itself. Genres can be in force even when not invoked by name, and there is no constant or necessary relationship between, say, defining a narrative form and telling a story that plays upon readers' generic expectations."[17] She posits instead that every text, merely by virtue of being written and read, participates in and belongs to a genre, an argument seconded by Stephen Heath: "To write or read at a given time in a given society is to engage with the current conventions of writing, with the expectations of what forms it can take. . . . There is no *genreless* text."[18] Building on this idea of sociability and practice, Orlemanski invokes Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* to suggest that, as in many other skills, trades, and arts, genre is not solely a product of regulation, but a matter of participation:

15. Fuchs, *Romance*, 37; cf. Roberta L. Krueger, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1.

16. H. Ansgar Kelly, for example, recommends that we consider "everything that is called or considered a tragedy is a tragedy, and only what is called a tragedy is a tragedy." H. Ansgar Kelly, "Interpretation of Genres and by Genres in the Middle Ages," in *Interpretation: Medieval and Modern*, ed. Piero Boitani and Anna Torti (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993), 110. A similar approach is brought to Arabic literature by Geert Jan van Gelder, *Beyond the Line* (Leiden: Brill, 1982).

17. Julie Orlemanski, "Genre," in *A Handbook of Middle English Studies*, ed. Marion Turner (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 209.

18. Stephen Heath, "The Politics of Genre," in *Debating World Literature*, ed. Christopher Prendergast (London: Verso, 2004), 163. Cf. Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti, with an introduction by Paul de Man (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 79:

> It is [. . .] unimaginable that a literary work set itself into an informational vacuum, without indicating a specific situation of understanding. To this extent, every work belongs to a genre—whereby I mean neither more nor less than that for each work a preconstituted horizon of expectations must be ready at hand.

> One doesn't learn football by reading a rule book; instead one discovers the ins and outs of the game by *playing* football . . . This does not imply that the game lacks official rules but rather that we miss a great deal if we focus only on these. Players in turn are neither exactly conscious nor unconscious of explicit rules. In play these rules are present only as the determinants of moves and feints on the field; they are practical rather than discursive or dogmatic knowledge.[19]

The metaphor of genre as a kind of "game" ties our discussion into the theories of Hans-Robert Jauss, whose notion of the "horizon of expectations" invoked by a text will provide a valuable conceptual tool in the course of this chapter. As Jauss explains, every text presents itself to its audience with an invitation to be read against the precedent set by previously-experienced interlocutors: "The new text evokes for the reader (listener) the horizon of expectations and 'the rules of the game' familiar to him from earlier texts, which as such can then be varied, extended, corrected, but also transformed, crossed out, or simply reproduced."[20] In such a scenario, a work could conceivably belong to—or better put, participate in—multiple genres at the same time, always emerging out of the interaction between an ongoing series of hints, suggestions, gestures, and cues in a text and the shifting expectations of its reader, ready to be confirmed or denied with each new twist and turn.[21] The effective manipulation of these expectations comprises what Thomas Pavel describes as the "good habits of the trade" that establish genres in the first place: patterns of narration, tropes and phrases that set the stage, thematic ground broken and retilled, conventions disrupted and reaffirmed; all practices that are difficult to pin down and formalize like so many boxes to be checked, but nonetheless "crucially necessary for the production and understanding of literary artifacts."[22] The benefit of thinking about genre as the interplay of habits and practices lies in the fact that it allows us to move beyond the taxonomical model that treats it like a fixed identity: instead of insisting that a text must either be a comedy or a tragedy, we might look for literary techniques that evoke tragic or comedic "model[s] of reality," perhaps combining the two to powerful effect, "not *ante*

19. Orlemanski, "Genre," 212–13.
20. Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, 88.
21. This interplay is well described by Fredric Jameson, who draws from Claudio Guillén to describe genre as a kind of literary institution "marked with certain indications and signals as to how it is properly to be used." See Fredric Jameson, "Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre," *New Literary History* 7, no. 1 (1975): 135; also Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 106–7.
22. Thomas Pavel, "Literary Genres as Norms and Good Habits," *New Literary History* 34, no. 2 (2003): 210.

rem or *post rem* but *in re*."[23] The intermingling of "epic" and "romance" can be thought of in a similar way, allowing us to look for moments in a particular story that "sound" epic or "feel" romantic. The work that goes into the creation of such generically identifiable moments, as Fuchs and Parker contend, is perhaps best visualized as the exercise of literary strategies that are distinctive of a particular mode, but could theoretically be deployed in all sorts of texts.[24]

To move from a prescriptive to a descriptive mode of inquiry, to ask what romances *do* rather than what they *are*, both allows for and demands that we find ways of mapping these techniques that are not limited by notions of national literature or prescriptive generic codes.[25] In lieu of a formal or theoretical structure imposed from above, we will attempt instead a kind of "thick description" that takes in an array of literary traditions that are plausibly in conversation with one another given our historical knowledge of the period.[26] The "Persian" part of the romance will have to be set aside for the moment, and our own horizons expanded and deepened, until we have some sense of the general terrain in which this tradition of writing left its mark. To build this map, we will begin with a recap of a critical period in New Persian literary history—nothing less than its emergence as a literary language—with our focus trained on the kinds of narratives and stories that were translated or adapted to this new idiom. This survey will push us beyond the boundaries of Khorasan and into the urban centers of Iraq and the eastern Mediterranean to explore how these tales were seen, what role they played in society, and the kind of literary work they could be called upon to do. Once the general contours of this genre have been established, we may then turn back to the earliest Persian romances and see how they operate within the horizons of expectation set by their neighbors and predecessors. In conducting this survey, we seek to answer the question posed

23. Gian Biagio Conte, *Genres and Readers: Lucretius, Love Elegy, Pliny's Encyclopedia*, trans. Glenn W. Most (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 112.

24. Cf. Fuchs, *Romance*, 31; Patricia A. Parker, *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode* (Princeton University Press, 1979), 4–14.

25. See Michael Roberts, *The Jeweled Style: Poetry and Poetics in Late Antiquity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 1–8 for a discussion of how this approach allowed the author to identify and appreciate some of the distinctive aesthetics and literary techniques in Latin poetry of late antiquity.

26. "Thick description" is a term perhaps most well-known in the fields of ethnography and anthropology and with which I became familiar through the work of Clifford Geertz; in a manner similar to my own purposes, it seeks to embed phenomenological observation within the social codes that grant all forms of communication their range and multivalence: "Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of 'construct a reading of') a manuscript—foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior." See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973), 5–30.

at the start of this chapter and decide if and how the love-stories of eleventh-century Iran are united by some combination of features that might allow us to consider them as part of the same group of texts, which we will call the "romance" for familiarity's sake—well aware that such a term does not exactly exist in the original language.[27] When approached from the standpoint of affiliated ideas, topoi, narratives, and strategies, this genre emerges as a remarkably stable kind of writing, with like-minded texts to be found in Greek, Arabic, and Persian literature. Having established the general shape of this genre and the "rules of the game" that distinguish it, we can then start to evaluate how a particular author, in this case Fakhroddin Gorgāni, could employ the techniques and themes available to him to craft a fresh take on a well-known narrative. I contend at the end of this chapter that Gorgāni, along with a number of other poets of his era, recognized new possibilities in this form and used it to recast a number of well-known stories from popular literature, evening tales, and folklore into sophisticated works that broke new ground in their treatment and consideration of aesthetics, ethics, and erotics.

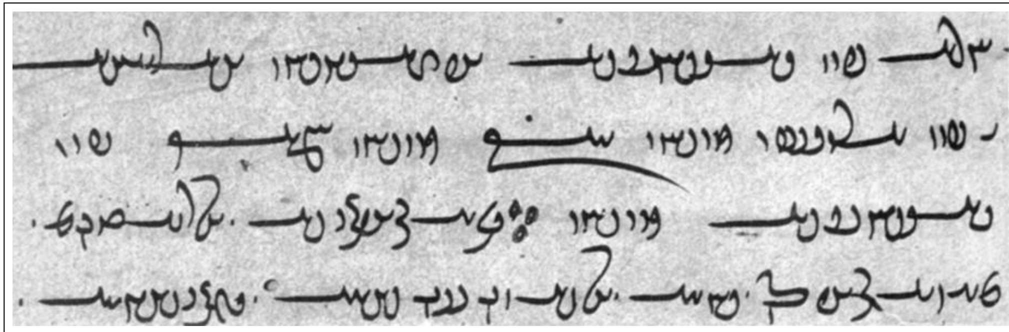
2.1 The Persian renaissance

The fourth century *anno hegirae*, corresponding roughly to the tenth century CE, is often known as the beginning of the "Persian renaissance" in Islamic history.[28] Such an epithet needs some qualification, for Iranians had played no small role in the great efflorescence of Arabo-Islamic thought and literature that took place under the aegis of the Abbasid caliphs in the two preceding centuries. It was from Khorasan that the Abbasids rose as a military power, ousting the Umayyads with a mixed army of Iranian and Arab soldiers; following their rise to power, they established themselves in the newly-founded city of Baghdad,

27. In a way similar to that described by Mohamad Pasha Khan, I was at first sure that this inquiry would be better off by avoiding the "foreign" term altogether, until I realized that it is just as foreign when applied to the medieval European literature as it is to the Persian, and since the word "romance" invokes almost exactly the right kind of horizons for modern readers as I would want it to, it became clear that this was the right term to use. See Khan, "The Broken Spell," 17.

28. For examples of the term in use, see Richard N. Frye, "The New Persian Renaissance in Western Iran," in *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of Hamilton A. R. Gibb*, ed. George Makdisi (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 225–231; C. E. Bosworth, "The Ṭāhirids and the Ṣaffārids," in *The Cambridge History of Iran, Volume 4: The Period from the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs*, ed. Richard N. Frye (Cambridge University Press, 1975), 129; Gilbert Lazard, "The Rise of the New Persian Language," in *The Cambridge History of Iran, Volume 4: The Period from the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs*, ed. Richard N. Frye (Cambridge University Press, 1975), 611, "Persian Popular Romances Before the Safavid Period," 4 (called here a "national awakening"); J. T. P. de Bruijn, "Classical Persian Literature as a Tradition," in *General Introduction to Persian Literature*, ed. J. T. P. de Bruijn (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 2.

Figure 2: Example of the Avestan Script, a close relative of Pahlavi. Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bodleian_J2_fol_175_Y_28_1.jpg; accessed 11 June 2015. The image has been cropped and modified.



only thirty kilometers away from the old Sasanian capital of Ctesiphon, where they adopted much of the royal pomp and administrative practice of the *ancien régime*.[29]

Despite these continuities with the old imperial infrastructure, there were naturally major changes that took place with the rise of the new polity. One obvious difference was that the language of the court was no longer Persian but Arabic, and Iranians who sought a place in this new milieu had no choice but to accommodate themselves to this new reality.[30] The transition from one official language to another might not have been as challenging or disruptive a process as we might imagine, for as John Perry explains, "literary Middle Persian, having been written for five centuries in a deficient script without spelling reform, had been outpaced by the spoken tongue as this changed in sound and structure; it had become an archaic scribal code."[31] Arabic, on the other hand, was in the midst of a brilliant efflorescence and was readily adopted as the new international language of culture, literature, and knowledge by non-native speakers from all parts of the empire. With increasing rates of conversion to Islam in the ninth century, written Persian quickly lost its relevance, save for the fast-dwindling numbers of Zoroastrians, whose priests, fearing the worst, were engaged in a flurry of activity preserving their sacred traditions in

29. See Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 5–6. On the makeup of the Abbasid army, see Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate*, 42–4; on the Abbasids' adoption of Sasanian administrative structures, see Touraj Daryaee, *Sasanian Iran (224–651 CE): Portrait of a Late Antique Empire*, Sasanika 1 (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2008), 81–82.

30. See John Perry, "The Origin and Development of Literary Persian," in *General Introduction to Persian Literature*, ed. J. T. P. de Bruijn (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 43–44.

31. ibid., 47; see also Frye, "Development of Persian Literature under the Samanids and Qarakhanids," 70. For an example of this script (actually Avestan, which is very similar to Pahlavi in terms of its appearance, see Figure 2.

an archaic script that few outside their circle could read.[32]

Evaluating the break in tradition that could have resulted from this reorientation is not an easy task, for points of change and continuity are both abundant. It has been commonly held that the Arab conquests, which led to the gradual conversion of the populace to Islam and the adoption of Arabic as the new language of religion and literature, threatened to wipe out the old Iranian traditions, a narrative that François de Blois firmly asserts: "The adoption of Islamic religion and culture *did* cut the Persians off from the religious (Zoroastrian) roots of the old national culture, and the extinction of Zoroastrian book learning among Muslim converts and their abandonment of the Middle Persian written language meant that Sasanid literature, indeed the whole of Sasanid 'high' culture, was unknown to Persian Muslims."[33] This must be true to a certain extent, and comments like the following from Abu Saʿid Estakhri, that the Persians "have a language called Pahlavi, in which are written books about the Persians of old and their exploits, and which Persians themselves cannot understand without it being interpreted," give a vivid picture of how far-off the ancient culture might have seemed to Iranians living in the tenth century.[34] But at the same time, we must be cautious of treating the interaction of Persian and Arabic elements as a zero-sum equation in which one tradition is lost when another is adopted. Much like Latin in medieval Europe, or Greek in the eastern Roman empire, Arabic had become a *lingua franca* that people of multiple backgrounds could use to express themselves; but that did not mean that they melted into a homogeneous mass. Rather than thinking of the centuries that followed the conquests as the "two centuries of silence," as Zarrinkub famously put it, we might instead say that Iranians were talking quite a lot, but in Arabic.[35] Though written Persian had been knocked out of the ring, much of its heritage made it into Arabic belles-lettres through translation, adaptation, and inspiration; as Lazard writes:

> The ancient books of history, wisdom and science, the romances, stories and fables had all been translated into Arabic and they were known to educated Iranians much more from these translations than from the original works in Middle Persian. . . . Arabic literature was

32. On rates of conversion, see Richard Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

33. Blois, "Influences on Persian Literature," 334.

34. Bruijn, "Classical Persian Literature as a Tradition," 47.

35. Cf. ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn Zarrīnʹkūb, *Dū qarn-i sukūt: sarguẕasht-i ḥavādiṡ va-awẓāʿ-i tārīkhī-i Īrān dar dū qarn-i avval-i Islām az ḥamlah-i ʿArab tā ẓuhūr-i davlat-i Ṭāhiriyān* (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1336 [1957]).

> therefore not foreign to the Iranians: they contributed to it themselves as translators and as original writers.[36]

Some famous examples of this process may suffice: Ruzbeh ʿAbd Allāh Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (d. ca. 139/757), a Manichean convert to Islam and proud follower of the traditions maintained by the Persian aristocracy, translated a number of Sasanian works on courtly etiquette and *savoir-faire* into Arabic, including *Kalīla & Dimna*, the *Book of Lords*, the *Book of Customs*, the *Book of the Crown*, and the *Letter of Tansar*.[37] Some decades after Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ's death, ʿAlī b. Dāʾūd and Abān Lāḥiqi both transposed his *Kalīla & Dimna* into rhyming hemistichs (*muzdawij*), probably in emulation of the Persian masnavi; the latter is also said to have versified the *Book of Mazdak*, the *Deeds of Ardashir*, *Barlaam & Josaphat*, *Sendbād the Sage*, and other Sasanian works in like manner.[38] In addition to these didactic, political, and historical texts, a vast amount of fictional literature—fairy-tales, love-stories, animal fables—was written down in Arabic, possibly for the first time in many cases. The Baghdadi bookseller Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 385/995) provides a succinct history of this translation movement in his *Catalogue*, and it is interesting that he singles out the Persians in his discussion of imaginative fiction:

> The first people who composed fables, some of them in the speech of animals, were the early Persians, who put them down in writing and stored them in their libraries. The Arsacids, the third Persian dynasty, outdid them in this endeavor, and the practice increased and spread still further in the days of the Sasanians. The Arabs translated this literature into Arabic, whereupon it was taken up by the masters of style and eloquence, who polished it, adorned it, and made their own compositions in its matter."[39]

At the head of Ibn al-Nadīm's list of "stories for the evening" (*asmār*) and "fables" (*khurāfāt*) are some

36. Lazard, "The Rise of the New Persian Language," 603. See also Perry, "Origin and Development," 46.

37. J. Derek Latham, "Ebn al-Moqaffaʿ," in *EIr*, online edition (1997), accessed June 11, 2015, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ebn-al-moqaffa.

38. Blois, "Influences on Persian Literature," 339; Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-fihrist*, ed. Ayman Fuʾād Sayyid (London: Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation, 2009), 1:369–70, 516, 3:326, 331; *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm: A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture*, ed. and trans. Bayard Dodge (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 260, 359, 716, 724. For an in-depth discussion of the translation of Pahlavi literature into Arabic during the 3rd/9th century, see Ẕabīḥ Allāh Ṣafā, "Sharāyit-i ijtimāʿī va siyāsī-yi Īrān baʿd az suqūṭ-i shāhanshāhī-yi Sāsānī va aṡar-i ān dar tarjumah va tadvīn-i rivāyathā-yi millī tā naẓm-i shāhnāmahʹhā va dāstānhā-yi qahrimānī," *Īrān shināsī* 2, no. 2 (1990): 239–247; Mohsen Zakeri, "ʿAlī ibn ʿUbaida ar-Raiḥānī: A Forgotten Belletrist (*adīb*) and Pahlavi Translator," *Oriens* 34 (1994): 89.

39. Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 3:321; cf. *Fihrist* (*tr. Dodge*), 713.

أَوَّلُ مَن صنَّفَ الخرافات وجعلَ لها كُتُباً وأوْدعَها الخزائن وجعلَ بعضَ ذلك على أَلسنة الحيوان، الفرس الأول. ثمَّ أغرقَ في ذلك ملوك الأَشغانية، وهم الطبقة الثالثة من ملوك الفرس. ثمَّ زادَ ذلك واتسَّعَ في أَيَّام ملوك الساسانية، ونقلَتْه العرب إلى اللغة العربية، وتناولَهُ الفصحاء والبلغاء وهذَّبوه ونمَّقوه وصنَّفوا في معناه ما يُشبِهُه.

famous collections whose names remain familiar to us today: the *Thousand Tales* (*Hazār Afsān*), the direct ancestor of the *Thousand and One Nights*; the animal fables of *Karīrak ud Damanak* (Ar. *Kalīla & Dimna*), known in Europe as the *Fables of Bidpai*; and the *Sendbādnāma* (Ar. *Sindbād al-ḥakīm*), a similar collection of wisdom literature that was translated into Latin in the twelfth century as the *Historia septem sapientium* and soon found its way into numerous European vernaculars.[40] Following these, Ibn al-Nadīm provides the names of a number of Persian books that had been translated into Arabic, organized under two curious rubrics: "evening-tales" (*asmār*) and "*true* evening-tales" (*asmār ṣaḥīḥa*), a division of the written word that lingers on to this day in the fiction and non-fiction sections of our public libraries.[41] Many of these stories are no longer extant, but judging from this list (Table 4), it does not appear that the old Iranian literary heritage was in danger of falling into oblivion, although these texts must have undergone significant changes as they made the transition from Middle Persian to Arabic.

It is worth taking a moment to consider the names of the stories presented in this catalogue. In most cases, we have very little to go on save their titles, but even these can give us a sense of what kinds of narrative were making it into Arabic translation and how contemporary readers might have received them. The first feature to note is that most of the books in the "non-fiction" section are concerned with the deeds of great men—kings, heroes, and sages like Darius, Bahrām Chubin, Khosrow Parviz, and Anushirvān—historical figures all, most of them hailing from the Sasanian period. The legendary battle between Rostam and Esfandyār also appears on this list, reminding us that for the people who preserved this material, these accounts were not seen as mere fantasy but as a serious part of their history.[42] In ad-

40. For more on Persian elements in the *Nights*, see Ulrich Marzolph, "The Persian *Nights*: Links Between the *Arabian Nights* and Iranian Culture," *Fabula* 4, nos. 3/4 (2004): 274–293. For a genealogy of *Kalīla & Dimna*'s sources and recensions, see François de Blois, *Burzōy's Voyage to India and the Origin of the Book of Kalīlah wa Dimnah* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1990); Blois, "Influences on Persian Literature," 335–38; and Dagmar Riedel, "Kalila wa Demna i. Redactions and circulation," in *EIr*, online edition (2010), accessed June 11, 2015, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/kalila-demna-i. For more on *Sindbad the Sage*, see Killis Campbell, *The Seven Sages of Rome* (Boston: Ginn & Company, 1907); Ben Edwin Perry, "The Origin of the Book of Sindbad," *Fabula* 3, no. 1 (1959): 1–94; Charles-Henri de Fouchécour, *Le sage et le prince en Iran médiéval* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1986); Stephen Belcher, "The Diffusion of the Book of Sindbād," *Fabula* 28, no. 1 (1987): 34–57; Yasmina Foehr-Janssens, *Le temps des fables: le Roman des Sept Sages, ou, l'autre voie du roman* (Paris: H. Champion, 1994). Many thanks to Alexandra Hoffmann for introducing me to to the world of Sindbad studies.

41. Similar divisions existed in other literary milieux: even before the distinction between "romance" and "novel" was made explicit in English literary criticism, an acknowledged difference between the history and the romance had emerged in the eighteenth century that "the one genre was by and large veracious, and the other generally mendacious"; Khan, "The Broken Spell," 18–19; see also Geoffrey Day, *From Fiction to the Novel* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), 1–33.

42. See Gazerani, "Old Garment from a New Tailor," 181, 183–86. For example, Khaleghi-Motlagh suspects that *Rostam and*

Table 4: List of Persian stories translated into Arabic, from Ibn al-Nadīm's *Catalogue**

"Fiction"	**أسمار**	**"Non-fiction"**	**أسمار صحيحة**
A Thousand Tales	هزار دِستان	*Rostam and Esfandyār*	رُستُم وأسفَندِياذ
Būsifās and Finīlūs	بوسِفاس وفِنيلوس	*Jabala b. Sālem*	ترجمة جَبَلَة بن سالم
The Miserly King	جَحْد خسرو	*Bahrām Chubin*	بهرام شوبين
The Maratayn[a]	كتاب المَرَتين	*Shahrbazār and Parviz*	شهرَبَزار مع أبرَويز
Fable and Amusement	كتاب خرافة ونزهة	*Anushirvān's Book of Deeds*	الكارنامج في سيرة أنوشُروان
The Bear and the Fox	الدب والثعلب	*The Crown and the Good Omens*	التاج وما تفاءلت به ملوكهم
Ruzbeh the Orphan	روزبَه اليتيم	*Darius and the Golden Idol*	دارا والصنم الذهب
Moshkdāna and Shāhzanān	مُشكِدنانَه وشاه زَنان	*The Book of Customs*	آئين نامه
Nimrod, King of Babylon	نمرود ملك بابِل	*The Book of Lords*	خُداي نامه
Khalīl and Daʿa[b]	خليل ودَعَه	*Bahrām and Narsi*	بهرام ونرسي
		Anushrād, son of Anushirvān	أنوشْراد بن أنوشِروان

* Some of these titles are a bit garbled and different editions have different readings. This list is derived from Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 3:325, but see Dodge (715–16) and Ghazi (174) for alternatives.

[a] Dodge suggests *al-Marbīyīn*, "The Book of the Tutors"; Ghazi suggests *al-Murābīn*, "les individus de mœurs suspectes."

[b] Dodge suggests "Daʿd," a girl's name, and Ghazi suggests Habīl for the boy.

dition to these narratives, we find works that describe courtly life and protocol, undoubtedly stemming from the tradition of counsel and reglementation (*andarz* and *āyēn*) that was continued in New Persian texts like Kaykāvus b. Eskandar's *Qābusnāma* (w. 475/1082) and Neẓām al-Molk's *Book of Government* (w. 484/1091).[43] The "fiction" category, on the other hand, is more various and sundry; we cannot speculate too much, save to observe that many of these sound like stories that would either be part of the fabulist tradition (*The Bear and the Fox*, *Fable and Amusement*) or the fantastic adventures of kings and princes of the sort one finds in the *Thousand and One Nights* (*Ruzbeh and the Orphan*, *The Miserly King*). I might venture that we also see a romance or two in this list: *Moshkdāna and Shāhzanān*, *Khalīl and Daʿd,* and *Būsfās and Finīlūs* all seem likely candidates given their titles (a topic we will return to presently); the latter even sounds a little Greek. That this was a flourishing genre at the time is amply demonstrated in the subsequent chapters of Ibn al-Nadīm's *Catalogue*, which list dozens of books under the following head-

Esfandyār belongs to the local tradition of one of the great Parthian families, possibly "Esfandyār" of Rayy, and originates from a battle fought in the first century CE when the Parthians expelled an army of Scythians from Sistan. See Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Bīzhan va Manīzhah," 287.

43. See Maria Macuch, "Pahlavi Literature," in *The Literature of Pre-Islamic Iran*, ed. Ronald E. Emmerick and Maria Macuch (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 160–72, 181–83.

ings: “Those lovers who loved before and during Islam and had books composed about them”; “Those lovers from the rest of the people about whom books were composed”; “The elegant beloveds”; “Those lovers whose records entered the evening-tales”; “Names of humans who loved jinn and of jinn who loved humans.”[44] The list concludes with an observation from the author that these fables and evening stories were greatly sought after in the days of the Abbasid caliphs, and so the booksellers composed and fabricated their own in their attempt to keep up with demand (*fa-ṣannafa l-warrāquna wa-kadhabū*).[45] One is left with the impression of something along the lines of J. R. R. Tolkien’s “Cauldron of Story,” which “has always been boiling, and to it have continually been added new bits, dainty and undainty”; while we can see firmer lines of textual transmission in the historical, practical, and didactic texts in the “non-fiction” category, the love-story genre was grounded not in the preservation of specific stories but through a reiterated cluster of images, motifs, tropes, plots, and structures, an aspect of the tradition we shall observe at work in specific tales further on.[46]

Even as Ibn al-Nadīm wrote in Baghdad, a remarkable process was taking place in Khorasan, some fifteen hundred miles to the east. The Abbasid caliphate’s political clout had largely diminished by the mid-tenth century, and its eastern provinces were breaking off into autonomous local dynasties. After nearly two centuries of almost nothing written in Middle Persian outside of the efforts of the Mazdean

44. Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 3:327–31; cf. *Fihrist* (*tr. Dodge*), 719–724. The corresponding titles in Arabic are: (1) *asmā’u l-ʿushshāqi l-ladhīna ʿashiqū fī l-jāhilīyati wa-l-islāmi wa-ullifa fī akhbārihim kutub*; (2) *asmā’u l-ʿushshāqi min sā’iri l-nāsi mimman ullifa fī ḥadīthihi kitāb*; (3) *asmā’u l-ḥabā’ibi l-mutaẓarrifāt*; (4) *asmā’u l-ʿushshāqi l-ladhīna tadkhulu aḥādīthuhum fī l-samar*; (5) *asmā’u ʿushshāqi l-insi lil-jinni wa-ʿushshāqi l-jinni lil-ins*. On the third title, Dodge has *al-ḥabā’ib al-mutaṭarrifāt*, which he translates as the “Loving and Fickle Girls,” but given the long-standing idea of noble or elegant love (*al-ʿishq al-ẓarīf*) such as we find in Ibn al-Washshā’’s (d. ca. 325/937) *Book of Embroidered Cloth* (*Kitāb al-muwashshā*) or Avicenna’s (d. 428/1037) *Treatise on Love* (*Risāla fī al-ʿishq*), I suspect *mutaẓarrifāt* is the correct reading. See Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq ibn Yaḥyā Washshā’, *al-Muwashshā, aw, al-ẓarf wa-al-ẓurafā’* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1965), 66–132, tr. into German by Dieter Bellmann as *Das Buch des buntbestickten Kleides* (Leipzig: G. Kiepenheuer, 1984); Avicenna, *Risālah fī al-ʿishq*, ed. Ḥusayn al-Ṣiddīq and Rāwiyah Jāmūs (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 2005), 65–76, with an English translation by Emil L. Fackenheim, “A Treatise on Love by Ibn Sina,” *Mediaeval Studies* 7 (1945): 218–22. For more on this idea of “elegant love” and its many manifestations in thought and literature, see Gustave E. von Grunebaum, “Avicenna’s *Risâla fî ’l-ʿišq* and Courtly Love,” *JNES* 11, no. 4 (1952): 233–238; Mohammed Ferid Ghazi, “Un groupe social: ‘Les Raffinés’ (Ẓurafā’),” *Studia Islamica* 11 (1959): 39–71; Jean-Claude Vadet, *L’Esprit courtois en Orient dan les cinq premiers siècles de l’Hégire* (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1968), 267–378; Joseph Norment Bell, “Avicenna’s Treatise on Love and the Nonphilosophical Muslim Tradition,” *Der Islam* 63, no. 1 (1986): 73–89; Etin Anwar, “Ibn Sīnā’s Philosophical Theology of Love: A Study of the *Risālah fī al-ʿIshq*,” *Islamic Studies* 42, no. 2 (2003): 338–44.

45. Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 3:331; cf. *Fihrist* (*tr. Dodge*), 723. Dodge is a little kinder in his translation (“they made [stories] and told untrue [tales]”), and he adds that these booksellers collected copies of these stories and sold them to professional storytellers.

46. Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” 125.

priesthood, these courts began to foster literary production in New Persian, a transcription of the spoken language using the Arabic alphabet. The language was not exactly the same as the Middle Persian of the Sasanian administration; it was a hybrid tongue rising out of the admixture of cultures and peoples in the new Islamic cities of the north-east, with heavy borrowing from Arabic, Soghdian, and Parthian elements.[47] It knew itself and was known by a few different names, but the most prominent of these were *fārsi*, the language of the Persians, and *dari*, the language of the court.[48] The genesis of this literary idiom is popularly traced to an anecdote found in the anonymous *History of Sistān*, featuring Yaʿqub b. Layṡ (d. 265/879), a coppersmith who led a popular revolt against the Tahirids, a dynasty loyal to the Abbasids that ruled in Khorasan. After a successful military expedition in which the governor of Herat was ousted and the Kharijites ʿAmmār and Zanbīl were killed, the poets in Yaʿqub's retinue began to compose the expected Arabic panegyrics to commemorate his victories, to which the untutored general replied, "Why must you say things I cannot comprehend?" (*chiz-i ke man dar nayāyam cherā bāyad goft*). A secretary, Moḥammad b. Vaṣif, seized on the moment and recited the first Persian qasida (*avval sheʿr-e pārsi andar ʿajam u goft*), which begins with the following verse—hardly a poem for the ages, but nevertheless a good indicator of the close connection between poets and courts that gave rise to this new literary language:[49]

> O prince! to whom both the elites and common-folk of the world
> are as but slaves and servants, lackeys and groveling houseboys . . . [50]

This same passage comments on another important change that was taking place in Persian poetics, nothing less than the concept of poetry itself. As scholars like Boyce, Khaleghi-Motlagh, and de Bruijn have documented, minstrels and singers played a vital role in the performance and transmission of nar-

47. See Lazard, "The Rise of the New Persian Language," 597; Perry, "Origin and Development," 51.

48. See Frye, "Development of Persian Literature under the Samanids and Qarakhanids," 71. Frye makes a further distinction between the two, calling *dari* "a simple style of New Persian free from Arabic words," and *fārsi* "the style of the New Persian language which was greatly mixed with Arabic words and was ornate rather than simple."

49. As Jerome Clinton writes, "The identification of Rudaki with the Samanids, Farrokhi and Manuchehri with the Ghaznavids, and Anvari and Moʿezzi with the Great Seljuks—to give only a few examples from many possible ones—is so complete that mention of one automatically brings the thought of the other. . . . In short, one cannot understand the poetry of this period without placing it in the context of the aristocratic and courtly tradition." See "Court Poetry at the Beginning of the Classical Period," in *Persian Literature*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1988), 75–76.

50. Muḥammad Taqī Bahār, ed., *Tārīkh-i Sīstān* (Tehran: Zavvār, 1383 [2004]), 226–27. Meter: *ramal maḥẕuf mosamman* [– ⏑ – – | – ⏑ – – | – ⏑ – – | – ⏑ –]. The editor suggests و سگبند for وسک بتد. For further discussion of this episode, see Lazard, "The Rise of the New Persian Language," 595, 607; Blois, *Bio-bibliographical Survey*, 47–48.

ای امیری که امیران جهان خاصه و عام　　　بنده و چاکر و مولای وسک بتد غلام

rative literature in pre-Islamic Iran; these performers usually accompanied themselves on an instrument and sang their own compositions, a tradition that remains visible in the early years of New Persian poetry in the example of accomplished poet-musicians like Rudaki (d. ca. 328/940) and Farrokhi Sistani (d. ca. 429/1038).[51] However, with the adoption of Arabic prosodic forms, the forms and meters of the old lays were fast becoming obsolete, and the Arabic distinction between "poet" (*shāʿir*), "reciter" (*rāwī*), and "musician" (*muṭrib*) was making inroads into Persian court practice. Turning back to the *History*, we find the following description of this transition as it affected the Persians:

> As long as they were *pārsis* [i.e., before they became Muslims, both in a cultural and a religious sense], lyrics used to be sung to them to the sound of the lute (*rud*) in the *khosrovāni* [royal] manner. When the Persians were defeated and the Arabs came, poetry among them was in Arabic and they all had knowledge and understanding of it.[52]

The impact of this new division of labor is visible in the *Qābusnāma* (w. 475/1082), a book of counsel by the Ziyarid prince Kaykāvus b. Eskandar, who devotes two chapters to advising his son what he should do if he wishes to be a poet (*shāʿer*) or a minstrel (*khonyāgar*). A minstrel, he says, must be a versatile entertainer: in addition to knowing how to play an instrument and sing well, he should also know how to tell stories and recite or perform poetry. But, the author adds, "do not be in love with your own poetry, and don't only recite your own verses . . . for minstrels are the reciters of the poets, not themselves."[53] The minstrel and the reciter have both been relegated to the important but secondary function of the professional performer who recites the work of a poet, rather like the relationship between an orchestra and a composer; we remember the names of Mozart and Stravinsky, but not those of the musicians who performed their works. Turning to the poets, Kaykāvus enumerates in great detail the skills required in that

51. See Boyce, "The Parthian *Gōsān*"; Boyce, "Gōsān"; Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Ḥamāsah´sarā-yi bāstān"; Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Bīzhan va Manīzhah"; J. T. P. de Bruijn, "Poets and Minstrels in Early Persian Literature," in *Transition Periods in Iranian History*, Studia Iranica 5 (Leuven: E. Peeters, 1987), 15–23. A further discussion of the minstrel tradition is found in Chapter 5.

52. Bruijn, "Classical Persian Literature as a Tradition," 15; cf. Bahār, *Tārīkh-i Sīstān*, 227. Bracketed passages are original to the citation. The "royal manner" (*ṭariq-e khosrovāni*) might refer to a specific mode or method of playing, but I suspect rather that he means the particular protocol used when performing music before royalty in Sasanid Iran; as Kay Khosrow writes, "they first created the 'royal mode' for playing in an assembly of kings; they then established modes of shorter meters such as could be sung." Kaykāvūs ibn Iskandar ibn Qābūs, *Qābūs nāmah*, 193, cf. *A Mirror for Princes: The Qābūs Nāma*, trans. Reuben Levy (London: Cresset Press, 1951), 186:

اول دستانِ خسروانی زنند و آن از بهرِ مجلسِ ملوک ساختند. بعد از آن طریق‌ها به وزن کم از آن بنهادند چنانکه بدو سرود توان گفت و آنرا راه نام کردند و آن راهی بود که به طبع پیران و خداوندان جدّ نزدیک بود.

53. Kaykāvūs ibn Iskandar ibn Qābūs, *Qābūs nāmah*, 194; cf. *Qābūs nāmah* (*tr. Levy*), 187:

عاشقِ شعرِ خویش مباش و همه روایتِ شعرِ خویش مکن که چنانکه . . . خنیاگران راویانِ شاعرانند نه راویانِ خویش.

line of work: to keep up the musical analogy, just as a virtuoso must gain proficiency in the techniques of vibrato, tremolo, tenuto, sforzando, rubato, and so on, the aspiring poet must master paranomasia, antithesis, refrain, allusion, simile, metaphor, coupling, and many other technical skills in order to produce a poem of renown and longevity. Thus, although improvisation and musical accompaniment continued to play a crucial role in performance, the profession of poet came to be seen as something separate and distinct from that of the musician or the minstrel: grounded in a discipline with both oral and written components, adhering to formal regulations adapted from Arabic models, circulated and studied by aspiring poets eager to master this new literary language.[54] Nāṣer-e Khosrow gives us a glimpse of how this might have looked when he writes in his *Travelogue*:

> In Tabriz I saw a poet by the name of Qaṭrān; he recited good poetry, but he didn't know Persian (*fārsi*) well. He brought me the divans of Monjik and Daqiqi and read them aloud for me, and asked me the meanings of everything that was difficult for him. I answered his questions and he wrote down my explanations, then he recited his own poetry to me."[55]

Invigorated by a new alphabet, lexicon, and poetic system, Persian literature bounded back into play in the ninth and tenth centuries; the sons of Yaʿqub b. Laiṡ soon lost ground to more long-lived dynasties that possessed the means and money to patronize writing and poetry on a large scale, and a second wave of translation, not into Arabic but New Persian, was begun—the "renaissance" alluded to earlier.[56] The Samanid family was by far the most important of these dynasties, ruling over the eastern heartlands

54. See Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Ḥamāsah′sarā-yi bāstān," 8; Bo Utas, "Arabic and Iranian Elements in New Persian Prosody," in *Arabic Prosody and its Applications in Muslim Poetry*, ed. Lars Johanson and Bo Utas (Uppsala: Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, 1994), 129–141; Lewis, "Reading, Writing, and Recitation," 72–91; Franklin D. Lewis, "The Transformation of the Persian Ghazal: From Amatory Mood to Fixed Form," in *Ghazal as World Literature II: From a Literary Genre to a Great Tradition; The Ottoman Gazel in Context*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth et al. (Wurzburg: Ergon Verlag in Kommission, 2006), 125–34; Bruijn, "Classical Persian Literature as a Tradition," 20. The extent of this separation of roles by the tenth century is discussed in Jerome W. Clinton, *The Divan of Manūchihrī Dāmghānī: A Critical Study* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1972), 5–6. For some examples on how improvisation continued to be an important skill for court poets, see the anecdotes in Niẓāmī ʿArūẓī, *Chahár Maqála*, 38, 47, 49, 53, 60–61.

55. Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Safarnāmah*, 9; see too Franklin D. Lewis, "The Modes of Literary Production: Remarks on the Composition, Revision and 'Publication' of Persian Texts in the Medieval Period," *Persica* 17 (2001): 72–74. De Bruijn describes how a poet would have prepared his poem and probably even put it on paper before sharing his work in a session (*majlis*); see "Classical Persian Literature as a Tradition," 32.

> در تبریز قطران نام شاعری را دیدم، شعری نیک می‌گفت، اما زبان فارسی نیکو نمی‌دانست. پیشِ من آمد. دیوانِ منجیک و دیوانِ دقیقی بیاورد و پیشِ من بخواند. و هر معنی که او را مشکل بود از من بپرسید. با او بگفتم و شرح آن بنوشت و اشعارِ خود بر من بخواند.

56. Blois, "Influences on Persian Literature," 334–35.

of Soghdia, Bactria, and Khorasan for over a century (875–1005) and commissioning numerous translations of prestigious books, mostly from Arabic but also from Pahlavi, into the new court language. The Ziyarid family (931–ca. 1090), based in Gorgan along the Caspian sea, was also an important source of Persian-language patronage. With the divans of famous poets like Shahid Balkhi (d. 325/935), Rudaki (d. ca. 328/940), Abu Ṭāher Khosravāni (d. ca. 342/953), and Daqiqi (d. ca. 366/976) now available to be circulated and studied, the new literary language of Khorasan acquired an aura of prestige that led to its emulation by poets further afield.[57] This process was accelerated by the rise of a new military leader, the Turkish general Maḥmud b. Sebüktigin (r. 998–1030), who displaced the Samanids and built a powerful state upon the political and ideological infrastructure they had left behind.[58] Eager to secure his own legitimacy and extend the cultural reach of his realm, Maḥmud vigorously promoted literary activity at his court in Ghazna, offering generous reward to poets who could immortalize his name; his poet-laureate, Abu l-Qāsem ʿOnṣori (d. 422/1031), will play a key role in our story to come.[59]

Thus, about a hundred and fifty years after the rise of the Abbasids, a new literary register of Persian emerged, heralding the advent of what would become a millennium-long poetic tradition. The most visible arena of activity, or at least the one that received the most attention and investment from the nobility, was the qasida, a form that had been long established as the premier vehicle for encomiastic literature.[60] When not eulogizing their patrons at official court ceremonies, however, poets were busy incorporating another important tradition into the new idiom, that of narrative storytelling (*dāstānsarā'i*).[61] While

57. Perry, "Origin and Development," 53.

58. For an account of the Ghaznavids' rise to power and promulgation of Perso-Islamic culture, see Bosworth, "The Early Ghaznavids," 164–187; also C. E. Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids: Their Empire in Afghanistan and Eastern Iran, 994–1040* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1963), Zaporozhets, *The Seljuks*, 97–104.

59. For more on Maḥmud and the Ghaznavids' role in fostering Persian literary and scientific activity, see Rypka, *HIL*, 173–74; C. E. Bosworth, "The Development of Persian Culture Under the Early Ghaznavids," *Iran* 6 (1968): 36–44. Another significant dynasty that fostered the production of New Persian poetry in the wake of the Samanids were the Qarakhanids in Transoxiana (r. 992–1212); see Frye, "Development of Persian Literature under the Samanids and Qarakhanids" and Lazard, "The Rise of the New Persian Language," 596.

60. See Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, "Abbasid Panegyric and the Poetics of Political Allegiance: Two Poems of al-Mutanabbī on Kāfūr," in *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa: Classical Traditions and Modern Meanings*, ed. Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 35–63; Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 41–46; Lewis, "Reading, Writing, and Recitation," 97; Julie Scott Meisami, "The Poet and His Patrons: Two Ghaznavid Panegyrics," *Persica* 17 (2001): 91–105.

61. Some major studies in the field of medieval Persian storytelling include Hanaway, "Formal Elements in the Persian Popular Romances"; Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Ḥamāsah′sarā-yi bāstān," 8–11; Ẕabīḥ Allāh Ṣafā, *Ḥamāsah-sarā'ī dar Īrān* (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1363 [1984]); Ṣafā, "Bīzhan va Manīzhah"; Rubanovich, "Orality in Medieval Persian Literature." This list is by no means exhaustive.

some of these adaptations were in prose—Abu l-Fażl Balʿami's (d. 329/940) *Kalīla & Dimna*, for example, or the *Shāhnāma* commissioned by Abu Manṣur b. ʿAbdorrazzāq (d. 350/961)—many Samanid and Ghaznavid poets were setting these same tales to masnavi verse, a form whose malleability permits a relatively smooth transition from prose to poetry.[62] Thus the Samanid poet Rudaki versified *Kalīla & Dimna* on the basis of Balʿami's text, and Masʿudi Marvazi did the same with the Abu Manṣur *Shāhnāma*. Other translations and adaptations followed suit, and the diversity of themes and sources attest to the eclectic and wide-ranging tastes of their translators: *Barlaam and Joasaph*, a life of the Buddha; Abu Shakur Balkhi's *Āfarinnāma*, a work of advice literature; Kaykāʾus of Rayy's *Mowlud-e Zartosht*, a life of the prophet Zoroaster which he claims to have extracted from a "royal book" in Pahlavi script.[63] This wave of adaptations came to a head with another versification of the *Shāhnāma*, begun by Daqiqi and completed some forty years later by Ferdowsi (d. ca. 416/1025) in a *tour-de-force* that is considered by many to be the finest work in Persian literature and certainly one of its foundational texts.

What is interesting to note, thus far, is the subject-matter of these early translations (Table 5): by and large, they are didactic or educational in some way, and could therefore be considered to bear an element of truth. The Sanskrit and Pahlavi tales, for example, were presented as instructive *fabulae* through which the courtly audience would learn the precepts of successful governance and princely comportment. Stories culled from the various religious traditions that were or had been active in Iran, including the Abrahamic faiths, Manichaeism, Buddhism, and Zoroastrianism, also presented the lives of saints and prophets as a form of reverence and a model of emulation. And finally, the royal chronicles were first and foremost conceived as a kind of history through which a noble house could remember the deeds of its forebears and follow in their footsteps.[64] Put another way, and in juxtapostion with Ibn al-Nadīm's catalog of Persian books translated into Arabic, we see that it is mostly titles from the "non-

62. See Maḥjūb, "Muqaddamah," 7.

63. Blois, "Influences on Persian Literature," 341–42.

64. See Ehsan Yarshater, "Iranian National History," in *The Cambridge History of Iran, Volume 3(1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 359–477; A. Shapur Shahbazi, "On the *Xʷadāy-Nāmag*," in Iranica Varia*: Papers in Honor of Professor Ehsan Yarshater*, Acta Iranica 30 (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 208–229; Julie Scott Meisami, "The Past in Service of the Present: Two Views of History in Medieval Persia," *Poetics Today* 14, no. 2 (1993): 247–275; Gazerani, "Old Garment from a New Tailor," 179–81. A thorough review of the various ways scholars have theorized the *Shāhnāma*'s genre can be found in Nasrin Askari, "The Medieval Reception of Firdausī's *Shāhnāma*: The Ardashīr Cycle as a Mirror for Princes" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2013), 1–11.

Table 5: List of early Persian masnavis*

Title	Author	Date	Source
Farāmarznāma	"Āzād-e Sarv"	before 307/919	*Shāhnāma* cycle
Shāhnāma	Masʿudi Marvazi	early 9th c.	*Shāhnāma* cycle
Kalila & Demna	Rudaki	d. ca. 329/940	Sanskrit via Pahlavi
Sendbādnāma	"	"	Sanskrit via Pahlavi
Belawhar & Budisaf [a]	Anonymous	first half of 10th c.	Sanskrit via Pahlavi
Āfarinnāma	Abu Shakur Balkhi	fl. 336/947	Wisdom-literature
Yusof & Zolaykhā[b]	Abu l-Mo'ayyad Balkhi	fl. 365/976	Stories of the prophets
Mowlud-e Zartosht	Kaykā'us of Rayy	w. 347/978?	A "Pahlavi royal book"
Shāhnāma (1,000 lines)	Daqiqi	d. ca. 366/976	Abu Manṣur *Shāhnāma*
Dāneshnāma[c]	Maysari	w. 370/980	Medical treatise
Shāhnāma	Ferdowsi	d. 416/1025	Abu Manṣur *Shāhnāma*
Shādbahr & ʿAynolḥayāt	ʿOnṣori	d. 422/1031	Alexander cycle?
Sorkhbot & Khengbot	"	"	Alexander cycle?
Vāmeq & ʿAẕrā	"	"	*Metiochos & Parthenope*
Shahryārnāma	(Pseudo-)Farrokhi	d. 429/1037	*Shāhnāma* cycle
Varqa & Golshāh	ʿAyyuqi	fl. 421/1030	*ʿUrwa and ʿAfrāʾ*
Yusof & Zolaykhā[d]	Pseudo-Ferdowsi (Amāni?)	before 476/1083	Stories of the prophets
Vis & Rāmin	Gorgāni	fl. 441/1050	Pahlavi romance
Garshāspnāma[e]	Asadi Ṭusi	w. 458/1066	*Shāhnāma* cycle
Bahmannāma[f]	Irānshān b. Abu l-Khayr	485–501/1092–8	*Shāhnāma* cycle
Kushnāma[g]	"	501–4/1108–11	*Shāhnāma* cycle
Pandnāma	Badā'iʿ	late 11th c.	Wisdom-literature
Alfiyah & Shalfiya	Azraqi	late 11th c.	*Kitāb al-alfīya* (a sex manual)

* This list was compiled from the following references: Maḥjūb, "Muqaddamah," 1; Tarbīyat, "Mathnavī va mathnavī guyān-i Īrānī," 230–441; Blois, *Bio-bibliographical Survey*, 64–65, 70, 72–74, 77–79, 84–85, 90–91, 94–96, 99, 140–42, 150–52, 157, 160, 166, 191–93, 201–6, 359–60, 465–79. Tarbiyat and Maḥjub list a few other masnavis about which we practically no information and have therefore excluded from the list: Rudaki's *ʿArāyes al-nafāyes* and *Dawrān-e āftāb*, a masnavi by Labibi, and a masnavi by Ṭayyān.

[a] This was transcribed in the Manichean script; a fragment of it was discovered at Turfan. See Blois, "Influences on Persian Literature," 342.

[b] There is also a *Yusof & Zolaykhā* attributed to an otherwise unknown Bakhtyāri.

[c] Ḥakīm Maysari, *Dānishnāmah dar ʿilm-i pizishkī: kuhantarīn majmūʿah-i ṭibbī shiʿr-i Fārsī*, ed. Barāt Zanjānī (Tehran: Mu'assasah-i Muṭāliʿāt-i Islāmī-i Dānishgāh-i Mak Gīl bā hamkārī-i Dānishgāh-i Tihrān, 1366 [1987]).

[d] Mentioned in Bürgel, "The Romance," 163–64; cf. Blois, *Bio-bibliographical Survey*, 479.

[e] The origins of this story are very ancient; the dragon-slayer Kərəsāspa is mentioned in the Avesta, and the author of the *History of Sistan* has an account of this same figure that is similar to Asadi Ṭusi's narrative. Asadī Ṭusi, *Garshāsbnāmah*, iii–vi; Blois, "Garšāsp-nāma."

[f] Īrānshāh ibn Abī al-Khayr, *Kūshnāmah*, ed. Jalāl Matīnī (Tehran: ʿIlmī, 1377 [1998]).

[g] Īrānshāh ibn Abī al-Khayr, *Bahman´nāmah*, ed. Raḥīm ʿAqīqī (Tehran: Shirkat-i Intishārāt-i ʿIlmī va Farhangī, 1370 [1991]).

fiction" section that were being commissioned by these early patrons of Persian literature. Not until the early eleventh century do we see independent love stories in this body of versified tales; the only exception may be the story of *Yusof & Zolaykhā*, a version of the Joseph story based on the medieval Judaeo-Islamic exegetical tradition. However, such a story still sits comfortably among the *vitae* of other holy figures, and certainly nobody thought of it as scandalous or irreligious, a charge that is easily leveled against the adulterers Vis and Rāmin or the polytheists Vāmeq and ʿAẕrā.

To explain this trend, we may consult Mary Boyce's invaluable article on the minstrel tradition in pre-Islamic Iran, where she offers a number crucial points that take us back to the question of genre. Although there was a vibrant culture of oral storytelling and sung ballads in ancient Persia, it was held in a domain quite separate from that of writing (*dibīrīh*); the latter was the provenance of administrators, scribes, jurists, messengers, accountants, and so on.[65] Texts committed to paper were therefore understood to possess some kind of practical benefit to those within this class:

> A number of native prose-works, written down before the Arabic conquest, survive directly or in translation; and these are almost all characterized by having a factual or a pseudo-factual basis, and by being composed, seemingly, for some practical purpose, either as propaganda for the reigning house, or a record, or an inducement to the virtuous behavior desirable in a good churchman and citizen. . . . The only prose works of entertainment, apart from *Hazār Afsān* [*The Thousand Fables*] known to have a sustained narrative interest, or elaborate framework, are of foreign origin, and were apparently rendered into Pahlavi late in the period. . . . Even in these latter works of entertainment, the stories are mixed with edification, so that either for this reason, or because they were written down, to study them could be regarded as a sign of moral worth.[66]

There are two main points to draw from this analysis. The first is the association of "truth" with writing, prose, instruction, and the administrative classes, and the corresponding association of "fiction" with entertainment, song, poetry, minstrels, and storytellers. The second is Boyce's conclusion that the scribes and bureaucrats who were actively involved in making their heritage accessible in this new idiom naturally gravitated towards what they thought was most important to preserve: "Ibnu'l Muqaffaʿ and his fellows were simply continuing their native tradition, in which prose alone was written. They were evidently scholars, men of books; and it is quite possible that the unwritten Persian poetry did not even

65. Boyce, "The Parthian *Gōsān*," 32.
66. ibid., 33, 35.

enter their purview as a matter for consideration."[67] Despite a flurry of literary activity and innovation, the translation and adaptation of numerous texts from one language to another, a widespread culture of reading and book-collecting in Abbasid Baghdad, and generous court patronage in Khorasan, a healthy skepticism about the utility of fairy-tales and love-stories for men of rank and nobility seems to have persisted. Although we know from Ibn al-Nadīm that there was a voracious demand for these stories among the reading public, they were understood as fantasies and evening entertainment and did not have the same claim to truth or edification that one would find in history, biography, travel narratives, or even fables with talking animals who swapped moral *sententiae* back and forth. Although there is no doubt that fictional stories continued to be told and enjoyed, their habitat remained largely confined to informal and oral contexts, told at home in mixed company after a hard day's work and a nightcap.[68] No one describes this better than Ferdowsi, who sets up the tale of *Bizhan & Manizha* in the following manner:

> A night as black as coal bedaubed with pitch,
>   A night of ebony, a night on which
> Mars, Mercury, and Saturn would not rise.
>   Even the moon seemed fearful of the skies:
> Her face was three-fourths dimmed, and all the night
>   Looked gray and dusty in her pallid light.
> . . . .
> I started up, bewildered, terrified;
>   My fear awoke the woman at my side.
> I called for her to bring torches, light;
>   She fetched bright candles to dispel the night
> And laid a little feast on which to dine,
>   Red pomegranates, citrons, quinces, wine,
> Together with a polished goblet fit
>   For kings and emperors to drink from it.
> "But why do you need candles now?" she said.
>   "Has sleep refused to visit your soft bed?
> Drink up your wine and—as you do so—I
>   Will tell a story from the days gone by,

67. Boyce, "The Parthian *Gōsān*," 36.

68. See Bruijn, "Poets and Minstrels," 16–18; Lewis, "Reading, Writing, and Recitation," 84–85. The *History* of Bayhaqi mentions professional storytellers in the court a number of times, in which we see them entertaining their masters at hunts and soirées as well as acting as their messengers and confidantes; see Abū al-Fāẓl Muḥammad ibn Ḥusayn Bayhaqī, *Tārīkh-i Bayhaqī*, ed. Muḥammad Jaʿfar Yāḥaqqī and Mahdī Sayyidī (Tehran: Sukhan, 1388 [2009]), 1:117, 124, 502; English translation in *The* History *of Beyhaqi*, trans. C. E. Bosworth, revised by Mohsen Ashtiany (Boston: Ilex Foundation, 2011), 1:212, 219–20, 2:172.

> A story full of love and trickery,
> Whose hero lived for war and chivalry."
> "Sweet moon," I said, "my cypress, my delight,
> Tell me this tale to wile away the night."
> "First listen well," she said, "and when you've heard
> The story through, record it word for word."[69]

Like *Vis & Rāmin*, *Bizhan & Manizha* was one of the ancient Parthian love-stories that had long been the provenance of minstrels and was now, for the first time, being recast in New Persian verse.[70] On their own, such tales do not seem to have been considered worthy material for a masnavi to be dedicated to the glory of a monarch—imagine Milton deciding to versify the stories of *Cinderella* and *Rumplestiltskin* for his great epic cycle—but Ferdowsi overcame this obstacle by incorporating the story into the larger framework of the *Shāhnāma*, a book of kings, heroes, wisdom, and glory, exactly the kind of thing that patrons craved to have attached to their name. This initial foray is but a sign of further developments to come; probably even before Ferdowsi's death in 416/1025, other poets were taking the unprecedented step of versifying stories that were solely dedicated to the trials and travails of two lovers, our first Persian romances. It seems that during Ferdowsi's lifetime, and perhaps partly due to the impact of the *Shāhnāma* itself, poets realized the potential power of the love-story tradition and audiences warmed to their ideas; the genre was losing its stigma as a kind of idle fantasy. As we shall see, this disdain for the love-story seems to go back as far as the tradition itself, making its reemergence as high literature in eleventh century Iran all the more remarkable.[71] As Northrop Frye writes: "Any serious discussion of romance has to take into account its curiously proletarian status as a form generally disapproved of, in most ages, by the guardians of taste and learning, except when they use it for their own purposes."[72]

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69. Firdawsī, *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings*, trans. Dick Davis (New York: Viking, 2006), 306–7; for the Persian, see Firdawsī, *Shāhnāmah*, 3:303–6, vv. 1–23.

70. This scene also offers some further parallels with *V&R* in that Ferdowsi's wife offers to read aloud the ancient story from a book (*yak-i dāstān · ze daftar-t bar khwānam az bāstān*); this will then become the basis for the tale's versification (*be sheʿr āvardan*) in the new poetic language (*be sheʿr āri az daftar-e pahlavi*); see Ibid., 3:305–6, vv. 19, 22.

71. This can be contrasted, one might add, with the general trajectory of the *Shāhnāma* as Rubanovich ("Orality in Medieval Persian Literature," 657) describes it:

> Until the fifteenth century the reception of the *Shāh-nāma* may have been restricted to learned circles of courtly makers of lyric and epic poetry and historical writings, while its infiltration into folk literature spanned a longer period. The absorption of the *Shāh-nāma* into the medieval folk milieu appears to have succeeded the canonization of the epic in 'high', courtly literature, in which it provided, among other things, a useful tool for conferring legitimacy on non-Iranian, Turco-Mongol rulers.

72. Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of the Romance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press,

2.2 “Love-stories and all that sort of stuff”

> For us it will be appropriate to read such narratives as have been composed about deeds that have actually been done; but we must avoid all fictions in the form of narrative such as were circulated among men in the past, *for instance tales whose theme is love*, and generally speaking everything of that sort.
>
> —Emperor Julian, 363 CE[73]

> Fables—the very word acknowledges their falsity—serve two purposes: either merely to gratify the ear or to encourage the reader to good works. They delight the ear as do the comedies of Menander and his imitators, or *the narratives replete with imaginary doings of lovers* in which Petronius Arbiter so freely indulged and with which Apuleius, astonishingly, sometimes amused himself.[74] This whole category of fables that promise only to gratify the ear a philosophical treatise avoids and relegates to children’s nurseries.
>
> —Macrobius, ca. 400 CE[75]

These two remarks are among the few contemporary sources that acknowledge the fact that in the first centuries CE, lengthy prose narratives about lovers had become a popular literary genre.[76] Recognition does not automatically breed acceptance; both Julian and Macrobius are doubtful about the benefit such “fabrications” (Gr. *plasma*, Lat. *fabula*), suspiciously cast in the guise of history (*en historias eidei*), could have for their readers. That is not to say that make-believe is useless in and of itself, but that it needs

1976), 23.

73. Julian, Emperor of Rome, “Fragment of a Letter to a Priest,” in *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, trans. Wilmer Cave Wright, vol. 2 (London: W. Weinemann; New York: Macmillan, 1913), 301b, p. 327. Emphasis mine.

> Πρέποι δ’ ἂν ἡμῖν ἱστορίαις ἐντυγχάνειν, ὁπόσαι συνεγράφησαν ἐπὶ πεποιημένοις τοῖς ἔργοις. ὅσα δέ ἐστιν έν ἱστορίας εἴδει παρὰ τοῖς ἔμπροσθεν ἀπηγγελμένα πλάσματα παραιτητέον, ἐρωτικὰς ὑποθέσεις καὶ πάντα ἁπλῶς τὰ τοιαῦτα.

74. Petronius (fl. 62 CE) was the author of the *Satyrica* and Apuleius (fl. 160 CE) wrote the *Metamorphoses*, a.k.a. *The Golden Ass*.

75. Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, trans. William Harris Stahl (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 84; cf. Macrobius, *Commentaire au Songe de Scipion: texte établi, traduit et commenté*, ed. and trans. Mireille Armisen-Marchetti (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2001), 1.2.7–8. Emphasis mine.

> Fabulae, quarum nomen indicat falsi professionem, aut tantum conciliandae auribus uoluptatis aut adhortationis quoque in bonam frugem gratia repertae sunt. Auditum mulcent uel comoediae, quales Menander eiusue imitatores agendas dederunt, uel argumenta fictis casibus amatorum referta, quibus uel multum se Arbiter exercuit uel Apuleium non numquam lusisse miramur. Hoc totum fabularum genus, quod solas aurium delicias profitetur, e sacrario suo in nutricum cunas sapientiae tractatus eliminat.

76. It is perhaps overly speculative to say we know for sure what texts Julian and Macrobius have in mind when they write *erōtikai hypotheseis* and *argumenta fictis*; indeed, Whitmarsh believes it more probable that Julian refers to “the ancient tradition of romantic/erotic historiography inaugurated by Ktesias” than the novels of his day. Nonetheless, these quibbles should not undermine my basic assertion, universally accepted among scholars, that the novel was never theorized in classical Greek literary criticism. See Tim Whitmarsh, “The Greek Novel: Titles and Genre,” *The American Journal of Philology* 126, no. 4 (2005): 607–8; Simon Goldhill, “Genre,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Greek and Roman Novel*, ed. Tim Whitmarsh (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 190.

to meet a specific set of criteria to be deemed appropriate for learned discourse: pointing to the use of myths by Plato and Cicero, Macrobius later states that fables are suitable for philosophical writing only when "a decent and dignified conception of holy truths, with respectable events and characters, is presented beneath a modest veil of allegory."[77] Only truth, in the end, may justify fiction.

The close association of the useful with the truthful was not confined to the Roman intelligentsia; Ibn al-Nadīm, as we saw, utilizes the same division in his *Catalogue*, dedicating individual chapters to all the serious topics—law, grammar, hadith, and so on—before cramming any and all works of fiction into a final chapter on fairy-tales.[78] Abu Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (d. 414/1023), a contemporary of Ibn al-Nadīm, allows that storytelling (*hadīth*) is agreeable as long as it comes "from ideas in the mind on simple matters, [related] in gentle tones, esteemed words, sweet speech, good pacing, adherence to rhyming prose, much affect and little affection, used in the service of upright behavior"; like Macrobius, he adds that because of their ability to stir the senses through the mind, such tales are most loved by women and children.[79] This sentiment is echoed in an anecdote conveyed by the courtier, critic, and chess master Abu Bakr al-Ṣūlī (d. ca. 335/946), who tells us that once, during a tutoring session with the future caliph Rāḍī, the prince's book collection was unexpectedly confiscated by his grandmother, who wished to see what he was reading; when the books were returned, the young man sent back an indignant reply: "You have seen these books and found them to be books of tradition, jurisprudence, poetry, language, history, and the works of the learned—books through the study of which God causes one to benefit and to be complete. They are not like the books which you read excessively such as *The Wonders of the Sea*, *The*

77. Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, 84 (1.2.11): "Hoc totum fabularum genus quod solas aurium delicias profitetur e sacrario suo in nutricum cunas sapientiae tractatus eliminat." Cf. J. R. Morgan, "Make-believe and Make Believe: The Fictionality of the Greek Novels," in *Lies and Fiction in the Ancient World*, ed. Christopher Gill and T. P. Wiseman (Universeity of Exeter Press, 1993), 177; Niklas Holzberg, "The Genre: Novels Proper and the Fringe," in *The Novel in the Ancient World*, ed. Gareth Schmeling (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 15.

78. Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 2:321.

79. Abū Ḥayyān ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad al-Tawḥīdī, *Kitāb al-imtāʿ wa-al-muʾānasah*, ed. Aḥmad Amīn and Aḥmad al-Zayn (Beirut: Manshūrāt Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāh, [1965]), 1:22–23; cf. Robert Irwin, "The Arabic Beast Fable," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 55 (1992): 37.

ورجعنا إلى الحديثِ فإنَّهُ شهيٌّ، سيَّما إذا كان من خطرات العقل قد خُدِم بالصواب في نَغْمةٍ ناغِمةٍ، والحروف متقاومة، ولفظٍ عَذب، ومأخذٍ سهل، ومعرفة الوصل والقطع، ووفاء بالنثر والسجع، وتباعُدٍ من التكلُّف الجافي وتقارُبٍ في التلطُّف الخافي. . . . والحديثُ معشوقُ الحِسِّ بمعونةِ العقل، ولهذا يُولَعَ به الصبيان والنساء.

Tale of Sindbad, and *The Cat and the Mouse*."[80] Some centuries later, the philosopher Naṣiroddin Ṭusi (d. 672/1274) warns his readers to avoid "stories of lovers and accounts of their poetry" (*ḥekāyāt-e ʿoshshāq va revāyat-e ashʿār-e ishān*); women, in particular, should not even be allowed to learn the qur'anic story of Joseph, as it might cause them to deviate from the rule of chastity.[81] Even the *Maqāmāt* of Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī (d. 398/1008), often singled out by modern scholars eager to locate the first openly fictitious work of Arabic literature, were admired by medieval readers not for their creative phantasy but for their rhetorical brilliance; they were therefore classified as a form of epistle, a secretarial art and member of the serious genres (*al-jiddīyāt*), rather than those meant for entertainment (*al-hazlīyāt*).[82]

Turning back to the Romans, Julian's sniff at "tales whose theme is love" is all the more telling for the rather shapeless category in which he places this genre: "all that sort of stuff" (*panta haplōs ta toiauta*).[83] The emperor does not have a word to describe this kind of writing; his disdain is not necessarily because he considers these books "bad literature," but because according to the critical tradition he inherited, they are not literature at all. For all their brilliance and insight, Gorgias, Plato, and Aristotle could not define or analyze forms of poetry and prose that did not yet exist, nor could the rhetors and grammarians of Hellenistic Alexandria; and when extended prose narratives about a boy and a girl who fall in love finally emerged in the first century CE, the classical genres were no longer accepting applications. As Simon Goldhill observes, "there is an extensive range of generic vocabulary for different types of writing in the ancient world. . . . But no critic mentions the novel (or any similar term) as a category, or refers to our novels individually or collectively until many years after their heyday."[84] Thus, the readers of these prose love-stories tended to describe them using what Tim Whitmarsh calls "the blandest, most generic form of content descriptor," such as we see in Julian's "intrigues that deal with love" (*erōtikai hypotheseis*) or Macrobius's "realistic but made-up narratives filled with the affairs of lovers" (*argumenta fictis casibus*

80. Nadia Abbott, "A Ninth-Century Fragment of the 'Thousand Nights': New Light on the Early History of the *Arabian Nights*," *JNES* 8, no. 3 (1949): 155.

81. Naṣīr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī, *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Khvārazmī, 1356 [1978]), 195, 219; for the English translation, see *The Nasirean Ethics*, trans. G. M. Wickens (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1964), 143–44, 164.

82. Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, *Maqama: A History of the Genre* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002), 360–64. Cf. A. F. L. Beeston, "The Genesis of the Maqāmāt Genre," *JAL* 2 (1971): 9; David A. Wacks, "The Performativity of Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ's 'Kalīla wa-Dimna' and 'al-Maqāmāt al-Luzūmiyya' of al-Saraqusṭī," *JAL* 34, nos. 1/2 (2003): 178–80.

83. For the slightly more colloquial rendition of the Greek, I am relying on a translation by Goldhill, "Genre," 190, n. 17.

84. ibid., 190.

amatorum referta).[85] Other terms called to service in the Greek context might illustrate the process and nature of the work's composition, such as *drama*, an enactment of life, *diēgēma*, a rhetorical narrative, *syntagma*, a written composition, *mythos* or *hypothesis*, a story or intrigue, *historia*, an inquiry or account, *plasma*, a piece of artifice; such appellations are very helpful in revealing some of the rhetorical features observed in these texts, but they make no attempt to create a new "genus" to which this writing could belong.[86] The failure of indigenous criticism to formally recognize this corpus had a profound impact on its subsequent reception, not least in modern scholarship, as Bryan Reardon explains:

> The late appearance of prose fiction and the academic conventions surrounding its elements led to its being generally disregarded by the academic world in antiquity. This disregard is responsible for the loss of much of the literary history attached to the genre, and hence for the modern world's ignorance of it—which in turn explains, in part, the disdain that long attached to the ancient romance in the modern world.[87]

Yet overcoming such attitudes can lead to rapid breakthroughs: after this nameless genre was recognized as a worthwhile object of study, it was was quickly noted for its narrative sophistication, generic versatility, and heteroglossia, characteristics that have often been associated with the novel, which in time became the standard designation for this family of ancient texts.[88] Scholars in the 1970s, most famous among them Michel Foucault, examined the classical novel in an effort to explore fundamental changes taking place in late antique society, including notions about the "care of the self," chastity, and marriage.[89] These and subsequent studies have proven a valuable tool for discovering the blind spots of both the classical age and our own, allowing us to read marginalized texts with a fresh pair of eyes and glean new insights into the literary and intellectual contexts of their production.

85. Whitmarsh, "The Greek Novel: Titles and Genre," 598.

86. For further discussions of these terms, see Tomas Hägg, *The Novel in Antiquity*, English ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 3–4; Niklas Holzberg, *The Ancient Novel: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1995), 8–9; Margaret Anne Doody, *The True Story of the Novel* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 25–27; Holzberg, "The Genre: Novels Proper and the Fringe," 15–19; Consuelo Ruiz-Montero, "The Rise of the Greek Novel," in *The Novel in the Ancient World*, ed. Gareth Schmeling (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 32–37; Whitmarsh, "The Greek Novel: Titles and Genre"; Goldhill, "Genre," 190–91.

87. Bryan P. Reardon, *The Form of Greek Romance* (Princeton University Press, 1991), 9.

88. The distinction between "romance" and "novel," it must be noted, has a unique flavor in anglophone scholarship, as the words *roman*, *romanzo*, *Roman*, and the like have been used in other European languages to refer to both the classical and modern incarnations of the form. See Gareth Schmeling, "Preface," in *The Novel in the Ancient World*, ed. Gareth Schmeling (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 1–5.

89. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, 3 vols. (New York: Vintage Books, 1990). For a discussion of Foucault's legacy in the study of the ancient novel, see Helen Morales, "The History of Sexuality," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Greek and Roman Novel*, ed. Tim Whitmarsh (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 39–55.

The Greek notion of genre has many parallels in Islamicate literature, not least because Hellenistic rhetoric, alongside many other areas of thought, was soon made accessible to Arab critics and writers; nearly all of Aristotle's works, including the *Rhetorika* and the *Poetika*, were translated into Arabic, where they played a major role in the burgeoning field of Arabic literary theory.[90] In a move reminiscent of Aristotle's four-fold distinction of "serious" and "trivial" objects and "dramatic" and "narrative" modes, Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) arranged poetry into four classes based on the intersection of high or low forms of diction (*lafẓ*) and import (*fā'ida fī l-maʿnā*).[91] Variations of this tetrad appeared in the work of numerous other critics, including Thaʿlab (d. 291/804), Ibn Sallām al-Jumaḥī (d. 231/846), Isḥāq b. Ibrāhīm b. Wahb (fl. 335/946), and Qudāma b. Jaʿfar (d. 337/958).[92] Later theorists, in particular Abu Hilāl al-ʿAskari (d. ca. 400/1010) and ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1078), expanded Ibn Qutayba's terms to encompass all aspects of speech (*kalām*) and introduced the third concept of "image" (*ṣūra*), the site where the poet displays his skill and originality in combining the dual aspects of utterance and import.[93] Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī (d. 463/1071) organized his analysis of poetry around the framework of four modal pillars (encomium, invective, erotic, and elegy) and four affective principles (desire, fear, pleasure, and anger);

90. Cf. Francis E. Peters, *Aristotle and the Arabs: The Aristotelian Tradition in Islam* (New York University Press, 1968); Wolfhart Heinrichs, *Arabische Dichtung und grieschische Poetik* (Beirut; Wiesbaden: F. Steiner in Komm., 1969); Franz Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); Tomas Hägg, "The Oriental Reception of Greek Novels: A Survey with some Preliminary Considerations," *Symbolae Osloenses* 61 (1986): 99–131; Deborah Black, *Logic and Aristotle's* Rhetoric *and* Poetics *in Medieval Arabic Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 1990); Salim Kemal, *The Poetics of Alfarabi and Avicenna* (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1991); Iḥsān ʿAbbās, *Malāmiḥ yūnānīyah fī al-adab al-ʿarabī* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasah al-ʿArabīyah lil-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 1993); Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ʿAbbāsid Society (2nd–4th/8th–10th centuries)* (London: Routledge, 1998). As scholars agree in growing numbers, it makes sense to consider the social and intellectual culture of the early caliphate as part of the temporal and geographic milieu we broadly define as "late antiquity"; cf. Michael Morony, "Continuity and Change in the Administrative Geography of Late Sasanian and Early Islamic al-ʿIrāq," *British Institute of Persian Studies* 20 (1982): 1–49; Walker, "The Limits of Late Antiquity: Philosophy between Rome and Iran," *Ancient World* 33 (2002): 45–69; Michael Morony, "Economic Boundaries? Late Antiquity and Early Islam," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 47, no. 2 (2004): 166–194; Jany János, "The Four Sources of Law in Zoroastrian and Islamic Jurisprudence," *Islamic Law and Society* 12, no. 3 (2005): 291–332; Chase F. Robinson, "Reconstructing Early Islam: Truth and Consequences," in *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins*, ed. Herbert Berg (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 101–134; Parvaneh Pourshariati, "Further Engaging the Paradigm of Late Antiquity," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 6, nos. 1–2 (2013): 1–14; Teresa Bernheimer and Adam Silverstein, eds., *Late Antiquity: Eastern Perspectives* (Cambridge, U.K.: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2012).

91. Ibn Qutaybah al-Dīnawāri, *al-Shiʿr wa-al-shuʿarā'*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1982), 1:64–69.

92. Cf. Wolfhart Heinrichs, "Literary Theory: The Problem of its Efficiency," in *Arabic Poetry: Theory and Development*, ed. Gustave E. von Grunebaum (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1973), 37–48; Julie Scott Meisami, *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. J. S. Meisami and P. Starkey (1998), s.v. "Genres, poetic."

93. Cf. George Kanazi, *Studies in the Kitāb aṣ-Ṣināʿatayn of Abū HIlāl al-ʿAskarī* (Leiden: Brill, 1989); George Kanazi, "The Literary Theory of Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī," in *Israel Oriental Studies XI: Studies in Medieval Arabic and Hebrew Poetics*, ed. Sasson Somekh (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 21–36; Mattitiahu Peled, "On the Concept of Literary Influence in Classical Arabic Criticism," in *Israel Oriental Studies XI: Studies in Medieval Arabic and Hebrew Poetics*, ed. Sasson Somekh (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 37–46.

from this, he named ten "types" (*anwāʿ*) of writing that engage with these categories in different ways, as a physician might classify diseases by determining their relation to the four humors.[94] However, such discussions do not offer much help in producing an indigenous theory of the romance. For one thing, they were by and large devoted to the rhetorical analysis of short poetic compositions; as Mattā b. Yūnus's (d. 328/940) infamous glossing of *kōmōidia* and *tragōidia* as panegyric (*madḥ*) and invective (*hijāʾ*) makes clear, the translators' efforts to convert formal labels from Greek to Arabic were awkward at best (and besides, there were no Greek terms for what we now call the novel to draw from anyway).[95] The general aim of these critics was not to produce a static taxonomy of all literature, but to formulate a system by which one could identify the intent and social function of a composition and judge its efficacy in fulfilling that role. Thus augmented and in the end determined by the work's central theme, concept, or motif (concepts that can all be subsumed under the Arabic word *maʿnā*, or "meaning"), the names of genres could merge, multiply, subdivide, and wink in and out of existence with every reiteration.[96] The case is very much the same in Persian, which relied on the Arabic precedent in producing its analytical terminology.[97] As Mesiami explains,

> For Persian (as for Arabic) writers, "genres" (variously termed 'purposes', 'types', 'arts', and so on, and discussed chiefly with reference to poetry) are content-oriented, and consist of such categories as praise, invective, elegy, utterances on love, description, reproach, apology, and so on. These generic categories cut across the formal prosodic categories of poetry (*qaside*, *ghazal*, *mathnavi*, etc.), and are relevant to prose as well. While certain topics are closely associated with certain forms (praise is the primary generic component of the *qaside*, love of the *ghazal*), this conception of genres as content-oriented allows for their combination and manipulation in relation to forms, in both poetry and prose. The medieval critics also discussed "modes"—referring in particular to the distinction between "serious" and "non-serious" writing—as well as to what might be called "registers," i.e., the style appropriate to a certain type of discourse.[98]

94. Heinrichs, "Literary Theory," 42; Meisami, *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, s.v. "Genres, Poetic."

95. Heinrichs, *Arabische Dichtung und grieschische Poetik*, 108*ff*.

96. Cf. Beatrice Gruendler, "Motif vs. Genre: Reflections on the *Dīwān al-Maʿānī* of Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī: Transformations of a Literary Genre," in *Ghazal as World Literature*, ed. Thomas Bauer and Angelika Neuwirth, vol. 1 (Beirut: Ergon Verlag, 2005), 57–85. For some examples of the kinds of generic labels employed by medieval poets and critics, see the anthologies of Abu Tammām (d. ca. 232/845) and Buḥturī (d. 284/897), as well as the tenth-century redactions of the diwans of Abu Nuwās (d. 198/814) and Ibn al-Muʿtazz (d. 296/908), which group poems into a dazzling array of topical themes; cf. Heinrichs, "Literary Theory," 25.

97. See Lewis, "Reading, Writing, and Recitation," 23–25; Lewis, "The Transformation of the Persian Ghazal."

98. Meisami, "Genres of Court Literature," 234. I removed the transliterated Perso-Arabic terms, except for the most vital ones about form, that are present in the original citation.

The textbook examples of this theoretical literature, which include Rāduyāni's *The Interpreter of Eloquence* (w. before 507/1114), *The Garden of Magic* by Rashidoddin Vaṭvāṭ (d. 578/1182), and Shams-e Qays's *Summa* (w. ca. 637/1240), are precisely that, textbooks—manuals detailing the techniques a poet must master if he hopes to earn the respect of his peers and the favor of his patrons. A "light" version of this is found in the *Qābusnāma*, which, as we saw, provides a list of these techniques (see page 86), and then enumerates the various kinds of poems that one might declaim: panegyric, amatory, invective, elegy, ascetic, the "song" (*tarāna*), and the "ode" (*qaṣida*).[99] The *Summa* adheres to similar organizational principles; after an exhaustive discussion of prosody (*ʿaruż*), rhyme (*qāfeya*), and the techniques of poetic ornamentation (*maḥāsen-e sheʿr va ṣanāʿāt*), it provides the following list of "genres" (*ajnās*): the *nasib* (a kind of ghazal), the *tashbib* (also a kind of ghazal), the ghazal proper, which consists of "speaking of women and describing love-play" (*ḥadis̱-e zanān o ṣefat-e ʿeshq-bāzi*), the quatrain, the qasida, the *moṣarraʿ* (a double-rhymed line), the *moqaffā* (a verse without the double-rhyme), riddles (*loghz o moʿammā*), "affected" and "natural" (*motakallaf* and *maṭbuʿ*), and the masnavi (*mozdavaj*), which is used for long narratives (*qeṣaṣ-e moṭavval o ḥekāyāt-e derāz*).[100]

This seemingly haphazard approach to genre has left many contemporary critics unsatisfied, for the last century has seen a number of attempts to bring a more systematic framework to the analysis of Persian literature. Iranian scholars have often theorized their literary heritage within the Hegelian triad of epic (*ḥamāsi*), lyric (*ghanāʾi*), and dramatic (*ṣaḥnaʾi*, *namāyeshi*, *tams̱ili*) types, a move with some appeal for its universalist interest in relations of the self *vis-à-vis* the world, but nevertheless laden with the potential for infelicitous results, such as Shamisā's bemused conclusion that the ancient Persians apparently had no sense of drama.[101] The romance, in any case, is an awkward fit within this schema:

99. Kaykāvūs ibn Iskandar ibn Qābūs, *Qābūs nāmah*, 190; cf. *Qābūs nāmah* (*tr. Levy*), 183. See Lewis, "Reading, Writing, and Recitation," 50–54 for a detailed discussion of this passage.

100. Shams-i Qays, *Kitāb al-muʿjam fī maʿāyīr-i ashʿār al-aʿjam*, 412–444. Elsewhere, he writes that the ghazal is any cut-off (*maqṣur*) poem on the "arts of love" (*fonun-e ʿeshqiyāt*), which include the description of beauty-marks and hair, stories of separation and union, longing to recall visions and fragrances, and various topoi: rains, winds (scents), and the traces of ruins. Cf. ibid., 201; Lewis, "Reading, Writing, and Recitation," 63.

101. Sīrūs Shamīsā, *Anvāʿ-i adabī* (Tehran: Bāgh-i Āyīnah, 1370 [1992]), 157. Cf. ibid., 50–54; Ṣafā, *Ḥamāsah-sarāʾī*, 2; Maḥmūd ʿIbādiyān, *Anvāʿ-i adabī* (Tehran: Ḥawzah-i Hunarī, 1379 [2000]), 20–23, 27–30; Zurqānī, *Tārīkh-i adabī-i Īrān va qalamraw-i zabān-i Fārsī*, 101–118. Such statements only reinforce a long trope, famously articulated by Goethe in his notes to the *West-östlicher Divan* and repeated by Thomas Chenery and R. A. Nicholson, that Persian and Arabic are evidently missing a leg in the great tripod of literature; see Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The West-East Divan: The Poems, with "Notes and Essays";*

Zorqāni classifies it as a kind of lyric poetry, Chelkowski as a "closet drama," and Bürgel as a subgenre of epic.[102] Meanwhile, European scholars like Browne, Bausani, and Rypka attempted to construct a comprehensive taxonomy of Persian literature from scratch, with diverse results that naturally presented their own shortcomings.[103]

Much of this difficulty, it seems, stems from an understanding of genre as a system of universal and stable identities; were we to let this conception go and consider alternative approaches, we might do well to revisit the medieval habit of describing texts through the way they land upon intersecting nodes of form, matter, style, register, and affect. *Vis & Rāmin* itself relies on such criteria: like his contemporaries, Gorgāni describes his poem as a "story," most frequently using the word *dāstān*, although we also see "tale" (*fasāna*, *ḥadiṡ*) or "book" (*nāma*, *daftar*) from time to time; and in one passage, he tells his audience:

> I shall tell you every detail of that moon's story, with her Nurse, Rāmin, and the king,
> In such a language that when a lover reads it,
> bloody tears shall fall from his eyes in sympathy;
> I will tell a love-story, in which love has many a tale.[104] (38.68–70)

It is the most simple kind of self-declarations, a veritable "I yam what I yam." Yet in making this statement, Gorgāni sets up the basic principles that allow his audience to situate this narrative within a preformed set of expectations; just as your telling me you have a joke prepares me to laugh even before I hear it (and leaves me disappointed if your joke isn't funny), so too are we primed by these words to anticipate

Goethe's Intercultural Dialogues, trans. Martin Bidney and Peter Anton von Arnim (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010), 205, 208, 228; Beeston, "The Genesis of the Maqāmāt Genre," 10. The dramatic elements of Persian literature have long been recognized in Soviet and eastern European scholarship; see Jiří Cejpek, "Iranian Folk-Literature," in *History of Iranian Literature*, ed. Karl Jahn (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1968), 621, 627, 645, which names Braginsky, Baumgartner, Minorsky, Zand, Christensen, and Ranke among those who have been active in this conversation. In English scholarship, the work of Peter Chelkowski is particularly relevant: "Shia Muslim Processional Performances," *The Drama Review* 29, no. 3 (1985): 18–30; "Nezāmi: Master Dramatist," in *Persian Literature*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (Albany, NY: Bibliotheca Persica, 1988), 179–189; "Narrative Painting and Painting Recitation in Qajar Iran," *Muqarnas* 6 (1989): 98–111; "Time Out of Memory: Ta'ziyeh, the Total Drama," *The Drama Review* 49, no. 4 (2005): 15–27.

102. Zurqānī, *Tārīkh-i adabī-i Īrān va qalamraw-i zabān-i Fārsī*; Chelkowski, "Nezāmi: Master Dramatist"; Bürgel, "The Romance." This messiness is not limited to Persian examples: Jauss observes that the medieval "vernacular epic or lyric is difficult to describe within the distinction provided by the modern triad of epic, lyric, and dramatic—and the passion play simply cannot be so described." See *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, 77.

103. Cf. Lewis, "Reading, Writing, and Recitation," 1–14; Meisami, "Genres of Court Literature," 234–36.

104. R94/T112/M73/D75. For every instance in which the text discusses itself, see *V&R* 7.29–32, 39, 45, 47, 50, 55–57; 12.11; 38.68–70; 60.6; 126.55–61; and 127.104–9.

بگویم با تو یک یک حالِ آن ماه　　چه با دایه چه با رامین چه با شاه
به گفتاری که چون عاشق بخواند　　بـه دردِ دل ز دیـده خـون چکـانـد
بـگـویـم داسـتـانِ عـاشـقـانـه　　بـدو در عـشـق را چـنـدیـن فـسـانـه

a story that will leave us moved and teary-eyed. Given the topic at hand, we can be certain to encounter a number of indispensable elements: obviously, we need a pair of lovers, and we need some kind of obstacle—a rival, a quest, a shipwreck—to stand between them and make their tale interesting; without this basic core, there is no story. We should also make sure that the lovers are a good fit for one another; we have to *want* them to be together, and feel affected when circumstances forbid their union. To heighten the pleasure and pain we feel in sympathy with them, we should include moments where we identify with the characters and inhabit their state of mind; thus, laments, soliloquies, and speeches are likely additions to the menu. Conventions such as these, so indispensible to the love-story, "show little change over the course of centuries, and conservatism of this kind is the mark of a stable genre"; Marina Brownlee affirms that this basic setup places the romance among "the most enduring of literary forms."[105] Guided by the "love-story" as our organizing principle, our genre begins to gain focus, allowing us to recover the romance from "the miscellaneous heap of prose works now covered by that term."[106]

Additional insights may be gained by looking at more recent Persian terminology. Writing in the 1930s, Moḥammad-ʿAli Tarbiyat names two topical modes in his list of masnavis that are pertinent to our study, "fighting" (*razm*) and "feasting" (*bazm*), and describes *Vis & Rāmin* as the first masnavi that belongs to the latter category.[107] This basic division was rephrased by Khaleghi-Motlagh as the "heroic story" (*dāstān-e ḥamāsi*) and the "love story" (*dāstān-e ʿeshqi* or *ʿāsheqāna*).[108] In either case, these categories are not concerned with discovering an essential quiddity about their representative members, but rather assert a group identity by virtue of their mutual participation in a dominant theme and its associated conventions. Naturally, the two themes are not exclusive to one another; the professional storytellers of Mughal India divided the thematics of their work into four types, *razm*, *bazm*, *ḥosn o ʿeshq*, and *ʿayyāri*—fighting, feasting, beauty-and-love, and chivalry—implying that for every theme, there would be an established repertoire of gestures, motifs, topoi, and strategies that would accompany its perfor-

105. Frye, *The Secular Scripture*, 4; Marina S. Brownlee, "Romance at the Crossroads," ed. Roberta L. Krueger, *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance* (2000): 253. Bakhtin, too, in his discussion of the chronotope and its relation to genre, argues that "adventure-time and the technique of its use in the novel is so perfected, so full, that in all subsequent evolution of the *purely* adventure novel nothing essential has been added to it down to the present day." See *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 87.

106. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 305.

107. *Vāmeq & ʿAẕrā* and *Varqa & Golshāh* had not yet been discovered. Tarbīyat, "Mathnavī va mathnavī guyān-i Īrānī," 433.

108. Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Bīzhan va Manīzhah," 289.

mance and shape its basic structure.[109]

This distinction has an analogue in classical studies, where scholars have faced similar dilemmas regarding the question of what they will call the texts they study. Ruiz-Montero argues that there is a basic difference between a story about kings and heroic deeds, a story about a journey, and a story about two lovers separated against their will, even if a certain number of motifs and elements can flow among all three plotlines.[110] Along the same lines, Niklas Holzberg notes that while fictional biographies like the *Education of Cyrus* and the *Life and Deeds of Alexander of Macedon* may contain episodes reminiscent of the Greek novel, they are fundamentally different in terms of their structure and intent:

> The plot covers the life of the protagonist from birth to death, and fictionalization is not the recipe for the narrative, but simply one ingredient. It is used to add a particular quality to the biography of a famous person, the *vita* being designed either to serve a didactic purpose or to entertain an audience with no taste for dry historical facts, or to do both.[111]

The same structuring effect can be seen at work in Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāma*: although it contains an astonishing range of genres within its pages, the poem is ostensibly a book about kings, organized in the manner of a royal chronicle, moving methodically from the life one king to the next. So too are two of the four "romances" by Neẓāmi, the *Haft Paykar* and the *Eskandarnāma*, which take up the lives of the kings Bahrām Gur and Alexander as their central narrative principle. To this list could be added the accounts of heroes and princes in poems like Asadi Tusi's (d. 465/1072–73) *Garshāspnāma*, the *Bahmannāma* of Irānshāh b. Abu l-Khayr (w. ca. 495/1101–2), the *Farāmarznāma* (early sixth/twelfth c.), prose romances like the *Dārābnāma* and *Samak-e ʿAyyār* (which, like the Indo-Persian romances, blend in an enormous number of elements from the love-story genre, such that they serve well as examples of the hybrid "heroic romance"[112]), and stories from Sasanian Iran like the *Deeds of Ardashir* and the *Memorial of Zarēr*. All of these works are built around the career of its central protagonist, pushing them in the direction of the "life" and "deeds" kind of narrative, which in the medieval terminology is often known

109. Khan, "The Broken Spell," 89–90.

110. Ruiz-Montero, "The Rise of the Greek Novel," 37–80.

111. Holzberg, *The Ancient Novel: An Introduction*, 15. For more on the novels' use of historiographical writing to produce a sense of believability and realism, see Tomas Hägg, "*Callirhoe* and *Parthenope*: The Beginnings of the Historical Novel," *Classical Antiquity* 6 (1987): 184–204.

112. See also Wen-Chin Ouyang's discussion of the *sīra* of ʿUmar al-Nuʿmān as simultaneously "epic" and "romantic": "Romancing the Epic: ʿUmar al-Nuʿmān's Narrative of Empowerment," *Arabic and Middle Eastern Literatures* 3, no. 1 (2000): 11–12.

by these very words: *bios*, *vita*, *geste*, *sīra* ("biography"), *kārnāmag* ("record of deeds"), and so on.[113]

These stories can be contrasted with others whose main topic is the *love affair* that takes place between their two eponymous protagonists: these include our first three extant romances, Neẓāmi's *Layli & Majnun* and *Khosrow & Shirin*, and its many subsequent imitators. The romantic interludes in the *Shāhnāma*, such as *Bizhan & Manizha*, *Zāl & Rudāba*, and *Goshtāsp & Katāyun*, recall patterns found in the independent romances; similar structures and motifs are also present in the Greek novels. Even the titles are an emblematic feature of this genre: in the context of the Greek novels, Tim Whitmarsh argues that the formulae "τὰ περὶ / κατὰ + girl," "girl-boy," or "boy-girl" were exclusive to and constant across all five works; thus, though the stories had no formal name in literary theory, a reader would quickly know what kind of story it was from its name.[114] The titles of the Persian romances follow a similar convention—*Vāmeq & ʿAẕrā*, *Varqa & Golshāh*, *Vis & Rāmin*, *Khosrow & Shirin*, *Layli & Majnun*, and so on—unlike the "heroic" narratives mentioned, which tend to identify themselves by adding the suffix *-nāma* ("story of") to the name of their central protagonist. Nor is the designation of a story by fronting the name of its heroine a meaningless gesture; Whitmarsh argues that in making this move, the novels "stake their claim to radical innovation on the shocking fact of their narratives of the emotional, sexual, and psychological lives of young men and (most shockingly of all) young women, even παρθένοι [*parthenoi*, virgins]. . . . It is that dynamic that lies at the heart of this genre, varied and capacious though it is."[115] The idea that the romance might be deployed not just to tell a story about love, but to invest it with a certain set of questions, concerns, and problems is further discussed by Pavel, who describes how late Renaissance writers would select from a variety of narrative subgenres that "were subject to a strict division of fictional labor, each subgenre specializing in a certain kind of vision of the human world."[116]

113. See Hägg, "*Callirhoe* and *Parthenope*: The Beginnings of the Historical Novel," 192–93; Holzberg, *The Ancient Novel: An Introduction*, 14–19.

114. Whitmarsh, "The Greek Novel: Titles and Genre," 603.

115. ibid., 606–7. Though Stefan Tilg disputes Whitmarsh's claim, his own proposed title, *Narratives about Callirhoe*, foregrounds the role of the heroine in much the same manner. See Stefan Tilg, *Chariton of Aphrodisias and the Invention of the Greek Love Novel* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 214–20.

116. Pavel, "Literary Genres as Norms and Good Habits," 206–7. See also Khan, "The Broken Spell," 41:

> Genre codes are not institutionalized in an absolutely disinterested way, but are fashioned in the glow of the generally covert force of some ideology or another. The articulation of a code of genre, the choosing of certain features of a text as traits of a genre, the identification of a text as a member of a certain genre; all of these acts of genre production or perpetuation involve a decision guided by a particular worldview. . . . The split

J.-C. Bürgel hints at this distinctive worldview in his introduction to the Persian romance, noting its hallmark techniques of "building long coherent units of verse, in developing characters, and in giving the poet the possibility of displaying his skill, not only in composing verse but as a narrator, lyricist, and analyst of the human psyche, and, often, as a moralist who instructs no so much by words as by persuasive examples."[117] Meisami attributes the sudden rise of the romance (and its nearly simultaneous appearance in European court literature) to both a "growing disaffection with the social values embodied in epic" and changes in intellectual and philosophical attitudes, including

> an increased emphasis on the individual and on the importance of self-knowledge, together with a corresponding interest in personal relationships; a decline of reliance on traditional authority and a growing feeling that "it was necessary for men to take the initiative in solving problems for which they were given no real guidance in their texts"; and a social dynamic that gave rise to conflicting codes of conduct and necessitated the discussion and evaluation of their relative merits.[118]

This description corresponds quite well with the social conditions outlined by Tomas Hägg in his explanation for the rise in the novel's popularity in the eastern Roman empire; it is clear that in both contexts, an obvious but crucial factor in explaining the success of these stories was that their plots and points of interest resonated with their audiences.[119] Despite its conservatism in regards to its tools and strategies, Frye suggests that "certain elements of character are released in the romance which make it naturally a more revolutionary form than the novel. The novelist deals with personality, with characters wearing their *personae* or social masks. . . . The romancer deals with individuality, with characters *in vacuo* idealized by revery, and however conservative he may be, something nihilistic and untamable is likely to keep breaking out of his pages."[120] This might help explain why the romance has had a mixed history of reception in elite settings; although the "heroic" romance (the *sīra*) was a flourishing genre in Arabic by the time of Ibn al-Nadīm and remained so for centuries onwards, it remained a "popular"

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between the probable novel and the improbable romance would have been unthinkable without the surging rationalist and empiricist epistemologies that allowed such distinctions to be made.

117. Bürgel, "The Romance," 162.

118. Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 78–79, 80. Her citation is from Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050–1200* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 58.

119. See Hägg, *The Novel in Antiquity*, 81–108; Holzberg, *The Ancient Novel: An Introduction*, 28–42.

120. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 304–5.

genre, intimately connected with the masses and never entertained as a prestigious kind of literature.[121] It should not be taken for granted, then, that the romance should have seen the success it did in Persian, for we find a similar reticence towards the genre before the early eleventh century; there was something special in the way that Gorgāni and his peers approached the love-story that was highly effective for their audiences in Khorasan and Isfahan, paving the way for the genre to be established as a valued and admired form of literary composition.

2.3 Sailing the sea: *Vāmeq & ʿAẕrā*

One of the most intriguing aspects about the Persian romance is its connection with neighboring traditions in Greek and Arabic. There is no arguing with the fact that *Varqa & Golshāh* and *Vāmeq & ʿAẕrā* take place outside Iran and have analogues in Greek and Arabic literature, but does this mean that the romance as a whole was culled from "exotic" traditions and climbed the ladder, so to speak, from popular legend to high literature? Probably not, says Davis; pointing out that the Greek novels were written by authors from the eastern provinces of the Roman empire, that they are usually set in the lands of the Achaemenid Empire, and that they contain numerous topoi identified by the texts themselves as of Persian origin, he argues that the romance/novel tradition emerged out of centuries of mutual engagement and syncretism between Hellenic and Iranian elements, "societies which possessed similar but not wholly overlapping aesthetic ideals and expectations."[122] In the following section, we will review this Helleno-Persian dynamic and map out some of the major points of congruity between the two. The connections run deep, and they occasionally come to the surface in unexpected moments of direct translation or adaptation.

Our main topic of concern are those love-stories so disdained by Julian and Macrobius, what is now generally called the "Greek novel" in contemporary scholarship. Like the "romance" in Persian, this is

121. See Geert Jan van Gelder, *Close Relationships: Incest and Inbreeding in Classical Arabic Literature* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 184; Bruijn, "Arabic Influences on Persian Literature," 379–81.

122. Davis, *Panthea's Children*, 58, also 7 and 82. In a companion article, Davis adds that "the relationship between the love narratives of the two cultures appear, therefore, to have been one of mutual reciprocity over a considerable stretch of time, rather than a more straightforward set of transactions in which one culture was always the donor and the other the recipient." See Davis, "Greece ix. Greek and Persian Romances."

largely a term of convenience whose definition and canon have been debated by critics devoted to its study, but the general consensus is that it consists of a body of prose literature that arose in the hellophone lands of the Roman Empire, beginning in the first century CE and persisting into the fourth. Practically any introduction to the Greek novel will describe more or less the same features at work; for example, we may cite the following description by Ewen Bowie:

> Boy and girl of aristocratic background fall in love, are separated before or shortly after marriage and subjected to melodramatic adventures which threaten their life and chastity and carry them around much of the eastern Mediterranean. Eventually love and fortune prove stronger than storms, pirates and tyrants and the couple is reunited in marital bliss. . . . Speeches, reflections and letters are much exploited to delineate the characters' emotions, set in the foreground of the reader's attention against a backcloth of travel and adventure.[123]

And for the sake of comparison, here is how Bryan Reardon introduces the genre in his *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*:

> Hero and heroine are always young, wellborn, and handsome; their marriage is disrupted or temporarily prevented by separation, travel in distant parts, and a series of misfortunes, usually spectacular. Virginity or chastity, at least in the female, is of crucial importance, and fidelity to one's partner, together often with trust in the gods, will ultimately guarantee a happy ending.[124]

This genre is represented by numerous fragments and five complete works: *Callirhoe* by Chariton of Aphrodisias, the *Ephesiaca* by Xenophon of Ephesus, *Leucippe & Cleitophon* by Achilles Tatius, *Daphnis & Chloe* by Longus, and the *Aithiopica* by Heliodorus.[125] The later works, particularly *Leucippe & Cleitophon* and the *Aithiopica*, enjoyed a long and esteemed reception; they were held as models of high style by medieval Byzantine rhetoricians, who would discuss the relative merits of Achilles Tatius and Heliodorus much as Arab critics debated the poetics of Mutanabbī and Abu Tammām. Writers like Spencer,

123. Ewen L. Bowie, "The Greek Novel: Greek Literature," in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, ed. P. E. Easterling and E. J. Kenney, vol. 1 (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 684–85.

124. Bryan P. Reardon, *Collected Ancient Greek Novels* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 2. Perhaps the most pithy of all such introductions is found in the translator's introduction to *Two Novels from Ancient Greece: Chariton's* Callirhoe *and Xenophon of Ephesos'* An Ephesian Story: Anthia and Habrocomes, trans. Stephen Trzaskoma (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2010), xix: "Boy and girl meet. Boy and girl fall for each other. Boy and girl become separated and face trials and tribulations. Boy and girl are reunited and live happily ever after."

125. For a brief introduction to and chronology of these texts and fragments, see Reardon, *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, 5 and more recently Tim Whitmarsh, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Greek and Roman Novel* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 378–84.

Figure 3: *Daphnis and Chloe*, painted ca. 1535 by Paris Bordone. Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bordone_Daphnis_and_Chloe.jpg; accessed 11 June 2015.

Sidney, and Cervantes ranked Heliodorus along with Homer and Virgil among the three crowning jewels of classical literature, and the pastoral scenes of *Daphnis & Chloe* have been a favorite subject of European painting and sculpture for many centuries; the latter work was even cast as a ballet in 1912, scored by Maurice Ravel.[126]

We have less information about the reception of the Greek novel in the Islamic world. We must not forget, of course, that the material did not have to "move" anywhere, since the Arabs took over those same territories where the novel had flourished in late antiquity; the question is simply whether this literature was made accessible to audiences literate in Arabic. There is no doubt that the scope of material transmitted from Greek into Arabic was vast: among the works translated, Tomas Hägg lists "the major Platonic dialogues, almost all the Corpus Aristotelicum, various Hermetic and Neoplatonic treatises, well over a hundred medical and philosophical works of Galen alone (and, mainly through him, parts of the Corpus Hippocraticum), books of 'Artemidorus', Dioscorides, Ptolemy, Euclid and other sci-

126. See Hägg, *The Novel in Antiquity*, 192–227; Gerald Sandy, "The Heritage of the Ancient Greek Novel in France and Britain," in *The Novel in the Ancient World*, ed. Gareth Schmeling (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 735–773; Massimo Fusillo, "Modernity and Post-Modernity," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Greek and Roman Novel*, ed. Tim Whitmarsh (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 325.

entific writers, not to mention a host of late antique commentaries and others."[127] Dimitri Gutas has a blunter statement to the same effect: "From about the middle of the eighth century to the end of the tenth, almost *all* non-literary and non-historical secular Greek books that were available throughout the Eastern Byzantine Empire and the Near East were translated into Arabic."[128] Yet this vast range of material had to travel, as Hägg puts it, through the "needle's eye" of the Christian Syriac community that was the principle agent of this process, and unfortunately this community had little interest in the pagan novels of the early Empire, a literature both too young to enter the classical canon and too frivolous to pass itself off as edifying or beneficial.[129] Here and there, we find exceptions: Pseudo-Callisthenes' *Life and Deeds of Alexander of Macedon*, "antiquity's most successful novel," which was translated into twenty-four languages, including Arabic and Persian; many stories from the apocryphal New Testament, such as *The Acts of Andrew and Matthew* and *The Acts of Thecla*, contain novelistic elements; and Hägg argues that the ninth-century Coptic and Arabic *Martyrdom of St. Bartānūbā* is in fact a reincarnation of the mostly lost first-century novel *Metiochos & Parthenope*.[130] These examples aside, the search for the Greek novel in Arabic or Persian literature has largely ended in frustration.[131] It seems from the paper trail that translators were almost exclusively concerned with the "useful" strands of Hellenistic writing—medicine, astronomy, philosophy, and ethics—while Homer and Euripides were left high and dry, leaving us with van Ruymbeke's summary of the general gloomy consensus: "It is remarkable that in spite of the great variety of Greek works translated into Arabic, hardly any Greek *belles lettres* were included."[132]

This lack of enthusiasm for Greek *belles lettres* makes more sense when we recall that the Persians

127. Hägg, "The Oriental Reception of Greek Novels," 280.

128. Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, 1, also 137, 152, 194. Emphasis original.

129. Hägg, "The Oriental Reception of Greek Novels," 281–83.

130. See Reardon, *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, 650; see also Gustave E. von Grunebaum, "Greek Form Elements in the Arabian Nights," *JAOS* 62, no. 4 (1942): 290–92; Gustave E. von Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam: A Study in Cultural Orientation*, 2nd ed. (University of Chicago Press, 1954); Tomas Hägg, "The *Parthenope Romance* Decapitated?," *Symbolae Osloenses* 59 (1984): 61–92; Hägg, "The Oriental Reception of Greek Novels," 282–83; Hägg and Utas, *The Virgin and her Lover*, 65–75; Faustina C. W. Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus: A Survey of the Alexander Tradition Through Seven Centuries, From Pseudo-Callisthenes to Ṣūrī* (Paris: Peeters, 2010).

131. But Hägg, alluding to the vast number of Arabic MSS that have yet to be edited or even carefully examined, is cautiously optimistic that the search for direct links could one day prove successful. See Hägg, "The Oriental Reception of Greek Novels," 285.

132. Christine van Ruymbeke, "Hellenistic Influences in Classical Persian Literature," in *General Introduction to Persian Literature*, ed. J. T. P. de Bruijn (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 361.

and Arabs had their own stories and poetry to tell; if we imagine a culture of minstrels and raconteurs regaling their audiences with the tales of Rostam, Jamshid, Bahrām, Gordāfarid, Zāl, and Esfandyār, what need would there have been to import such material from Homer? Nonetheless, Greek and Iranian literatures undoubtedly mixed and crossed paths, and as von Grunebaum argued long ago, there are subtler routes for literary historians to follow that direct translation: we might tune our antennae to pick up "patterns of style, patterns of presentation, and emotional conventions . . . particularly manifest in the none too rare event that a motive of Persian or Indian origin is presented in such a manner as to conform with some Hellenistic convention."[133] Given the largely informal and oral performance context of love-stories in this milieu, such a line of inquiry seems appropriate, and it has lead to some productive results: in one article, von Grunebaum enumerates eight tales within the corpus of the *Thousand and One Nights* whose plots and narrative elements correspond with the plan set by various Greek novels; in another, he broadens his reach and identifies traces of Homer, Plato, Aristophanes, Plautus, Pseudo-Callisthenes, *The Acts of Andrew and Matthew*, the *Ephesiaca*, and the *Aithiopica* in the works of Jāḥiẓ, Masʿudī, Qazwīnī, the *Shāhnāma*, udhri poetry, and again the *Nights*.[134] These are obviously not direct translations from one text to another, but they do suggest some kind of connection between the two literatures; Hägg writes that, to his eye at least, "one never gets the feeling that this 'is' a Greek novel . . . yet attentive examination reveals still more details, notably in phraseology and narrative technique, which escaped von Grunebaum but seem to confirm his thesis."[135] These features indicate for him a likely connection with the novels produced in the first centuries CE, such as *Metiochos & Parthenope*, *Callirhoe*, and the *Ephesiaca*—the same *terminus pro quem* Minorsky proposed for *Vis & Rāmin*.[136]

Incidentally, some would say that is is not even necessary to look for Greek influences on the Persian romance, as narrative elements that are typical of the genre have been postulated to come from even earlier Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and ancient Persian sources. As John Winkler writes, "it begins to look as if the narrative pattern of romance (as I have defined it) is a resident alien in Greek culture, a literary form born in and (presumably) appropriate to the social forms of a Near Eastern culture, and which

133. Grunebaum, "Greek Form Elements in the Arabian Nights," 278.
134. ibid., 282; Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam*, 296–318.
135. Hägg, "The Oriental Reception of Greek Novels," 299.
136. Minorsky, *Iranica*, 178–80.

has been Hellenized in the wake of Alexander's conquests."[137] If this theory is accepted, the consequent scenario would not be one of unilateral influence from one tradition to another, but of a frequent and enduring pattern of mutual exchange and cross-pollination, something that would seem to be a natural outcome of far-flung and multinational empires like those of the Achaemenids, Seleucids, Ptolemies, Romans, Parthians, and Sasanians:

> The assumption, still widely entertained, that contacts between Persia and the Greek world were severed during or after the Persian war of 481–479 B.C. is unsustainable. We know the names of hundreds of Greeks, including Athenians, who were attracted for various reasons by Persia and went there during the two centuries down to the time of Alexander. There will have been a great many more whose names we will never know. And yet these contacts and interactions are largely to be inferred in spite of, rather than with the help of, the main body of classical literature that survives.[138]

The scholarship on this point is too extensive to summarize, but a few brief examples may be offered: from Ctesias of Cnidus (b. 441 BCE), who spent seventeen years traveling in Persia, we learn about the ill-fated love of *Stryangaeus & Zarinaea*; from Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus* (w. early fourth c. BCE), the love-story of *Panthea & Abradatas*, a story that Davis calls the "prototype for all later Greek novels," and Miller, "the western pioneer in that field of literature"; from Chares of Mitylene, who accompanied Alexander on his march eastwards, the story of *Odatis & Zariadres*.[139] Plutarch relates the story of King Artaxerxes's marriage with his own daughters, instigating a family crisis with his son Darius; traces of this plot reappear in the story of Ardashir (=Artaxerxes) in the *Dārābnāma*.[140] The same author also tells us

137. John J. Winkler, "The Invention of Romance," in *The Search for the Ancient Novel*, ed. James Tatum (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 35. Discussions of "oriental" sources of the novel—usually Egyptian, but also Sumerian and Persian—can be found in Anderson, *Ancient Fiction*; Richard Stoneman, "Oriental Motifs in the Alexander Romance," *Antichthon* 26 (1992): 95–113; Susan A. Stephens and John J. Winkler, eds., *Ancient Greek Novels: The Fragments* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 11–19; Ruiz-Montero, "The Rise of the Greek Novel," 70–80; Tim Whitmarsh, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Greek and Roman Novel*, ed. Tim Whitmarsh (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 12–14.

138. Peter Kingsley, "Meetings with Magi: Iranian Themes among the Greeks, from Xanthus of Lydia to Plato's Academy," *JRAS*, 3rd ser., 5, no. 2 (1995): 188–89. For an excellent overview of the kinds of literature exchanged during this period, see Richard Stoneman, "Persian Aspects of the Romance Tradition," in *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*, ed. Richard Stoneman, Kyle Erickson, and Ian Netton (Barkhuis Publishing & Groningen University Library, 2012), 3–18.

139. ibid., 4, 7; Davis, *Panthea's Children*, 26–28, 61–65; Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, trans. Walter Miller (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 1:vii, V.i.1–17, VI.1.32–47, VI.4.2–11, VII.iii.4–16; Athenaeus, *The Learned Banqueters*, ed. and trans. S. Douglas Olson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006–2012), XIII.575a–f; Mary Boyce, "Zariadres and Zarēr," *BSOAS* 17, no. 3 (1955): 463–477.

140. Plutarch, *Lives*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 11:182–83; Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan Abū Ṭāhir Ṭarsūsī, *Alexandre le Grand en Iran = le Dârâb Nâmeh*, trans. Marina Gaillard (Paris: De Boccard, 2005), 22–23, 93.

about Hyrodes (Orod), the king of Parthia, who "knew Greek and was well versed in Greek literature" and was enjoying a performance of Euripides's *Bacchae* when the head of the ill-fated Crassus was brought before him after the Roman army's defeat at Carrhae in 53 CE.[141] Traces of the Parthian poem *The Hymn of the Pearl* are found in the Syriac *Acts of St. Thomas*, and the motif of the trial by fire appears in texts as disparate as the *Ephesiaca*, the *Aithiopica*, the *Shāhnāma*, and *Vis & Rāmin*.[142] Depending on how comfortable one is looking across language, time, and space, the back-and-forth flow of themes, topoi, and narrative structures that von Grunebaum advises us to be on the alert for can become so thick as to convince the reader that southwestern Asia of late antiquity was one great bazaar of cultural and literary exchange. Daniel Selden insists that such was the case:

> Between 450 BCE and 1450 CE, readers across the Levant, North Africa, and Europe were united by complex networks of interrelated texts, attested in a multiplicity of languages, that contemporary scholars call the Ancient Novel. All available evidence points to the Afroasiatic origins of the narrative devices that typify these compositions, whose several types show a diffusional pattern from the Levant around the Mediterranean and into Europe, southward through the Ḥijāz and Yaman to Ethiopia as well as eastward across Īrān to India and central Asia. . . . A product of the intellectual ferment that Karl Jaspers termed the *Achsenzeit* ("Axial Age"), the ancient novel flourished as an epiphenomenon within the multi-ethnic tributary empires of the Mediterranean and the Middle East—Īrān, Makedonia, Rome, Byzantion, the Caliphates—where it achieved both its greatest artistic complexity and its widest geographical diffusion between the second and twelfth centuries CE.[143]

For readers unconvinced by such sweeping claims, we do have some rare and remarkable instances of direct or nearly direct transmission of fiction from Greek into Arabic and Persian. The most prominent example of this is the *Alexander Romance*, which was translated into Syriac (and perhaps Pahlavi) by the third century CE.[144] The story appears in the *Shāhnāma* and again in the *Dārābnāma*, a twelfth-century manuscript attributed to Abu Ṭāher Ṭarsusi (perhaps from the Mediterranean city of Tarsos?),

141. Plutarch, *Fall of the Roman Republic*, ed. Robin Seager, trans. Rex Warner (London: Penguin, 2005), 153–54. See also Davis, *Panthea's Children*, 12–13.

142. Mary Boyce, "Parthian Writings and Literature," in *The Cambridge History of Iran, Volume 3*(2)*: The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1161–62; Kevin van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes: From Pagan Sage to Prophet of Science* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 58; Davis, *Panthea's Children*, 83–104.

143. Daniel Selden, "Mapping the Alexander Romance," in *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*, ed. Richard Stoneman, Kyle Erickson, and Ian Netton (Barkhuis Publishing & Groningen University Library, 2012), 19.

144. The question about the Pahlavi translation is still up for debate: cf. Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes*; Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus*; Stoneman, "Persian Aspects of the Romance Tradition," 11–12; Faustina C. W. Doufikar-Aerts, "King Midas' Ears on Alexander's Head: In Search of the Afro-Asiatic Alexander Cycle," in *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*, ed. Richard Stoneman, Kyle Erickson, and Ian Netton (Barkhuis Publishing & Groningen University Library, 2012), 61–63.

which recounts the adventures of the Persian king Dārāb and his two sons, Alexander and Dārāb Jr; this family tree allows for two nearly complete story cycles to unfold, the first revolving around the life of Dārāb the elder with many stories within stories, the second a recension of the Alexander romance. Although the two story cycles in the *Dārābnāma* are centered around kings, and are thus closer to what I would consider the "heroic tale" (perhaps enlivened with "anti-heroic" twists, as Marina Gaillard suggests), the hallmark plot elements of the Greek erotic novel are fully represented in both cycles in terms of their content and structure: the prelude featuring the protagonists' parents, the overarching cycle of union, separation, and reunion that spans many a distant journey and heroic deed, delayed recognition, and finally, a happy ending.[145] The value this work brings to our historical account is substantial, as it attests to the continued relevance of an oral tradition of storytelling that existed alongside the relatively newfangled art of written romance and epic.[146] Hägg and Utas write:

> The presentation of the stories in this collection gives a clear hint of their oral background. The language is generally peculiarly simple and stereotyped, just giving a skeleton of the story, but at certain points, obviously constituting dramatic nodes, the wording is more elaborate and the actors are quoted verbatim. This is not ordinary literary 'high' New Persian but a kind of stylized narrator's language, seemingly close to spoken language but probably conventionalized in its own special mode. In all appearance this compilation originated in some kind of notes for memorization, like those called *ṭūmār* by 20th century story tellers in Iran.[147]

Thus, in spite of scanty textual evidence, a clearer picture begins to emerge: although there was little "official" interest in sponsored translations of Greek fiction, many of these tales enjoyed a lively existence within the repertories of professional storytellers and the cultured elites who entertained themselves with "evening tales" in their symposia. The oral quality of this transmission naturally makes it impossible to trace; but when we do get the occasional lucky glimpse of this tradition, we see that even if and when these stories lose their specifically Greek characteristics, the underlying narrative structure and

145. Hanaway, "Persian Popular Romances Before the Safavid Period," 230–31; Hanaway, "Formal Elements in the Persian Popular Romances," 142–48; Marina Gaillard, "Hero or Anti-Hero: The Alexander figure in the *Dārāb-nāma* of Ṭarsūsī," *Oriente Moderno* 89, no. 2 (2009): 313–331.

146. See Hanaway, "Persian Popular Romances Before the Safavid Period," 6–7; Abū Ṭāhir Ṭarsūsī, *Alexandre le Grand en Iran = le Dârâb Nâmeh*, 65–68, 73–79; Rubanovich, "Orality in Medieval Persian Literature," 660–61.

147. Hägg and Utas, *The Virgin and her Lover*, 144–45. For more on how storytelling in twentieth-century Iran was taught, practiced, and performed, see Mary Ellen Page, "Professional Storytelling in Iran: Transmission and Practice," *Iranian Studies* 12, nos. 3/4 (1979): 195–215 and Ulrich Marzolph, "A Treasury of Formulaic Narrative: The Persian Popular Romance *Ḥosein-e Kord*," *Oral Tradition* 14, no. 2 (1999): 279–303.

"the peculiar touch with which the Hellenistic Age and its heirs treated love and the lover" continued to command audiences' attention, a testament to the ongoing popularity of the romance genre and the durability of its hallmark characteristics.[148]

Recently, another text has come to light that suggests an even stronger continuation of the Greek novel into Persian literature, perhaps providing that long sought-after smoking gun that could confirm a direct line of textual transmission. This is a work by Abu l-Qāsem ʿOnṣori (d. 431/1039), the poet laureate of Maḥmud of Ghazna and a contemporary of fellow romancers ʿAyyuqi and Gorgāni. ʿOnṣori must have been a prolific poet, for not only does he leave behind a substantial collection of lyric and panegyric poems, he is attributed with the composition of three romantic epics. The first two, *Red Idol & White Idol* (*Khengbot o Sorkhbot*) and *"Happy-in-Fortune" & "Font-of-Life"* (*Shādbakht o ʿAynolḥayāt*), are all but lost, but they are both mentioned in a Persian translation (w. twelfth–fourteenth c.) of Pseudo-Callisthenes as being among the tales about famous lovers; there may even be a connection between the names of the Greek protagonists Chaireas ("Cheerful") and Callirhoe ("Beautifully-flowing [Stream]") and the Persian lovers "Happy-in-Fortune" and "Font-of-Life."[149] It is worth adding that the famous scholar and polymath Abu l-Rayḥān Bīrūnī (d. after 442/1050), who was at Maḥmud of Ghazna's court during ʿOnṣori's tenure, also claims to have translated these same stories, along with *Vāmeq & ʿAẕrā* and other "spicy anecdotes," into Arabic prose.[150]

A similar calque is certainly at work in the names of the protagonists of ʿOnṣori's third romance, *Vāmeq & ʿAẕrā*, literally *The Ardent Lover and the Virgin*, which corresponds exactly with the meaning of the Greek names *Metiochos* and *Parthenopē*. The Greek text of this novel is only preserved to us in fragments, but it seems to have been popular for many centuries.[151] The oldest fragment is a first-century ostracon from Egypt featuring a soliloquy by Metiochos that might have been copied as a school exercise; another fragment recounts the debate on love at Polykrates's symposium, which, again due to its

148. Grunebaum, "Greek Form Elements in the Arabian Nights," 295.
149. Hägg and Utas, *The Virgin and her Lover*, 195–99.
150. Bo Utas, "Did ʿAdhrā Remain a Virgin?," *Orientalia Suecana* 33–35 (1984–86): 430. Incidentally, Bīrūnī entitles his stories *Qāsim al-Surūr* (the Arabic equivalent of the Persian *Shādbahr*) *and ʿAyn al-Ḥayāt* and *Ṣanamay al-Bāmiyān* (*The Two Idols of Bamiyan*).
151. For complete details on the Greek fragments, see Stephens and Winkler, *Ancient Greek Novels*, 72–100 and Hägg and Utas, *The Virgin and her Lover*, 188–193.

Figure 4: Mosaic of Metiochos and Parthenope from Antioch-on-the-Orontes, now held the Zeugma Mosaic Museum, Gaziantep, Turkey. Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:ZeugmaMuseum10.jpg; accessed 11 June 2015. The image has been cropped.

rhetorical brilliance, was a favorite scene for anthologists and collectors (an analogy may be made with the enthusiastic reception of the "Ten Letters" in *Vis & Rāmin*). We also know from Lucian that a version of the story was performed in popular theaters, and among the mosaics that decorate the villa floors in Antioch-on-the-Orontes, there are two mosaics that depict the lovers, one of them shown in Figure 4; the quality of the work's execution is evidence that the story was known and enjoyed by elite members of society, cautioning us against dismissing works of this kind (as did the moralists and philosophers) as purely lowbrow fare.[152]

152. See Stephens and Winkler, *Ancient Greek Novels*, 80 and Hägg and Utas, *The Virgin and her Lover*, 58–61. Lucian was such a moralist and had little to esteem in these performances; he writes (ibid., 50):

> (What man, well educated and philosophically minded at that—a critic of dance asks—would give up his moral and literary pursuits) to sit enthralled by flute-playing, watching an effeminate fellow, who indulges in soft clothes and lewd songs, impersonate oversexed females, the most lecherous ones of ancient times, such as Phaidra and Parthenope and Rhodope, and all this accompanied by beating and humming and stamping of feet?

Turning eastwards, the story of *Vāmeq & ʿAẕrā* has a long but hazy history in the Iranian lands; we learn from Ibn al-Nadīm that the caliph Maʾmūn's librarian, Sahl b. Hārūn (d. 246/860), "a wise and eloquent poet of Persian origins, and a staunch opponent of the Arabs," had a copy of this book.[153] Dowlatshāh has an interesting (but predictably dubious) anecdote that a book of this name was brought before ʿAbd Allāh b. Ṭāhir (d. 230/844), who was the Abbasids' governor of Khorasan.[154] The bearer of the gift promised that it was a sweet and wonderful tale, but when the governor learned that it had been compiled by the "sages of King Anushirvān," he replied, "We read nothing but the Qur'an and the prophetic traditions," and ordered the book thrown in the river, and all other books by Zoroastrians and the ancient Iranians burned.[155] The romance is mentioned again in the anonymous twelfth-century *Compendium of Histories and Tales*, which states that the story of *V&ʿA* took place in Greece at the time of Dārā (not Dārāb) b. Dārāb, the brother of Alexander and hero of the *Dārābnāma*; Mostowfi also identifies Vāmeq and ʿAẕrā as two lovers who lived in the time of Alexander.[156] All of these clues are highly suggestive of a love-story with Greek elements or of Greek provenance that had been known in Iran since Sasanian times and perhaps translated into Arabic by Sahl b. Hārūn; of course, the question of *which* "virgin and lover" this could be was irresolvable without further information, and concerted efforts by scholars to look for later recensions produced a staggering twenty-four narratives with that same generic title, each one different from the last.[157] However, in the early 1950s, the Pakistani scholar Mohammad Shafi discovered some folios dating back to 526/1132, less than a century after ʿOnṣori's death, in the binding of a book.[158] Subsequent analysis of these folios against the fragmentary Greek evidence produced a startling

153. Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 1:373–74; cf. *Fihrist* (*tr. Dodge*), 262–63: *wa-kāna ḥakīman faṣīḥan shāʿiran fārisīya l-aṣli shuʿūbīya l-madhhabi shadīda l-ʿaṣabīyati ʿalā l-ʿarab.*

154. As C. E. Bosworth notes, not only is this story apocryphal, but there is no evidence that either the Persian language or Zoroastrian literature was actively suppressed by this dynasty, as has been alleged. Rather, they simply focused their efforts on cultivating local Arabic literary production, as a highly Arabicized court with close ties to Baghdad. See C. E. Bosworth, "The Ṭāhirids and Persian Literature," *Iran* 7 (1969): 103–106.

155. Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tadhkirah*, 30.

شخصی کتابی آورد و به تحفه پیشِ او نهاد، پرسید که این چه کتابست، گفت این قصّهٔ وامق و عذراست و خوب حکایتی است که حکما به نامِ شاه نوشیروان جمع کرده‌اند. امیر فرمود که ما مردمِ قرآن‌خوانیم، به غیر از قرآن و حدیثِ پیغمبر چیزی نمی‌خوانیم ما را ازین نوع کتاب در کار نیست و این کتاب تألیفِ مغانست و پیشِ ما مردودست. فرمود تا آن کتاب را در آب انداختند و حکم کرد که در قلمرو من هر جاکه از تصانیفِ عجم و مغان کتابی باشد جمله‌را بسوزانند.

156. Najmʹābādī and Weber, *Mujmal al-tavārīkh va al-qiṣaṣ*, 73; Mustawfī Qazvīnī, *Tārīkh-i guzīdah*, 97, cf. *The Ta'ríkh-i-guzída or "Select History"*, trans. Edward G. Browne (Leiden: Brill, 1910–13), 2:33.

157. Hägg and Utas, *The Virgin and her Lover*, 16.

158. For the remarkable story of this discovery, see Abū al-Qāsim Ḥasan ʿUnṣurī, *Maṡnavī-i Vāmiq va ʿAẕrā*, ed. Mohammad

result, announced in 1984 by the Iranicist Bo Utas:

> Unṣurī's *Vāmiq u ʿAḏrā* is without any doubt a rendering of the *Parthenope Romance* which is remarkably close to what is known of the Greek original. Both the fragments pieced together by H. Maehler and the verses discovered by M. Shafi belong to the beginning of the narrative and they partly run parallel. Furthermore, there are verses of *Vāmiq u ʿAḏrā* among those abstracted from lexical works that correspond to practically all the *testimonia* presented by H. Maehler and T. Hägg.[159]

Utas goes on to say that the linguistic evidence produced by the comparison, particularly in the way the Greek names were rendered into the Perso-Arabic script, suggests that "no version in another alphabet could have formed an intermediary, definitely not one in Pahlavi and hardly one in Syriac." It is possible, he concludes, that ʿOnṣori himself could read Greek; another source could be Bīrūnī, who claims to have translated those same stories that ʿOnṣori put into verse.[160] It is a mysterious link, one that has not been conclusively explained up to the present day; but what concerns us here, basically, is the nearly incontrovertible evidence that the Greek novel continued to make its presence felt in Persian literature, a thousand years after its initial appearance.[161] The tale of *Vāmeq & ʿAẕrā* is thus an important witness in our account of the rise of the Persian romance, and a compelling piece of evidence to justify reading the Greek and Persian traditions side-by-side.

Despite its fragmentary nature, *Vāmeq & ʿAẕrā* is a fascinating read, and even a cursory summary reveals a text with close thematic connections with both the Greek novel tradition and other Persian romances like *Varqa & Golshāh* and *Vis & Rāmin*.[162] The story begins in Samos, with the wedding of King Polycrates to the beautiful Nāni. Their daughter, ʿAẕrā, is a paragon of skill and beauty, as adept at the bow and arrow as she is at reading and debate; as a virgin maiden, a mortal version of Athena, she is destined to rule when the king passes on. One day, her cousin Vāmeq, who has recently been

Shafi (Panjab University Press, 1967), 3–4 (English), 1–3 (Persian).

159. Utas, "Did ʿAdhrā Remain a Virgin?," 431.

160. ibid., 435; see also Bo Utas, "The Ardent Lover and the Virgin: A Greek Romance in Muslim Lands," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 48, nos. 1–2 (1995): 238. Sachau doubts, however, that Bīrūnī could read Greek. Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Bīrūnī, *The Chronology of Ancient Nations: An English version of the Arabic Text of the* Athâr-ul-Bâkiya *of Albîrûnî, or "Vestiges of the Past"*, ed. C. Edward Sachau (London: Pub. for the Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain & Ireland by W. H. Allen, 1879), xii.

161. The latest synopsis of this line of inquiry, and its ongoing problems, can be found in Hägg and Utas, *The Virgin and her Lover*, 193–203 and 251–53.

162. A summary of the reconstructed text is found in ibid., 213–50.

driven from his homeland by his evil step-mother, arrives to take refuge at Polycrates's court, and the two youths immediately fall in love. Unwilling to divulge their secret, they have a tough time at it during that evening's symposium, where they are invited to participate in a debate about the nature of Eros. This is followed by a musical interlude featuring the minstrel Ibykos, after which Vāmeq takes the lyre, sings a couple love-songs to great applause, and tells the story of the instrument's invention by Hermes Trismegistos.[163] That night, the lovers go to their respective quarters, but insomnia drives them out to wandering the palace halls, where they eventually meet, only to be caught by ʿAẕrā's tutor Filāṭus (Philitas), who rebukes ʿAẕrā her for her shamelessness. Once convinced of Vāmeq's pure intentions, however, he joins the lovers' side as their advocate, and—as far as we can guess, owing to the fragmentary nature of the work—the parents assent to their marriage.

The inevitable separation comes in a form similar to that in the Greek novel *Callirhoe* and the Persian romance *Varqa & Golshāh*. Although we only have a summary recension in the *Dārābnāma* to help us, it seems that ʿAẕrā's parents die unexpectedly and the new ruler of Samos, Mandāros (Maiandrios) falls in love with the girl, but she forcefully rejects his advances, scratching out his agent's eye.[164] The remaining fragments suggest a battle in which both Vāmeq and ʿAẕrā participate (another parallel with *V&G*), ʿAẕrā's capture and enslavement, and many long journeys in which she fulfils the role that is implied by her name, as one of the Greek fragments testifies: "Parthenope is so named because she preserved her virginity in spite of falling into the hands of many men."[165] Eventually, a kindly merchant takes pity on ʿAẕrā's plight and restores her to Samos. We can only guess how the story ends: perhaps Vāmeq and ʿAẕrā reunite and rule together as king and queen, which would be the expected ending; but perhaps, to extrapolate from the *Martyrdom of St. Parthenope*, things did not end so well. Such is the case in the Arabic story of ʿUrwa b. Ḥizām, to which we will now turn.

163. It is worthwhile noting that Vāmeq in *V&ʿA*, Rāmin in *V&R*, and Bayāḍ in *Bayāḍ & Riyāḍ* are accomplished minstrels.
164. Cf. Vis's violent expulsion of Zard when he comes to fetch her.
165. Hägg and Utas, *The Virgin and her Lover*, 243.

2.4 Traversing the desert: *Varqa & Golshāh*

Around the same time that ʿOnṣori was transposing Greek stories into masnavi, another poet was doing the same to an Arabic tale in a story called *Varqa & Golshāh*. We know little about this poet's life and career; he twice identifies himself with the pen-name ʿAyyuqi, and, based on the "manifest influence" of Ferdowsi in this poem, the archaic vocabulary, and the fact that it was dedicated to Sultan Maḥmud of Ghazna, Khaleghi-Motlagh surmises that it was written sometime after the *Shāhnāma* was completed and before the death of Maḥmud, most probably in the 1020s.[166] In his editor's introduction, Ṣafā dwells on the supposedly Arab aspects of the story, distancing it from the worldview of the Persian romance:

> The topic of the story, and the locations, characters, sensibilities, and customs mentioned within it, are entirely connected with the Arabs and the Arabian peninsula; it does not conform whatsoever with [the culture and literature of] Iran and the Iranians. The style of versification and the story's expression also confirm its total correspondence with the Arabs, in that this story, like other Arab love-stories, is accompanied by hopelessness and privation and leads to a poignant conclusion; this was a necessary outcome of the militancy of Bedouin culture, one that brought particular hardship upon its wives and daughters."[167]

This assessment, in my view, seems overly committed to emphasizing a fundamental difference between Arab and Persian cultural and literary traditions without drawing sufficient attention to the hybrid milieu in which this story circulated. A similar move is made by Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, who in his comparison of the archetypal lover in the Arabic udhri tradition against that of the Persian romance describes the two figures in very different terms: in the Arabic model, the lovers are passive, chaste, devoted, ascetic, and die the tragic deaths of martyrs; in the Persian, the lovers are royal and heroic, skilled in combat, have many adventures, disguise themselves, and eventually marry in a happy ending.[168] Melikian-Chirvani,

166. ʿAyyūqī, *Varqa va Gulshāh*, 3, 122; Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh, "ʿAyyūqī," in *EIr*, online edition (1987), accessed June 11, 2015, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/abu-mansur-mohammad-b.

167. ʿAyyūqī, *Varqa va Gulshāh*, viii.

> ضمناً موضوعِ داستان و امکنه و اشخاص و آداب و عاداتِ مذکور در آن به تمامی و بی‌کم و کاست مربوط به عربستان و قومِ عرب است و مطلقاً قابلِ انطباق بر ایران و ایرانیان نیست. کیفیتِ تنظیمِ داستان و ایرادِ موضوع هم انتسابِ حتمیِ آن را به قومِ عرب می‌رساند به این معنی که این داستان مانندِ دیگر داستان‌های عاشقانهٔ عربی همراه با نومیدی و محرومیت و منجر به عاقبت تأثیرانگیز است و این امر لازمهٔ تعصبِ دور از تمدنِ اقوام بیابانگردِ عرب بوده‌است که مخصوصاً در بارهٔ زنان و دختران به سخت‌گیری‌های وحشیانه می‌انجامید.

168. See Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnūn: Love, Madness and Mystic Longing in Niẓāmī's Epic Romance* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 63–69.

however, comes to the opposite conclusion, writing that all the elements of ʿAyyuqi's poem point to an "Iranian source," while Dick Davis sees in *V&G* the closest correspondence in the early Persian romances to the Greek novel.[169] Such a diversity of interpretation suggests that "Greek," "Arab," and "Iranian" elements are perhaps all present in this work, and rather than treat these as separate "national" traditions of telling stories, I would propose instead that they all draw from a shared set of topoi and strategies that make up the bread and butter of the romance genre.[170] In the case of *Varqa & Golshāh*, we are fortunate to have a number of intermediaries between the lyrical poems that gave rise to the legend in the eighth century and the narrative that ʿAyyuqi produced in the eleventh, which show how various literary techniques were brought in and out of play as the story was passed down successive generations. By comparing and contrasting these iterations of the story, we may observe how the Arabic legend was drawn into the world of the romance with each retelling.

The origins of *Varqa & Golshāh* go back to a body of Arabic poetry that became a wellspring of themes and material for later Persian romances, the "chaste" school of love lyrics. This was a subset of a wider efflorescence in lyric poetry that took place shortly after the advent of Islam, in which poets began to specialize in short incidental poems called ghazals, which were devoted exclusively to the theme of love. Poems and stories about love were naturally performed before this period, as is evident in the collections of pre-Islamic poets like Muraqqash al-Akbar, ʿAwf b. Saʿd, and Imruʾ al-Qays, but in terms of professional practice, there was a definite shift.[171] As Thomas Bauer explains,

> There is not one single poem dating from the pre-Islamic era that is exclusively dedicated to love. Since individual poems focusing on other themes contained in the polythematic qaṣīda exist in abundance, it appears that no independent love poems existed in these early times. . . . The societal upheavals during the era of the conquests, as integration into tribal structures was loosened, created the preconditions for the emergence of independent love poems.[172]

169. Assadullah Souren Melikian-Chirvani, "Le roman de Varqe et Golšâh: Essai sur les rapports de l'esthétique littéraire et de l'esthétique plastique dans l'Iran pré-mongol, suivi de la traduction du poème," *Artes Asiatiques* 22 (1970): 30; Davis, *Panthea's Children*, 55.

170. See As'ad E. Khairallah, *Love, Madness, and Poetry: An Interpretation of the Mağnūn Legend* (Orient-Institut der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, 1980), 50–51, where the author argues that even in the earliest recension of the Majnūn legend by Ibn Qutayba, the anecdotes "seem to have been drawn from already established patterns, regardless of the particular verses associated with them."

171. See Salma K. Jayyusi, "Umayyad Poetry," in *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, ed. A. F. L. Beeston et al. (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 421.

172. Thomas Bauer and Angelika Neuwirth, "Introduction: Transformations of a Literary Genre," in *Ghazal as World Liter-*

As the first Islamic century drew to a close, the ghazal had been established as an independent genre whose mood and content was generally grouped around the oppositional poles of "urban" and "desert" (or *ḥijāzī*, after the cities Mecca and Medina in the Hijaz, and *ʿudhrī*, after the Banū ʿUdhra, one of the tribes chiefly associated with the "desert" school). Like any other generic label, these two types were by no means mutually exclusive, and poets could interweave thematic motifs from both approaches into a single poem. Both had significant implications for later Persian poetry: the poems in the *ḥijāzī* tradition, epitomized by ʿUmar b. Abī Rabīʿa (d. 93/712 or 103/721), were used as song-texts by court performers, a development in early Arabic-Islamic urban culture that might very well have taken place under the influence of Persian models; such performances would later become a significant feature in the textual fabric of both *Varqa & Golshāh* and *Vis & Rāmin*.[173] The udhri tradition, on the other hand, was thematically distinguished as a solitary, antisocial, and melancholy expression of entrapment in desire, from which the poet could only expect release through death.[174] Despite their outward differences, both subgenres adhered to a number of mutual convictions and stances that formed the core of the ghazal movement, the most important of which, as Bauer and Jacobi observe, is a change in the way love itself is understood and expressed: time shifts from the past to the present, and the poet describes his state as if in the moment of experiencing his pleasure and torment, creating a "stage presence," a persona within the thought-world of the lyric who is embedded and enacted within the poems.[175]

One of these poet-personas was ʿUrwa b. Ḥizām, a quasi-historical figure who is said to have been born before the advent of Islam and may have lived into the caliphate of Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān (r. 41–60/661–680). He can thus be counted among a handful of poets who entered Arabic annals (and, one

ature, ed. Thomas Bauer and Angelika Neuwirth, vol. 1 (Beirut: Ergon Verlag, 2005), 12. Cf. Thomas Bauer, *Liebe und Liebesdichtung in der arabischen Welt des 9. und 10. Jahrhunderts: Eine literatur- und mentalitäsgeschichtliche Studie des arabischen Ġazal* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998), 23–25.

173. See Umar Muhammad Daudpota, *The Influence of Arabic Poetry on the Development of Persian Poetry* (Bombay: The Fort Printing Press, 1934), 68–69; Oliver Wright, "Music and Verse," in *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, ed. A. F. L. Beeston et al. (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 445–49; Samha Amin El-Kholy, *The Function of Music in Islamic Culture in the Period up to 1100 A. D.* (Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organization Press, 1984), 117–26; Everett K. Rowson, "The Effeminates of Early Medina," *JAOS* 111, no. 4 (1991): 667–85; Lewis, "Reading, Writing, and Recitation," 41–42; George Dimitri Sawa, *Music Performance Practice in the Early ʿAbbāsid Era, 132–320 AH / 750–932 AD*, 2nd ed. (Ottawa, Canada: Institute of Mediaeval Music, 2004), 111–27. The embedded lyrics will be the topic of our discussion in Chapter 5.

174. In this discussion, I am "Englishing" the word *ʿudhrī* as "udhri" to describe this poetic movement, since "desert" or "chaste" is not quite specific enough to act as a gloss.

175. Bauer and Neuwirth, "Introduction," 12–13; Renate Jacobi, "Time and Reality in *Nasīb* and *Ghazal*," *JAL* 16 (1985): 1–17.

might assume, popular parlance) as one of the great lovers of the "Golden Age" of the Prophet's lifetime and his immediate companions, a time that even by the Umayyad period had come to be looked on with a great deal of nostalgia. Very little of his poetry has survived; as the editors of his diwan write,

> It's as though destiny had intended to efface this poet after his death as it had effaced him in life; perhaps this poet could sense this annihilation that encompassed him and enveloped his poetry after his death, and perhaps he wanted to suffer his pain and sickness in solitude, and to make an end to himself and the oppression of his soul, and so he said to his comrade, 'I'm afflicted by despair and a burning fever that has entered me / Keep away from me, lest you catch what I've caught!' "[176]

The motifs of overwhelming despair, loneliness, and isolation are characteristic of many poems in this genre; it is perhaps not surprising, then, to see that many lines attributed to ʿUrwa have been ascribed to other famous love-poets as well, from his near-contemporaries Qays "Lubnā" b. Dharīḥ (d. ca. 70/689), Qays "Majnūn" b. Mulawwaḥ (fl. first/seventh c.), Jamīl "Buthayna" (d. ca. 82/701), and Kuthayyir "ʿAzza" (d. ca. 105/723), to the early Abbasid poet ʿAbbās b. al-Aḥnaf (d. 188/803).[177] This tendency to mix attributions was abetted by the oral transmission of these early poets. Kuthayyir, for example, was both Jamīl's transmitter and reciter (*rāwī*) and his poetic disciple; it would be quite natural for him to adapt or rework lines from his master's oeuvre in composing his own works, and as time went by, the distinction of which line came from whom would have been difficult to maintain. Even from performance to performance, individual lines from poems could be shuffled, swapped, and rearranged to create micro-units around a particular theme or narrative; these became the building-blocks for the stories that would coalesce around these figures as they passed into legend.

When we look at the earliest anthologies, ʿUrwa's oeuvre is presented as a series of short poems ranging from two to eight lines, each one typically oriented around a single theme. The precise arrangement of lines within these poems will often vary from recension to recension, but as rhetorical and thematic

176. ʿUrwah ibn Ḥizām, *Shiʿr ʿUrwah ibn Ḥizām*, ed. Ibrāhīm al Sāmarrāʾī and Aḥmad Maṭlūb (Baghdad: Majallah Kullīyah li-Ādāb, Jāmiʿat Baghdād, 1961), 1:

وكأنّ القدر تعمد أن يضيع هذا الشاعر بعد موته كما أضاعه في دنياه؛ ولعل هذا الشاعر كان يحس بهذا الضياع الذي لفّه ولفّ شعره بعد موته، ولعله كان يريد أن يشقى وحده بآلامه وأدوائه، و أن يقضى على نفسه وعصارة روحه فيقول لصاحبه:

بِيَ اليَأْسُ والداءُ الهُيامُ سُقيتُهُ فإيَّاكَ عنِّي لا يَكُنْ بِكَ ما بيا

177. ibid., 4–6.

units, they are nonetheless relatively stable. For example, in the earliest biography of ʿUrwa, presented by Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) in his *Poets and Poetry*, the longest of his poems is six lines long and goes as follows:

I tremble in awe when I think of you
  it creeps between my skin and bones
It's not there, but then I see her
  I'm so overwhelmed I forget to speak
Whatever was in my mind is driven out
  I forget my thoughts until she is gone
My heart forgives her and sides against me
  and I am left with no share of my heart
My soul knows that its cure is nearby
  but is one beyond reach ever at hand?
If cold water, pure and white, is what I cherish
  than she truly is the most dear[178]

About a century later, the same poem appears in the *Book of Songs* of Abu l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī (d. ca. 363/972), with only one new line appearing as the penultimate verse.[179] The poem's opening line, however, has been slightly modified and moved to a different poem of roughly the same length, where it functions as the coda:

I'm not possessed, nor am I mad; but my uncle, O brothers, is a liar!
"Cure me!" I cry to the sage of Yamamah, "For if you do, you're a healer indeed."
Alas, my heart! It's been destroyed, branded by the doctor's coals.
At night, ʿAfrāʾ is not far enough away to be forgotten, nor is she near.
At night, nothing incites me from behind, no passion entices me,
  and no outsider desires her as I do.
By God, I'll never forget you, no matter where the east wind goes,
  nor the winds of the south in its wake;
I'm seized by a shiver when I think of you, it creeps between my skin and bones.[180]

Although the two poems share the same rhyme and meter, and even a mutual line, their dominant mood and topic is quite different. The first poem reads as a private meditation in the well-known sense of the lyric as Frye develops it: rhetorically, the poet "turns his back on his listeners" and speaks aloud as if

178. Ibn Qutaybah, *al-Shiʿr wa-al-shuʿarāʾ*, 622–623; cf. ʿUrwah ibn Ḥizām, *Dīwān ʿUrwah ibn Ḥizām: ʿUrwah ʿAfrāʾ*, ed. Anṭwān Muḥsin Qawwāl (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1995), 22–26, 78. For the Arabic and full translation of this and subsequent passages, see Appendix C.

179. Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās, 25 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2002), 24:85–86.

180. ibid., 24:84; cf. ʿUrwah ibn Ḥizām, *Dīwān*, 62.

addressing himself, musing on his disordered state of mind.[181] The second poem has a dramatic touch, featuring a cast of characters, some more generic than others, who walk the landscape of ʿUrwa's poetic imagination. His interlocutors, the two brothers (or comrades), is a common apostrophic convention in Arabic poetry; more specific, however, is this mysterious sage from Yamama who cannot cure the poet of his malady. Though the poem's topic is the incurable disease of love, another major topos, it also hints at a particular episode that the audience was likely to have been privy to. So too, we might guess, is the allusion to a lying uncle, who clearly plays some role in the poet's story, although we have no further details from the poetry; we must await Ibn Qutayba's exposition before this reference will become clear. In both cases, the line "I tremble in awe / I'm seized by a shiver when I think of you" seems to work well as a linking device, a powerful line to open or close a piece or to join one theme to another in an extended performance. The next biography of ʿUrwa, *The Struggles of Lovers* (*Kitāb Maṣāriʿ al-ʿUshshāq*) by Abu Muḥammad al-Sarrāj al-Qāriʾ (d. 500/1106), combines the themes of the previous two poems into a single condensed unit, again with some small variations:

> I tremble in awe when I think of you
> it creeps between my skin and bones
> It's not there, but then I see her
> I'm so overwhelmed I forget to speak
> "Cure me!" I cry to the sage of Yamamah
> "For if you do, you're a healer indeed;
> For I suffer not from fever or the touch of a jinn
> but my Himyarite uncle is a liar![182]

Despite its brevity, this recension of the poem indicates that further narrativization of ʿUrwa's poetry is taking place. We have probably one of the most memorable lines of the lyrical mood (considering that it is cited in all three versions) open the poem, and then the poet invokes both the Himyarite uncle and the Yamamese sage as important characters in his story. By virtue of the fact that all these lines are cast in the most prominent meter of early Arabic poetry (*ṭawīl*) and share the same rhyming letter, lines

181. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 250.
182. ʿUrwah ibn Ḥizām, *Dīwān*, 75.

وإنّي لَتَعروني لِذِكراكِ رِعْدَةٌ　　لها بينَ جِلدي والعِظامِ دبيبُ
فَما هو إلّا أَنْ أَراها فُجاءةً　　فأُبهَتَ حَتّى ما أَكادُ أُجيبُ
فَقُلتُ لِعَرّافِ اليمامةِ داوِني　　فَإنَّكَ إنْ أَبْرأْتَني لَطَبيبُ
فَما بيَ من حُمّى ولا مَسِّ جِنَّةٍ　　ولكنَّ عمِّي الحِمياريَّ كَذوبُ

from the two thematic clusters can be mixed and matched by the anthologist to create new units, as we see here. It also seems that more and more lines with this meter and rhyme were attributed to ʿUrwa if they fit the general theme of his poetry. For example, the two lines in the second poem that repeat with the word *ʿashīya* ("that night") might be meant to amplify the lines' impact, but they might also be read as two variations of the same line. That this was a topical and thematic form of composition and performance becomes clear when modern editors attempt to assemble all of the verses scattered across the anthologies and weave them into an ur-text, the super-poem from which these fragments originated: the result is a behemoth of one hundred and forty lines with a great deal of thematic circling and the frequent repetition of nearly identical lines. Rather than exhaust the reader (and the author) with an analysis of such a poem, we shall instead provide one more example from the *Book of Songs*, and perhaps his most famous poem:

O my companions, noble sons of Hilāl b. ʿĀmir!
    Turn aside at Ṣanʿāʾ for a day, and wait for me!
And don't be stingy in my share, bring it all together,
    For you both suffer with me today.
Pass by ʿAfrāʾ, for tomorrow
    You shall nearly recognize separation and distance.
O you who slander ʿAfrāʾ, curse you!
    Who, what, and by whom have you come to revile?
By whom, if I saw him suffering, I would sacrifice myself for him;
    And who, if he saw me suffering, would do the same for me.
O comrades, when shall you strip off the shirt
    Revealing the damage that ʿAfrāʾ has done me?
When you do, you shall see one of little flesh
    Whose bones have crumbled, whose heart is perpetually choked
She has left me deaf to those who speak to me
    Even if he whispers to me, and I to him.
I would accept the wisdom of the sages
    From Hajr and Yamama, if they could cure me!
And they left no spell they knew untried,
    Or medicine they gave me to drink.
They sprinkled water upon my face on the hour,
    And stood with their staves, striving against each other,
And said, "May God heal you!
    By God, our hands cannot touch what you bear between your ribs."
Alas for ʿAfrāʾ, alas!
    It's as though I have spear-points in my chest and guts.

I love the ʿUdhrī girl though she be far away
And approach her without ever arriving.[183]

This is the closest we get in ʿUrwa's diwan to a poem with some kind of embedded narrative; in this regard, it is similar to the polythematic qasidas attributed to more famous udhri poets, particularly Jamīl, who likewise often begins his poems by urging his companions to halt in the midst of a journey, a well-established trope that hearkens to the conventions of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry.[184] As we shall see, there are enough specific details, incidents, and figures in this poem to make it conducive to the construction of a story about the poet and his love affair with ʿAfrāʾ. We will see these elements reappear in the narratives that began to coalesce around ʿUrwa and his fellow lover-poets in the following centuries.

Starting in the early Abbasid period, critics and anthologists began to collate these lyrical poems and place them into biographical dictionaries with a separate heading for each poet. These anthologies bring in a considerable amount of narrative detail that is is often absent, or treated with the vaguest of allusions, in the poetry itself; as in the case of the *vidas* and *razos* written about the troubadours, where commentators would frame their extracts and citations with accounts of the circumstances around each poem, these authors would use whatever biographical and anecdotal evidence they could find to situate the poet and his poetry into a historically plausible account, populated by figures whose existence could be attested in the biographical records maintained by historians and transmitters of hadith.[185] This makes Urwa's story a valuable opportunity to examine how a cycle of scattered narratives can converge into a unified tale, and, in so doing, acquire many of the same features of the romance genre.

The first anthology to feature ʿUrwa b. Ḥizām is Ibn Qutayba's *Poets and Poetry*, where he is presented as a quintessential example of "one of the lovers killed by love" (*aḥadu l-ʿushshāqi l-ladhīna qatalahum al-ʿishq*).[186] Orphaned at an early age, ʿUrwa is brought up in his uncle's house. His uncle has a daughter the same age as him named ʿAfrāʾ; the two cousins grow up together, and as they mature, they fall in love. When ʿUrwa asks his uncle for permission to marry ʿAfrāʾ, the uncle puts off the decision until

183. Iṣbahānī, *al-Aghānī* (*Beirut*), 84–85.
184. See, for example, the poems on pages 90, 93, 102, 172, 187, and 196 in *Dīwān Jamīl, shiʿr al-ḥubb al-ʿUdhrī*, ed. Ḥusayn Naṣṣār (Cairo: Maktabat Miṣr, 1967).
185. Sarah Kay, *Parrots and Nightingales: Troubadour Quotations and the Development of European Poetry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 58–71.
186. Ibn Qutaybah, *al-Shiʿr wa-al-shuʿarāʾ*, 266.

ʿUrwa is forced to leave for Damascus in the seasonal caravan. While away, the uncle marries ʿAfrāʾ to another nephew who lives in Syria, and just as the newlywed couple embark on their northward journey, ʿUrwa's caravan encounters them on its return home. The poet beholds ʿAfrāʾ from afar and falls into a deep despair, growing so wretched and miserable that people think him bewitched or insane. His family consults two doctors, one from Hajr and the other from Yamama, but they are unable to devise a cure. As ʿUrwa knows, the only thing that can heal his malady is the sight of ʿAfrāʾ, and so he disguises himself and travels to Damascus, where he ingratiates himself with her husband and takes solace in the occasional glimpse of his beloved. However, his true identity is eventually revealed, at which point the husband, impressed by the depth of ʿUrwa's feeling, offers to grant him a permanent place in his home. Embarrassed, ʿUrwa refuses the offer and departs for his homeland, where he once again falls ill and finally perishes. When ʿAfrāʾ learns of his passing, she goes to his grave to lament and soon pines away. In this account, the lovers come across as the victims of destiny, helpless to change their fate or even resist it. Once separated from his beloved, ʿUrwa is doomed to die, a destiny that he is not only aware of but seems committed to, given his curious choice to abandon ʿAfrāʾ in Damascus. The conventions of his story demand that he enact a vision of love that, paradoxically, can only be fulfilled by postponement, frustration, and death.

If we turn to another of Ibn Qutayba's works, the *Choice Reports* (*ʿUyūn al-akhbār*), we find much shorter versions of the same kind of tale presented in a number of variations. For example, at the beginning of his chapter on "Lovers Besides the Love-Poets" (*al-ʿushshāq siwā ʿushshāq al-shuʿarāʾ*), Ibn Qutayba tells us of a tax-collector who came upon a woman by the side of the road, holding her wasted son on her lap. When asked of her story, the woman replied that this boy had been raised in the same household as his cousin and had loved her since his childhood; but when they reached puberty, she was taken away from him (*ḥujibat ʿanhu*), and so he requested her hand in marriage, but her father refused (the woman adds, "For we consider it shameful for a woman to marry a man who is infatuated with her!"); in the end, a different cousin married the girl, and the youth gave up food and drink and now only speaks in poetry. He says a final ghazal and then gives up the ghost, leaving the narrator with no choice but to deliver the news to the beloved's family; the girl, when she hears the news, recites a poem of lament as

well. On hearing this story, the caliph sends the tax-collecter back to have the body interred in Medina as a holy site, but when he arrives, the girl has also died of grief.[187] As we can see, we are dealing with an archetype of sorts; many of these details also occur in the well-known story of Majnūn "the madman," where the lovers again grow up in the same household, are forcibly separated by their families, and soon pine away in their grief and receive a martyrs' burial. The details of ʿUrwa's frenzied behavior in the absence of ʿAfrāʾ (such as smearing camels' menstrual blood upon his belly) only further tie his character into this generic persona of one who has gone crazy with love.[188]

Tales of this sort proliferated across the lands of the caliphate throughout the ninth century. According to Ibn al-Nadīm, Zubayr b. Bakkār (d. 256/870), a contemporary of Ibn Qutayba, composed thirty-one stories among which were many extended accounts of these famous lover-poets: *The Story of ʿUmar b. Abī Rabīʿa*, *The Story of Jamīl*, *The Story of Hudba and Ziyād*, *The Story of Majnūn*, and *The Story of Tawbā and Laylā*.[189] Ibn al-Nadīm names a plethora of additional couples in his list of "Those lovers who loved before and during Islam and had books composed about them" (see page 84): Muraqqash and Asmāʾ, ʿAmr b. ʿAjlān and Hind, Kuthayyir and ʿAzza, Qays and Lubnā, Ṣimma b. ʿAbd Allāh and Rayyā, Yazīd and Ḥabāba, Qābūs and Munya, Aḥmad and Dāḥa. Mohammed Ferid Ghazi counts thirty-five of these "biographies romancées" in the *Catalogue*, and naturally *The Book of ʿUrwa and ʿAfrāʾ* makes it into this list.[190] We may therefore assume that alongside the version recorded by Ibn Qutayba were other written accounts composed by and for the literate classes of Baghdad and Basra, in addition to the oral variations performed by the storytellers and jongleurs of Iraq, who, Ghazi maintains, performed not only for the general public but also for the court at Baghdad.[191]

When we come to our next recension of the tale by Abu l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī in his *Book of Songs*, we may observe some of the directions these many writers and raconteurs had taken the story. It begins

187. Ibn Qutaybah al-Dīnawāri, *ʿUyūn al-aḫbār* (Cairo: National Library Press, 1996), 128–30: wa-naḥnu narā ʿayban an tuzawwaja l-marʾatu min rajulin kāna bi-hā mughraman.

188. Khairallah, *Love, Madness, and Poetry* is a useful study of the archetypal features of the crazed beloved.

189. Mohammed Ferid Ghazi, "La littérature d'imagination en arabe du IIᵉ/VIIIᵉ au Vᵉ/XIᵉ siècles," *Arabica* 4, no. 2 (1957): 167.

190. Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, 3:327–28; *Fihrist* (*tr. Dodge*), 719; cf. Ghazi, "La littérature d'imagination en arabe du IIᵉ/VIIIᵉ au Vᵉ/XIᵉ siècles," 175.

191. ibid., 170.

in much the same way, but the details of the plot have thickened: ʿAfrāʾ's father is a kindly man who only wants the best for the lovers, but his wife is greedy and only cares about securing the highest bride-price she can find for her daughter. With no other choice, ʿUrwa secures their promise that they will wait for him to round up the money, then travels to far-off Yemen to seek the aid of his wealthy cousin, who receives him generously and outfits him with all he needs to meet the demands of his prospective mother-in-law. In this voyage he is accompanied by two comrades who provide the interlocutors for his famous poem that begins with "O my companions, noble sons of Hilāl b. ʿĀmir!" as well as fulfilling the general kinds of support one expects from a pair of sidekicks. But during his absence, the nagging wife prevails upon her husband to consider the petition of a scion of the Umayyad family (the perfect villain for Abu l-Faraj's context) to marry their daughter. The man showers the parents with presents until they back out of their promise to ʿUrwa and consent to the wedding, at which moment the hapless girl cries out: "O ʿUrwa! The tribe has broken the sacred pact and committed treachery!"

When ʿUrwa returns from his voyage, ʿAfrāʾ's father tells him that his daughter has died and shows him a false grave, and there our poet lingers for some time, grieving. But a young girl, taking pity on the wretched lover, reveals the truth to him, and he heads for the Umayyad court in Damascus. After introducing himself in disguise to ʿAfrāʾ's husband, he secures the trust of one of ʿAfrāʾ's slave-girls, to whom he gives his ring and commands to drop it in her morning glass of milk. When ʿAfrāʾ drinks the milk, she sees the ring and realizes that ʿUrwa is there. At this point, the lovers are given ample opportunity to prove their chastity: the husband leaves the two alone in his private chambers, but has one of his servants spy on them to see what they do. ʿAfrāʾ offers him a drink, and he refuses, saying, "By God, no forbidden thing has ever entered me, nor have I committed a sin as long as I have lived! If I had helped myself to that which was forbidden, I would have helped myself to *you*, for you are my share of this world!" The husband is so impressed by this display of virtue that he offers to divorce ʿAfrāʾ and give her back to ʿUrwa, but the stoic lover refuses even this offer, preferring instead to accept his doom as one of the lovers killed by love. Back at home, he is afflicted by a relapse of his fatal longing for his beloved, and we witness again the famous scenes of the doctors who cannot save him, the camel's blood, the tax-collector, his death in the arms of his mother, and ʿAfrāʾ's pining away at his tombstone; the story is brought to an

end with the famous scholar Ibn ʿAbbās looking at the fallen body and pronouncing his fate: "This is one killed by love: no blood money; no retaliation."

As we can see, the basic structure of Ibn Qutayba's narrative is still in place, but it has been expanded with a wide range of classic topoi and techniques that we find in other romances: his greedy aunt seems like a a version of the "evil stepmother" motif we saw in *Vāmeq & ʿAẕrā* (and also in Persian stories like Siāvakhsh and Sudāba); the wealthy rival's temptation of the parents with presents and gold is a topic we will find again in *Vis & Rāmin*, as is the breaking of the contract; the disguises, false graves, misrecognitions, and false deaths are staples of the Greek novel, such as *Callirhoe* and *Leucippe & Cleitophon*; the exchange of tokens by which the true lover may be recognized again appears in *V&R*; the presence of comrades and go-betweens is an essential part of virtually every romance we have discussed in this chapter (*Callirhoe*, *Leucippe & Cleitophon*, *V&ʿA*, *V&R*). In one additional anecdote provided in the *Book of Songs*, we learn that another version of this story had ʿUrwa as a young and vain man with no interest in ʿAfrāʾ until she comes out adorned on the day of the Eid festival and he is smitten by her looks—an opening scene that closely resembles the lovers' meeting at the gates of the temple of Hera in *Vāmeq & ʿAẕrā*.[192] To explain the mechanism that allows such expansion to take place while preserving the essential story, we may turn to Mikhail Bakhtin's discussion of the chronotope, the interaction of time and space that he contends is *the* decisive characteristic that determines a work's genre. Bakhtin calls the chronotope of the Greek novel "adventure-time," which operates on this dynamic:

> The first meeting of hero and heroine and the sudden flareup of their passion for each other is the starting point for plot movement; the end point of plot movement is their successful union in marriage. All action in the novel unfolds between these two points. These points—the poles of plot movement—are themselves crucial events in the heroes' lives; in and of themselves they have a biographical significance. But it is not around these that the novel is structured; rather it is around that which lies (that which takes place) *between* them. . . . The adventures themselves are strung together in an extratemporal and in effect infinite series: this series can be extended as long as one likes: in itself it has no necessary internal limits.[193]

We have already seen the effects of this kind of expansion as we moved from the sparse account of ʿUrwa b. Ḥizām we find in *Poets and Poetry* to the more fulsome version given in the *Book of Songs*. The

192. It also corresponds closely with scenes from the *Ephesiaca* and Chaucer's *Troilus & Criseyde*; see page 156.
193. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 89, 94.

effect is repeated tenfold in ʿAyyuqi's *Varqa & Golshāh*, which takes a ten-page story and expands it to an epic-romantic poem of 2,250 verses. We begin with the same scene as that provided by Abu l-Faraj, in which the cousins, now redubbed Varqa and Golshāh, grow up in the same house and fall in love as students at the same school (a motif we find also in *Layli & Majnun*), and as before, their parents promise them that they will soon be married. But now, an obstacle far more dramatic than a lack of money comes to stand between the two: a jealous rival from a neighboring tribe, Rābiʿ b. ʿAdnān, launches a surprise attack on the night of their wedding and abducts the bride, a motif identified by Davis as one of the central topoi of the romance genre, occurring in texts like Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus*, *Odatis & Zariadres*, *Leucippe & Cleitophon*, the *Ephesiaca*, and later, Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*.[194] The abduction, of course, demands retribution, and so Varqa's tribe marches off to war: in the battle that ensues, Varqa's father is killed and the hero is taken prisoner. But lo! out comes Golshāh, who has escaped captivity, disguised herself as a man, and taken the field. Bringing epic to the romance produces new twists on the idea of sexual symmetry, for Golshāh is every bit as capable a warrior as Varqa: in Figure 5, we see her saving her would-be savior, running Rabiʿ b. ʿAdnān through with her lance while Varqa, stripped to the waist and bound by a chain around his neck, looks on helplessly. [195] She is eventually captured by Rabiʿ's son, giving Varqa the chance to redeem himself and rescue her; the two lovers united, they return to their tribe in joy and triumph.

Naturally, these battles and exploits expand the narrative quite a bit, allowing the poet to bring in further motifs that are popular topoi of romantic (and heroic) stories: the back-and-forth swapping of the heroine between rival parties, a heightened element of surprise and suspense, and the appearance of a female beloved who disguises herself as a man to defend herself in battle, a mirror of the male lover who disguises himself as a woman to gain access to his beloved. But the story proper, as we know it from Abu l-Faraj, has yet to begin; this entire episode might be understood as the "prequel" to expand on the

194. Davis, *Panthea's Children*, 61–65, 72–73.

195. The motif of the warrior-woman is much more strongly pronounced in Persian narrative poetry than it is in the Greek novel; see Hanaway, "Persian Popular Romances Before the Safavid Period," 25–54; Davis, *Panthea's Children*, 34–35; Dick Davis, "Women in the *Shahnameh*: Exotics and Natives, Rebellious Legends, and Dutiful Heroines," in *Women and Medieval Epic: Gender, Genre, and the Limits of Epic Masculinity*, ed. Sara S. Poor and Jana K. Schulman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 74–75. This figure is a fixture, however, in the Arabic popular romance (*sīra*), as this recent study shows: Remke Kruk, *The Warrior Women of Islam: Female Empowerment in Arabic Popular Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

Figure 5: Golshāh kills Rabiʿ b. ʿAdnān. Her lover, Varqa, is in the lower right corner with fetters about his neck. Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:GulshahKilling.jpg; accessed 11 June 2015. The image has been cropped and modified.

world already established by the traditional, and presumably already familiar, tale. Once the lovers are reunited, the narrative from the *Book of Songs* kicks in: suddenly the mother is not willing to give up her daughter to Varqa (despite the fact that he just rescued her) until he has enough money to pay the bride-price, and so off he goes to Yemen (here, too, the narrative is expanded—Varqa must rescue his uncle and win his wars for him before he can be duly rewarded). Meanwhile, the Umayyad prince, who has been recast as the King of Syria, has come to Golshāh's parents to seek their daughter's hand, and as we saw before, he exploits the mother's greed for money to prevail over the objections of her husband. When Golshāh learns the news of her betrothal, she again recites a lament, but instead of a single line, it has been expanded into a long poem lambasting her tribe and her parents for breaking their word. The false grave, the intervention by the sympathetic maid, and Varqa's ride to Damascus all ensue.

Throughout these scenes, the plot more or less treds the same path as its predecessors, but each waystation is elaborated with additional detail, color, and description to enliven the story and increase its aesthetic pleasure for its audience; it is less about relating the "biography" of the poet as Ibn Qutayba might have intended, and more about telling a good story. When Varqa's disguise is found out and he makes the fatal decision to quit Damascus and return to his home to die, we come to the scene when the famous doctors of Hajr and Yamama are summoned and fail to cure their ailing patient. It seems that this was one of the oldest and most popular kernels of the ʿUrwa story, as references to these sages occur in the earliest citations of his poetry, such as the following lines in Ibn Qutayba's *Poets and Poetry*:

I would accept the wisdom of the sages
from Hajr and Yamama, if they could cure me!
They left no remedy untried
they made me drink every possible medicine.
Until they said, "May God heal you! By God, our hands cannot touch
that which you bear between your ribs."

In recasting this story into Persian masnavi, ʿAyyuqi does a full remake of this classic scene. He accomplishes this through the ingenious device, which we will discuss in detail in Chapter 5, of embedding lyrical performances within his narrative. Just as the work of Ibn Qutayba and Abu l-Faraj might be considered a kind of *prosimetrum*, in that they feature prose narratives interspersed with bits of poetry, ʿAyyuqi's *V&G* recreates this effect as a *metrimetrum*, a verse within the verse, alternating between the more "prosaic" rhymed hemistichs of the masnavi and the refrains and double-rhymes of the lyric. He begins by describing how Varqa's concerned relatives summon the best doctor in the land, Abu ʿAli, the "Crow" of Yamama (Abu ʿAli is also the patronym of Avicenna), and when the doctor realizes that love is the disease that is killing him, Varqa repeats those famous lines we heard above:

O wise one, now that you see the matter clearly,
If you can cure me, there would be no doctor like you in the world.[196] (108/5–6)

Following this, he launches into a formal poem to riff on this theme, recreating the effect of shifting from prose to verse in the original Arabic:

O accomplished sir! O wise doctor! Find me a cure in the absence of my beloved!
For in separation from my silver-bodied idol, I've been turned into a golden reed.
The fate of my beloved is bounty and grace; why is mine to be trials and suffering?
The soul of he in whom both love and absence meet is doubtless approaching death.
I have been enslaved by love; show mercy on this weak and wounded stranger![197]
(108/13–17)

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196. ʿAyyūqī, *Varqa va Gulshāh*, 108:

چنین گفت او را کی ای پر هنر   درین کار اکنون کی داری بصر
اگر بِه کنی مر مرا ای حبیب   نباشد چتو گِردِ گیتی طبیب

197. ibid.:

ایا پر هنر راذ و دانا طبیب   یکی چاره کن بر فراقِ حبیب
که از هجرِ آن سروِ سیمین صنم   گذارنده‌ام هم چو زرین قضیب
نصیبِ بتم خبوی و چابکیست   چرا مر مرا محنت آمذ نصیب
کرا عشق و هجران به هم یار گشت   شوذ جانش با مرگ بی‌شک قریب
منم بستهٔ عشق رحمت کنیذ   برین خستهٔ مستمندِ غریب

In terms of the poem's structure, the ending of *Varqa & Golshāh* is perhaps the most interesting feature for this analysis, for it satisfies both the example set by the Arabic model and the expectations we would anticipate in Hellenistic romantic fiction. In accordance with the tragic outcome of the udhri story, the lovers eventually die in grief at their separation, as they do in previous recensions. Yet such an ending is anathema in the Greek novel, and it seems no small coincidence that this tragic death is reworked in this version as one of the many "false deaths" lovers can undergo; no sooner do they die than the prophet Muḥammad comes and revives them in a miracle.[198] This new ending speaks volumes about the evolving tastes and expectations of an audience over the course of a few centuries; the idea of a love-story in the society that gave rise to the original udhri poetry and legends is somewhat different from the genre as it existed in the Abbasid milieu, a society with greater access to Persian and Hellenic narratives and conventions.

The story of ʿUrwa b. Ḥizām and his later reincarnation in *Varqa & Golshāh* sheds light on two basic processes that help us imagine how the genre of the love-story could travel through different forms and avail itself of an established range of themes and topoi to create novel interpretations of a time-honored and well-worn story. In this example, we saw how a body of short topical poems originating in the Umayyad period—which seems to emerge out of a very different lyrical tradition from the prose narratives of the Greek novel (although they do share some motifs, and those with better knowledge of Greek lyric poetry than I have postulated a potential interplay between the two)—were two centuries later embedded within a narrative prose framework that gave structure and context to these lyrical pieces.[199] In doing so, these compilers adopted the main narrative techniques that were used for history in their day, the collection of *akhbār* reports authenticated by lines of transmission, to give their stories the veneer of historical authenticity.[200] In this regard, it is a perfect parallel to the narrative strategies of the Greek

198. ʿAyyūqī, *Varqa va Gulshāh*, 116–22.

199. See Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam*, 313–19.

200. See Thomas Herzog, "'What They Saw With Their Own Eyes . . . ' Fictionalization and 'Narrativization' of History in Arab Popular Epics and Lerned Historiography," in *Fictionalizing the Past: Historical Characters in Arabic Popular Epic*, ed. Sabine Dorpmueller (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 25–43, who emphasizes the shared techniques used in constructing both the presumably real world of "history" and the presumably fictitious world of the "popular epic" in Arabic literature; in both cases, he concludes, both genres belong to the world of (hi)story, the formation of narratives that were intended to be perceived as essentially true, if embellished with a little exaggeration at times. See Doufikar-Aerts, "Alexander Made History, Whereas Historians Made Alexander" in the same volume for an example of the "narrativization" of Alexander into Arabic *sīra*.

novelists, who adopted the form and manner of historiography to the same effect. This process of narrativization brought the Arabic sources closer within the generic orbit of the love-story. In recasting a source text into a new form or telling, the author may choose to situate his work in a variety of possible conventions; ʿAyyuqi, for example, seems to have liked the "heroic" thematics that can be brought to romance, for his poem is replete with battles and derring-do. However, the core structural element of two noble young lovers who are separated against their will remains the theme that identifies this story as a tale about love, allowing it to undergo these numerous revisions and changes without losing its generic core.

2.5 Wisdom and beauty

These observations bolster my conviction that we ought to be thinking of these love-stories, regardless of their original provenance or the language in which they were told, as part of a common genre that moved back and forth between the written and the oral, existing in innumerable recensions and versions with episodes falling out of one story and into another, just as lines of lyric poetry could come apart and rejoin in new thematic configurations in the anthologies. In such a scenario, there is nor never was an ur-text, nor is there a need for one to establish an archetype; the work maintains its stability and cohesion through the mechanism of genre and not textual transmission. Names, places, details, episodes—all of these elements are susceptible to change with each new generation of minstrels and storytellers, and as the stories they tell move from place to place; but the stage can be set with nothing more than the right opening phrase: "I, Chariton of Aphrodisias, a clerk of the lawyer Anethagoras, am going to relate a love-story."[201] Such expressions, Holzberg writes, suggest that "for a certain type of prose narrative a certain type of story was not only anticipated by the readers, but was also automatically visualized a priori by the authors themselves."[202] While we saw that textual transmission does add additional stability to spe-

201. Chariton, *Callirhoe*, ed. and trans. G. P. Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 29. Most translators have rendered the Greek phrase πάθος ἐρωτικὸν (*pathos erōtikon*) as "love-story," although "a story of erotic suffering" and "the story of a love affair" have also been used; see Doody, *The True Story of the Novel*, 33, Reardon, *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, 21, Chariton and Xenophon of Ephesus, *Two Novels from Ancient Greece*, 3, Tilg, *Chariton of Aphrodisias and the Invention of the Greek Love Novel*, 148.

202. Holzberg, *The Ancient Novel: An Introduction*, 9.

cific works, allowing the same lines to be quoted verbatim and nearly in the same sequence by authors removed from one another by a century or more, such written records are like the tips of an iceberg, peeking out over a sea of oral and popular literature that will never be recovered.[203] However, their presence gives us enough material to create an outline of the main conventions of the love-story, and their breadth and diversity is enough to suggest that these expectations remained relatively stable despite the passage of time. This "type of story" enjoyed a remarkable efflorescence in the first three centuries CE in the guise of the Greek novel, where it transcended (for some people) the category of fairy-tale and became a form of prose writing that was enjoyed and appreciated by sophisticated authors and readers. In such literature, we can observe the extent to which imaginative writers could play with what is at heart a very old and simple idea, creating narratives that remained popular in Europe until the nineteenth century, when new approaches to the novel demoted the romantic tales to the status of penny dreadfuls and pulp fiction; even today (in anglophone circles), the "romance" is still considered a somewhat inferior form of writing to the "novel."[204]

Such tales did not die out after their heyday in the third and fourth centuries; their characteristic themes, structures, and literary strategies were recycled, reshuffled, and redistributed to explore new questions and pose new problems for new communities of readers and listeners. With their tenacious interest in chastity and fidelity, the Greek novels were effectively reworked into Christian martyrdom stories and saints' lives, as the transformation of *Metiochos & Parthenope* into *The Martyrdom of St. Parthenope* illustrates. Not much later, a similar version of these stories appeared in the Arabic udhri tradition, wherein lovers became martyrs to their love. By the tenth century, we know from Abu l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī, Ibn al-Nadīm, and other Arabic sources that the shelves of the urban literate groaned with books about famous lovers from the past, and that the halls of caliphs and princes resounded with the voices of singers and storytellers who continued to regale their patrons with the latest episode of the

203. Khan puts it well when he writes, "The romance was bound up with an *oral*, *physical*, and *visual* practice of storytelling, and that it is not, therefore, merely reducible to its written representatives. . . . it is particularly the pervasive orality of the romance that has shaped the written remains of the genre in unmistakable ways"; see "The Broken Spell," 67, also 74–75.

204. "The Victorians in general found the novels distasteful: they were post-classical (secondary, derivative, second-rate), and they exhibited a 'foul, hypocritical sophistication', which challenged the idealism of classical value: 'detestable trash', as Macaulay sniffed."Goldhill, "Genre," 192; see also Day, *From Fiction to the Novel*; David Konstan, *Sexual Symmetry: Love in the Ancient Novel and Related Genres* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 205; Doody, *The True Story of the Novel*, 15–19; Khan, "The Broken Spell," 28–35.

famous lover So-and-so. However, all indications, based on patterns of translation and patronage, anecdotal evidence, and indigenous literary theory and classification, suggest that these stories remained firmly settled in the halls of the "fiction" section of the library, loved by all, but ultimately not within the provenance of "real" literature.[205]

And then, in the courts of the Samanid princes, of Maḥmud of Ghazna, and of Toghrul Bey, a new chapter in the history of the love-story takes place, as a group of tales—often of foreign extraction, of ancient provenance, or both—are recast in a relatively young literary idiom and presented to the court of the Islamicate world's most powerful monarchs. To make sense of this sudden development, we might visit "Thesis 5" of Jauss's essay "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," in which he describes the process by which old genres can gain relevance for new audiences:

> A literary past can return only when a new reception draws it back into the present, whether an altered aesthetic attitude willfully reaches back to reappropriate the past, or an unexpected light falls back on forgotten literature from the new moment of literary evolution, allowing something to be found that one previously could not have sought in it.[206]

The rapid appearance of the independent love-story on the tail end of the "Persian renaissance" suggests that eleventh-century authors saw some untapped potential in this genre that could pull such stories out of the bed-chamber and into the throne-room, not merely something to entertain and delight but something that, as Gorgāni writes, "will one day bring benefit as you read" (*be kār āyad-t chun bekhwāni*, 7.42). That this new appreciation for the romance as a genre capable of aesthetic and intellectual sophistication extended beyond the borders of Persia I have no doubt: shortly after the battle of Mantzikert in 463/1071, the Byzantine literati revived the old Greek novel tradition which had lain dormant for half a millennium, only this time, like their Persian counterparts to the east, their novels were cast in verse as well as prose: *Drosilla and Charikles* by Niketas Eugenianos, *Rodanthe and Dosikles* by Theodore Prodromos, *Hysimine and Hysimines* by Eustathios Makrembolites.[207] Decades later, the romance became

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205. See Khan, "The Broken Spell," 23–30 for a discussion of a more recent version of this long-standing prejudice. Jameson also writes: "The older generic categories do not, for all that, die out, but persist in the half-life of the subliterary genres of mass culture, transformed into the drugstore and airport paperback lines of gothics, mysteries, romances, bestsellers, and popular biographies, where they await the resurrection of their immemorial, archetypal resonance at the hands of a Frye or a Bloch." *The Political Unconscious*, 107.

206. Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, 35.

207. See the chapter entitled "The Renaissance of a Genre" in Roderick Beaton, *The Medieval Greek Romance*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1996), 52–69; cf. Elizabeth Jeffreys, trans., *Four Byzantine Novels* (Liverpool University Press, 2012).

one of the cornerstone genres of the newly-emergent tradition of Georgian secular literature, with the translation of *V&R* as *Visramiani*, followed by *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* by Shota Rustaveli and *Amiran-Darejaniani* by Mose Khoneli.[208] In northern France in the late twelfth century, the romance explodes onto the scene in the works of Chrétien de Troyes, the story of *Floire & Blancheflor*, and the *Tristan & Iseut* cycles of Béroul, Thomas of Britain, and Gottfried von Strassburg; meanwhile, in the city of Ganja, the master poet Neẓāmi was composing what would become the definitive works of the genre in Persian literature. Romance, in short, was in the air, and no amount of textual transmission studies, as important as they are, will provide a full explanation of the efflorescence of the genre from England to Persia. I therefore suggest we look for ways the love tale was reformulated and presented to its courtly audience; or, in another way of phrasing it, to see how authors reworked the genre in a way that spoke to broader philosophical, social, and ethical currents of thought taking place at the time. This study cannot hope to fully resolve these big questions, but it can at least return to the texts at hand to begin to explain how the pioneers of the romance in the Persian context saw themselves and what kind of literary work they needed to do to make their poetry worthy of a royal audience.

Let us begin with ʿAyyuqi, who precedes Gorgāni by a few decades. After praising God and his patron, Sultan Maḥmud of Ghazna, the poet launches into a *discursus* about discourse (*sakhon*):

> Discourse is better than favors and that which is desired, better than treasures adorned.
> Discourse is enough for a poet, sufficient ornament for a man.
> Hark and heed the wise one's words, for nothing save discourse descends from the sky.
> Discourse draws men's heads towards the heavens, pulls the peaks upon the plains—
> Discourse will turn your vile acts to mercies and show the path to paradise.
> I have told this tale in a sweet discourse said by none before;
> None among the great and small have told the story in such cadence and diction.
> I was in my room, having renounced poetry, [my] judgement broken inside [myself].[209]
> But for the sake of that auspicious crown, I shall [again] speak in the *dari* tongue!
> Discourse, without doubt, gains color when ordered; a bride becomes proper once arrayed by her attendant.
> So shall I ever array my discourse, seeking beauty from wisdom.
> I bring a tale into verse: an amazing event from the books and chronicles of the Arabs![210]
> (4/9–5/5)

208. Gvaxaria, "Notes on the Persian Text of Gorgani's Vis o Ramin," 53–55.

209. A rather obscure line; Meisami has: "I had opted for solitude, repented of poetry; but an adjudicator interfered." Melikian-Chirvani has: "J'étais là dan ma cellule reconçant à la poésie / Le débat entretemps fut résolu."

210. ʿAyyūqī, *Varqa va Gulshāh*, 4–5. Cf. Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 90; Melikian-Chirvani, "Varqe et Golšâh,"

It is hard to miss the bold tenor of the poet's tone; despite having selected a story that Ibn al-Nadīm had listed among the fairy-tales, ʿAyyuqi is confident that he can transform it into a work of high literature.[211] The tool in his hand is discourse, *sakhon*, a term that, like the Hellenistic concept of *logos*, came to acquire more expansive and metaphysical layers of meaning. As we saw in Chapter 1, Ferdowsi describes *sakhon* as the tool that may transcend the elements (though it may not penetrate God's secrets); Neẓāmi later praises it in his *Treasury of Secrets* as the fundamental element of being, the tool that not only conveys but creates meaning: in an echo of the well-known qur'anic phrase " 'Be,' and it is" (*kun fa-yakūn*), he writes, "In the first movement of the Pen, the first letter to take shape was discourse" (*jonbesh-e avval ke qalam bar gereft · ḥarf-e nakhostin ze sakhon dar gereft*).[212] Having invoked the transformative power of *sakhon*, ʿAyyuqi draws our attention not to the content of his material but to the mode of his discourse and the form in which it arranged—"none have told the story in such cadence and diction"—presenting himself as a wordsmith capable of transforming a popular story into a work of art. While this may simply be a reference to the fact that ʿAyyuqi is bringing a "foreign" tale into Persian, I am rather inclined to suspect that he means a more fundamental change in the inherent quality of speech through the alchemy

102–103.

سَخُن بهتر از نعمت و خواسته   سخن بهتر از گنجِ آراسته
سخن مر سخن‌گوی را مایه بس   سخن بر تنِ مرد پیرایه بس
ز دانا سخن بشنو و گوش کن   کی نامذ دگر ز آسمان جز سخن
سخن مرد را سر به گردون گشذ   سخن کوه را سوی هامون کشذ
سخن بر تو نیکو کنذ کارِ زشت   سخن ره نُمایذ به سونِ بَهِشت
بگفتم به شیرین سخن این سمر   که کس نیست گفته ازین پیشتر
چنین قصّه‌یی را کس از خاص و عام   نگویذ بذین وزن و انشی تمام
من و حجره و توبه از شاعری   گسسته شذ اندر میان داوری
من از بهرِ آن افسرِ سروری   سخن راند خواهم به لفظِ دری
سخن بی‌شک از نظم رنگین شوذ   عروس از مِشاطه به آیین شوذ
سخن را بیاراست خواهم همی   جمال از خِرد خواست خواهم همی
به نظم آورم سر گذشتی عجب   ز اخبارِ تازی و کُتبِ عرب

211. The romance's mobility between the "popular" and "courtly" spheres—and the pitfalls that await those who assume too wide a gap between these categories—is discussed in Khan, "The Broken Spell," 91–92.

212. Niẓāmī Ganjavī, *Makhzan al-asrār*, ed. Bihrūz S̱arvatīyān (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1387 [2008]), 68; Kamran Talattof, "Nizāmī Ganjavi, the Wordsmith: The Concept of *sakhun* in Classical Persian Poetry: Artistic and Humanistic Aspects of Nizāmī Ganjavī's *Khamsa*," in *A Key to the Treasure of the Hakīm*, ed. Johann-Christoph Bürgel and Christine van Ruymbeke (Leiden University Press, 2011), 227–28. See also Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, *Courtly Riddles: Enigmatic Embellishments in Early Persian Poetry* (2010), 156, with a summary of a discussion by J. T. P. de Bruijn, "De dichter over het woord. Beschouwingen over de rede, de taal en de dichtkunst in de Perzische poëzie," in *De Vorsten van het woord: Taksten over dichterschap en poëzie uit Oosterse tradities*, ed. W. L. Idema and Geert Jan van Gelder (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1983), 36–37. For the phrase *kun fa-yakūn*, see Q2:117, 3:47, 6:73, 16:40, 19:35, 36:82, and 40:68.

of versification. There is an aesthetic pleasure and potency intended in ʿAyyuqi's description of *Varqa & Golshāh* as an "astonishing" (*ʿajib*) tale: drawing from the aesthetic theories of Avicenna, Neẓāmi ʿAruži, and Naṣiroddin Ṭusi, Utas and Yarshater point out that the ability to thrill and overwhelm the audience through the pleasure of the text (*taʿjib* or *taʿajjob*) is one of the basic qualities that makes literature "literary," so to speak.[213] In other words, the significance of this tale cannot be boiled down to the didactic or moral elements that are explicitly at the forefront in genres like history, advice, and mirrors for princes. Rather, it is up to the poet to make it beautiful, to transform its lead into gold, to turn a fable about star-crossed lovers into a poem that will both serve and delight its audience. Not everyone can pull it off; it requires one who is knowledgeable and skilled in the arts of the word to reveal the inner wisdom and beauty buried within a fantastic tale.

We hear a similar message in Gorgāni's introduction to *Vis & Rāmin*, part of which we read in our discussion of his sources (see section 1.3). Now what does our poet plan to do with this archaic Pahlavi tale, this story that he likens to a garden in full bloom, but nonetheless filled with strange words whose meaning even the wise cannot unravel? What this poem needs, he proudly states, is a scholar who knows the craft of poetry, a gardener who can pull out the weeds and prune back its tangled branches.

> Back then, there was no professional poet or quick-witted scholar.
> Where are those sages now, to see how they craft poetry today—
> How they bring out import (*maʿāni*), how they lay out meter and rhyme![214]
> . . . .
> For poetry is finer with meter and rhyme than when carelessly measured,
> Especially when you find import therein that will one day bring benefit as you read.
> However sweet and pleasant the tale be, it becomes new with meter and rhyme.[215]
> Out of so many words, meanings will shine like gold upon a princely pearl,
> Set here and there in the tale, blazing like stars in the middle!
> The great and intelligent read this tale to extract many meanings like this,
> While the common folk read it aloud for the sake of the story.
> Poetry should be of the sort that when it leaves the poet's mouth, it travels the world,
> Not of the kind that stays at home, with none to read it save the poet himself!
> . . . .

213. Bo Utas, "The Aesthetic Use of New Persian," *Edebiyât* 9 (1998): 4; Ehsan Yarshater, "The Indian or Safavid Style: Progress or Decline?," in *Persian Literature*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1988), 268.

214. Morrison: "If only those scholars could see how diction is produced nowadays, meanings unraveled, meter and rhyme superimposed!"

215. Morrison: "Refurbished"; Minorsky: "Refreshed." Meisami stresses the literal implications of the *now-āyin*, " 'making new' the traditional *matière* by revealing its deeper signification." Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 89, n. 19.

> If a learned man took the trouble, it would become as beautiful as a treasury full of gems;
> For this is a famous story, with amazing adventures beyond number![216] (7.36–38, 41–49)

Gorgāni's message is loud and clear: the old tales are in need of a major overhaul; they must be outfitted with the new formal conventions of rhyme and meter, given balance and symmetry, and above all, inscribed with inner meanings that will benefit its readers. This will transform the text into a "new way" (*now-āyin*) of literature, a new fashion of telling the story that bears intrinsic value and is worthy of elite consumption.[217] In Gorgāni's view, poetry is a kind of skill, a *technē* as the Greeks understood it, and it is the application of his professionalized and technical craft that he promises will instill the poem with distinction and beauty. Back then, as he says, there was no professional poet to get the job done; whatever text he had before him, it is clear that it was devoid of meter, rhyme, and matters of import (*maʿāni*, literally "meanings").[218] Although he employs the Arabic word *shāʿer* to describe the poet as a profession, his word for poetry is broader; like ʿAyyuqi, he uses the word *sakhon*, which, generally speaking, refers to any kind of speech that is ordered, rational, and beautiful, in contrast to that which is "carelessly measured." As reason, it is the means by which we can look beyond the world of the senses to understand the intellectual reality behind it; and as speech, it is the literary version of language that is worthy of expressing these eternal truths. Both the form and the significance are crucial elements

216. R37/T29/M18. For other translations of this passage, see Gabrieli, "Note sul *Vīs u Rāmīn*," 169–70; Minorsky, *Iranica*, 153–54; Massé, "Introduction," 6–7; Lazard, "La source en 'farsi' de 'Vis-o-Ramin'," 37–38.

که آنگه شاعری پیشه نبودست　　حکیمی چابک‌اندیشه نبودست
کجااند آن حکیمان تا ببینند　　که اکنون چون سخن می‌آفرینند
معانی را چگونه بر گشادند　　برو وزن و قوافی چون نهادند
سخن را چون بُوَد وزن و قوافی　　نکوتر زانکه پیمودن گزافی
به خاصه چون درو یابی معانی　　به کار آیدْت روزی چون بخوانی
فسانه گرچه باشد نغز و شیرین　　به وزن و قافیه گردد نوآیین
معانی تابد از الفاظِ بسیار　　چو اندر زر نشانده دُرِّ شهوار
نهاده جای‌جای اندر فسانه　　فروزان چون ستاره زان میانه
مهان و زیرکان آن را بخوانند　　بدان تا زان بسی معنی بدانند
همیدون مردمِ عام و میانه　　فرو خوانند از بهرِ فسانه
سخن باید که چون از کامِ شاعِر　　بیاید در جهان گردد مسافر
نه زان گونه که در خانه بماند　　بجز قایل مرو را کس نخواند
اگر دانندهای در وی برد رنج　　شود زیبا چو پر گوهر یکی گنج
کجا این داستانی نامدارست　　در احوالش عجایب بیشمارست

217. Cf. Yamamoto, *The Oral Background of Persian Epics*, 78.

218. An alternative and perhaps more common reading of this line is "poetry was not a profession" (*shāʿeri pisha nabuda-st*); however, Meisami suggests *shāʿer-i* to parallel *ḥakim-i* in the second hemistich, which I think is a persuasive suggestion. See Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 89, n. 19.

for transforming a narrative tale into a work of art; if we recall the basic Arabic theoretical distinction between the diction (*lafẓ*) and the meaning (*maʿnā*) of a poem, we see both elements represented here in Gorgāni's invocation of the outward forms of meter and rhyme (*vazn o qāfiya*) and the valuable inner meaning of the poem's contents, which he compares to stars shining out of the midst of many utterances (7.44).[219] It is not surprising, then, to see the degree to which Gorgāni is actively involved in shaping the poem; as Hedāyat observes, the poem is filled with allusions to Arabic poetry, translations of Arabic proverbs, and references to Jewish and Islamic exegesis and eschatology that could not have existed in the Parthian original, making it clear that Gorgāni "knew the literary tropes of his own era very well and would refer to the mental expectations of his readers in accordance to the taste of that time."[220] Like ʿAyyuqi, Gorgāni is certain that his craft has the power to breathe new life and relevance into the old stories. Thus, when his patron commands him to "embellish this poem as April the garden" (*ze man dar khwāst u k-in dāstān rā · biārā hamcho nesyān bustān rā*, 7.57), we should consider this *rifacimento* not as an attempt to preserve an archaic text that was in danger of falling out of history, but as a bold commitment to creating something new and unprecedented out of a well-known story.

Although Gorgāni and ʿAyyuqi are drawing from very different sources, it is striking how they both emphasize the fact that their work comes out of the category of "evening tales," Ibn al-Nadīm's "fiction" section: ʿAyyuqi writes that he has an "evening tale" (*samar*) to relate, extracted from the "chronicles" (*akhbār*) of the Arabs, while Gorgāni begins his tale with these words: "I have found, written among the evening tales and from the chronicles told by raconteurs, that there was once a king . . . " (*neveshta yāftam andar samar-hā · ze goft-e rāviyān andar khabar-hā / ke bud andar zamana shahryār*, 8.1). This characterization also stresses the poems' origins in both written and oral sources, as well as lending them

219. I'm reading this line as *maʿāni, az alfāẓ-e besyār, tābad*, "meanings shine forth out of so many words"; another way to interpret this line would be that many-worded meanings are shining (*maʿāni az alfāẓ-e besyār tābad*). Also, there is another reading of *V&R* that points the word تابد as *bāyad*, not *tābad*, thus Morrison writes: "There should be numerous sentiments and expressions scattered here and there in the story, like a royal pearl set in gold, shining out from its midst like stars"; and Minorsky: "Like a kingly pearl (which needs to be) set in gold, a story needs abundant conceits and words, strewn here and there and shining like stars on that background."

220. Hidāyat, "Chand nuktah," 385; see also Maḥjūb, "Muqaddamah," 21–22, 58–66, 69–73. This is contra Musā Piri, who claims that Gorgāni did not interfere with the original text; *Sākhtār´shināsī-i muqāyasah´ī-i manẓūmah´hā-yi Vīs va Rāmīn va Khusraw va Shīrīn*, 287.

فخرگرگانی معلومات ادبی زمان خود را به خوبی می‌دانسته و مطابق ذوق زمان اشاره به سابقهٔ ذهنی خوانندگان می‌کرده‌است.

an air of authenticity by saying that they come from the "chronicles" (*akhbār*). To claim that these tales are capable of conveying the same benefit to their audience as an epic poem or advice for princes is a remarkable moment in the genre's history; as Melikian-Chirvani writes, "the diversity of their avowed [sources of] inspiration only makes the shared attitude between the two authors regarding the literature more remarkable. . . . Both of them underline the novelty of what they are doing."[221]

As we bring this chapter to a close, I would like to reflect on two major themes about *Vis & Rāmin* in relation to its generic position as a love-story that have emerged in the course of our discussion thus far. In Chapter 1, we learned that one of the primary aspects of *V&R* that offended modern critics was the fact that the lovers are engaged in an illicit affair for the bulk of their story. In this chapter, we have seen that if we consider *V&R* to be participating in the genre of love-stories, there are certain "rules of the game" that have proven to be remarkably stable throughout the *longue durée*—so stable, in fact, they might be taken to be a constitutive element of defining the genre in the first place. Bringing these two elements together, we can conclude that one of the reason why critics were so bothered by the protagonists of *V&R* was precisely because they strayed so far out of bounds. Their reaction is a testament to the durability of these basic premises in romantic literature, even to the present day, and the fact that *V&R* goes so far afield has caused some to wonder if we should consider it a member of this genre in the first place; as we have seen, some critics have preferred to call it a parody of the world invoked by the love-story.[222]

I would disagree: for when we turn to the text, we will find that the characters, Vis in particular, are as bothered and disturbed by their unorthodox actions as are those who will later read their story. The language of *Vis & Rāmin* is steeped the classic understanding of love as a praxis of loyalty, chastity, and fidelity to the one and only person with whom we have been destined to love; and yet, the entire story is built around an adulterous affair, and we will find that the question of who is Vis's proper mate is far more vexed than the title of her story would have us believe. We are faced, then, with a love-story in which all the expectations we bring to such a tale are frustrated and challenged: all the rules are bent and twisted, the structure is turned upside-down, and the fundamental premises that allow the genre to function are

221. Melikian-Chirvani, "Varqe et Golšâh," 30–31: "La diversité de l'inspiration avouée ne rend que plus remarquable l'attitude commune des deux auteurs à l'égard de la littérature. . . . Tous les deux soulignent la nouveauté de la chose."

222. Cf. Kaladze, "Georgian Translation," 139.

pushed to the breaking-point. Jauss believes that it is precisely those works that challenge the rules of the game so much that they come to redefine it are those that are often remembered as master-works in a literary tradition, and the case could very well be made that *Vis & Rāmin* is such a master-work for this reason.[223] As Meisami suggests, Gorgāni's observation that few who read the story can understand its meaning might not be taken merely as a comment on the difficult script, but on the hermeneutical problems this story poses to its readers.[224] But since Gorgāni assures us that the story will bring benefit to those who read it, let us take him at his word, and try to make sense of what may be the fundamental crisis that brings the story together, drives it forward, and plagues the thoughts of its protagonists: how can lovers ever live up to expectations when their love itself is illicit?

223. Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, 28–32:

> If, according to Gadamer, the classical *itself* is supposed to achieve the overcoming of historical distance through its constant mediation, it must, as a perspective of the hypostatized tradition, displace the insight that classical art at the time of its production did not yet appear "classical": rather, it could open up new ways of seeing things and preform new experiences that only in historical distance—in the recognition of what is now familiar—give rise to the appearance that a timeless truth expresses itself in the work of art.

224. Meisami, "Kings and Lovers," 4.

Chapter 3

An Affair of Conscience

From the roof of her pavilion, a young queen named Vis observes a polo match unfold between two families of the Parthian aristocracy. On one side is her brother Viru, King of Media and head of the house of Qāren; on the other is the Great King, Mobad Manikān, and his younger brother Rāmin.[1] As it happens, all three men have a romantic history with Vis: not so long ago, Vis was betrothed to Viru, but Mobad intervened on their wedding day, saying that she was rightfully his due to a long-forgotten promise. A bitter struggle ensued between the two sides, and although Mobad was defeated in battle, he nonetheless managed to capture Vis by another route and brought her kicking and screaming back to his palace in Marv.[2] Vis completely shunned her new husband, but recently she has begun a clandestine affair with Rāmin. As she observes her husband, brother, and lover vie against each other on the polo-field below, she is suddenly overcome by a wave of emotion:

> She gazed at her brother, then at Rāmin, preferring them to all the other men.

1. The house of Qāren (Mid. Pers. Kārēn) had its capital at Hamadan, ancient Ecbatana, called Mah or Mahabad in *V&R* (see Figure 1). Minorsky suggests that Mobad's family name might be a matronym pointing to the famous Manizha (*Manēčak*), the wife of Bizhan, thus tying the monarch into the regional Khorasani lore about the family of Godarz, Giv, and Bizhan that was later assimilated into the *Shāhnāma* in a manner similar to the Sistani cycle of Narimān, Zāl, and Rostam. See Minorsky, *Iranica*, 164–67, 182–86; Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Bīzhan va Manīzhah," 286–87.

2. Marv, called Margiana by the Greeks, is situated in modern-day Turkmenistan, about 30 km southwest of the modern town Mary, just over the border from Iran. Even in Achaemenid times, the Margiana region was a highly developed agricultural complex and frontier garrison, and after the city proper was founded by the Seleucids in the second century BCE, it became an important commercial and political center whose prominence endured until it was sacked by the Mongols in 618/1221. In Gorgāni's day, the city was experiencing an economic boom as the eastern capital of the newly-established Seljuk empire and a center of silk and cotton production; see C. E. Bosworth, ed., *Historic Cities of the Islamic World* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 401–5.

Her heart felt choked by worry, her face lost its color, and her brow furrowed.
Her silver body began to tremble, like a cypress shaken by the wind.
Her red eyes filled with tears; liquid pearls fell upon roses.[3] (47.105–8)

Vis's Nurse, looking on, cannot help but wonder at this reaction. "Why do you struggle so with yourself?" (*cherā bā jān-e khwad chandin setizi*, 47.110), she asks, marvelling that a woman in Vis's position could have anything at all to fuss about: how could she cry out to God, who has blessed her with such beauty, youth, luxury, power, elegance, and success (47.122)? Is she not queen of Iran and Turan? Is not Mobad her husband, Viru her ally, and Rāmin her lover? With an air of exasperation, Vis chides the Nurse for her ignorance and naivete—"It's like I'm on foot, while you are mounted; you have no idea of the toil of my journey!" (*man-am hamchun piāda to sovāri · ze ranj-e raftan āgāhi nadāri*, 47.132)—then explains to her the cause of her distress:

My lord and husband is king of the world, but he's spiteful and vindictive.
He'll never please me, though he be my husband, for he's malicious, evil, and old!
Viru is suspicious of me; he's like a coin in someone else's pocket,
Though he's a veritable moon in the sky, what good does he do me, since he is not mine?
And though Rāmin's handsome, you know yourself what a rake he is!
He is nothing but sweet-talk, and does not seek virtue in love.
His words seem sweet on the outside, but are colocynth-bitter when you taste them.
With this lover, I'm helpless in a hundred endeavors; in love, I'm loveless with a hundred lovers.
I've brother, lover, and husband; from all three, I forever burn in fire.
. . . .
Had fortune come to my aid, I'd have no lover save Viru.
Neither Mobad nor Rāmin would be my mate, nor would my share have been these hurtful friends:
The one with me is like cruel anguish in the soul; the other, like a stone upon glass.
The tongue of one belies his heart; the other oppresses me with both heart and tongue.[4]
(47.134–41, 146–49)

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3. R135/T173/M116/D136:

برادر را و رامین را همی دید ز چندان مردم ایشان را پسندید
ز بس اندیشه کردن گشت دلتنگ رخش بی‌رنگ و پیشانی پرآژنگ
تنِ سیمینش را لرزه بیفتاد تو گفتی سرو بُد لرزنده از باد
خمارینْ‌نرگسان را کرد پرآب به گل بر ریخت مرواریدِ خوشاب

4. R136/T175/M117/D138:

اگر شویست بس نادلپیرست کجا بدرای و بدکردار و پیرست
وگر ویروست بر من بدگمانست به چشمِ من چو دینارِ کسانست
وگر ویرو بجز ماهِ سما نیست مرا چه سود باشد چون مرا نیست
وگر رامین همه خوبی و زیبست تو خود دانی چگونه دل‌فریبست

Ironically, the cause of Vis's suffering lies in the very abundance for which the Nurse congratulates her: she is loveless with too many lovers. Viru is absent and does not return her love; Mobad has legal dominion over her body, but no share of her heart; and while she does have feelings for Rāmin, he is untrustworthy and his claim to her is illicit. In all three cases, the integrity of her body, soul, and social standing is in some way compromised, leaving her in some way at odds against herself and split in twain. This kind of internal division was often considered one of the worst kinds of violence that could be done against the self in the broad currents of medieval thought: Augustine calls the war within his soul a "monstrosity" (*monstrum*) in the *Confessions* (VIII.ix), and Boethius bemoans how "human depravity divides that which is one and simple in its nature" (*hoc igitur quod est unum simplexque natura prauitas humana dispertit*, III.9.16).[5] On her way to meet her lover, the heroine of *Khosrow & Shirin* beholds a beautiful youth who captures her heart (none other than Khosrow in disguise), but she turns away and shoulders on, telling herself, "A prayer towards two niches is not licit" (*ravā nabvad namāz-i dar do meḥrāb*).[6] Fenice, another romance heroine, declares that she would rather that she and her lover be dismembered before their love be compared with that of *Tristan & Iseut*: "That love was insane, but mine will be so true that neither my body nor my heart will be sundered at any cost. I shall never prostitute my body, it will never be split between two men; he who has my heart will have my body!" (3112–17).[7] The fact that Vis

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ندارد مایه جز شیرین‌زبانی   نجوید راستی در مهربانی
زبانش را شکر آمد نمایش   نهانش حنظل اندر آزمایش
منم با یار در صدکار بی‌کار   به گاهِ مهر با صد یار بی‌یار
همم یارست و هم شو هم برادر   من از هر سه همی سوزم بر آذر
اگر بختم مرا یاری نمودی   دلارامم بجز ویرو نبودی
نه موبد جفتِ من بودی نه رامین   نبهره دوستانِ دشمن آیین
یکی با من چو غم با جان به کینه   یکی دیگر چو سنگ و آبگینه
یکی را با زبان دل نیست یاور   یکی را این و آن هر دو ستمگر

5. Augustine, *Confessons*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford University Press, 2008), 147; Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Joel C. Relihan (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2001), 69.

6. Niẓāmī Ganjavī, *Khusraw va Shīrīn*, 84; cf. Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 9.

7. Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligès*, 230–33; cf. Staines, *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, 125:

> Ceste amors ne fu pas raisnable,
> Mais la moie est si veritable
> Que de mon cors ne de mon cuer
> N'iert partie faite a nul fuer.
> Ja voir mes cors n'iert garçoniers,
> Ja n'i avra .II. parçoniers.
> Qui a le cuer, cil ait le cors.

has lost her virginity draws the themes of disintegration and fragmentation to the physical level of her body, and the fact that she lost it out of wedlock expands them outwards to touch on matters of society and religion. She thus concludes her lament with a double entendre, "I forever burn in fire," reminding us that her story is woven into a fabric of norms that will not fail to punish her body and condemn her soul for her transgression; her yearning to be free of both a tyrannous husband and a faithless lover demonstrates the extent to which she herself operates within this normative framework. Vis's speech participates in her own metaphorical dismemberment even as it expresses it, casting her as both guilty and innocent, a violator of her own principles and a victim of fate's injustice. Her lament is not merely a sigh of longing for a lost beloved, but a threnody to her shattered and divided self.

From the perspective of Gorgāni's readers, Vis's dilemma is further complicated by the problematic nature of the choices before her. Although her wish to abandon adultery and return to her legitimate husband would seem commendable, the fact that this husband is also her brother leads her to incest, another major taboo. By the same token, her union with Rāmin is equally impermissible even had it been sanctioned by wedlock, for he and Vis were raised by the same wet-nurse; according to Islamic law, this puts them in the same category as siblings. The result, as van Gelder writes, is that Mobad, our ostensible villain, "is not merely the most appropriate partner, but the only possible one, from a legalistic Muslim point of view."[8] Even putting Islamic sensibilities to the side, the story's rhetoric does not seem rule out Mobad as potentially serious candidate, for as Davis observes, the king does fulfill some of the narrative formulae expected for the heroine's beloved.[9] This confusion is not accidental: as we readers seek to identify the appropriate match for our heroine, we find ourselves caught at the same impasse that she complains of. No matter whom she chooses, we encounter something wrong, repugnant, or violated; no matter which way she turns, her love is cursed to be illegitimate.

Vis's breakdown at the polo game epitomizes an endemic problem that is found throughout her story, in which the classic triangle of hero-heroine-villain that provides the structural axis and familiar ground of many romances has been twisted into a net of unworkable relations that barely resemble

8. Gelder, *Close Relationships*, 184–85.
9. Davis, *Panthea's Children*, 42.

their original model: the hero is recast as a lying philanderer, the heroine an adulteress torn between love and hate for the man responsible for her disgrace, the villain an anxious and miserable husband who oftentimes seems more deserving of pity than censure. The impossibility of Vis's reunion with Viru is both a symptom of this deeper problem at work and the cause of Vis's terrible grief, for no matter how she longs for restitution and normalcy, the text has nullified any chance of that happening. Vis has no home to return to, exiled from the norms of her genre as surely as she has been snatched away from her homeland. Now, just as she is stuck between three equally bad solutions, so we too share in her bewilderment as readers of a text that offers no hope of return or of closure.

The loss of certainty, the disappearance of guiding principles, and the death of immanent resolution marks a watershed moment in the development of the romance in Persian literature. Like its counterparts *Vāmeq & ʿAẕrā* and *Varqa & Golshāh*, the story of *Vis & Rāmin* relies on well-worn conventions of the love-story genre to tell its tale of two young lovers who are separated against their will and suffer numerous hardships before they are reunited, marry, and live happily ever after.[10] Although this narrative technically remains intact in *V&R*, the premises and ground rules that provide its foundation are subverted to the point that the structural edifice becomes little more than a shell to hold the story together while radical transformations unfold within. The result is an "imperfect" romance, a love-story gone wrong, a tale that consciously invokes both conceptual and practical considerations of love and consistently fails to live up to those values.[11] While the gap between practice and ideal is apparent in both Mobad and Rāmin, who sometimes seem to trade off the roles of villain and hero, it is especially tangible in Vis, the adulterous beloved who both confirms and violates the principles of chastity and fealty that constitute the bedrock ethos of her story. Not that it is unheard of for heroines in medieval Persian literature to have affairs outside of wedlock: Tahmina and Manizha in the *Shāhnāma* are two examples, and Shirin expresses her desire for Farhād, though she never consummates it. But these women are few

10. This statement can be qualified a bit: as discussed in Chapter 2, we don't actually know the ending of *V&ʿA*, although it is clear from what we do have that it treads a path very similar to that of the early Greek novels. *V&G*, which adapts the udhri tale of ʿUrwa b. Ḥizām to a Persian narrative poem, is another interesting take on the model: the tragic ending of the original is reversed by the lovers' resurrection by the Prophet Muḥammad, allowing the happy ending to take place.

11. Part of this argument, it should be clear, is dependent on my approach outlined in Chapter 2, where I discuss Jauss's idea of the "horizon of expectations" to claim that the readers of this story would have approached it with these ideals already in their mind from prior experience with other texts that participate in the same genre.

and far between, and certainly none other can be found who openly carries on an illicit affair for over ten years of story-time (102.19). Given that this ground rule has been broken, Vis could in some ways be seen as the villain of the story, not its protagonist; indeed, this was how many nineteenth-century European critics, such as Graf and Stackleberg, came to view the poem.[12] Many characters in the text are quite prepared to agree; Mobad, naturally the one most offended by her actions, curses Vis as a wolf (64.144), a ghoul (68.101), a witch (60.61), demon-spawn (64.135), brazen (59.90), disgraceful (59.84), lascivious and contemptible (47.27), and other names of that sort:

> Your soul lacks sense, your eyes have no shame; your deeds are immodest, your judgement is crooked!
> You've broken your honor, your humility, and your vows; you've cast us both into disrepute!
> You've renounced decency and religion, a disgrace in everyone's eyes![13] (47.28–30)

This mantra is taken up by secondary characters as well: Rāmin's lover Gol calls Vis a sorceress (74.137), and Mobad's mother calls her as a whore (*balāya*) of insatiable sexual appetites (51.34): "I've heard that faithless, vile woman has once again joined up with Viru . . . This is all the fault of evil-natured Vis, who picks up a new lover every day" (51.36, 42).[14] Even the narrator chimes in from time to time and calls her a sinner (*gonāhkār*) for participating in the story he has written for her (59.269). The constant barrage of contempt and denigration directed at Vis from all sides is another manifestation of the ongoing anxiety generated by the gap between the story's inscribed moralities and the failure of its protagonists to abide by these standards; as the target of this vitriol, Vis is the most sensitive of them all to her own sense of failure, and much of her narrative can be boiled down to her struggle to find the proper resolution for an unwanted love-affair, thrust upon her by a cruel destiny and heartless storyteller.

Of course, the challenge of relating a tale populated by imperfect characters does afford some singular opportunities to the one who does the telling. In taking it upon himself to write about an intrinsically

12. See Graf, "Wîs und Râmîn," 378; Minorsky, *Iranica*, 190.

13. R132/T169/M113/D132:

نه جانت را خرد نه دیده را شرم — نه رایت راستی نه کارت آزرم
بخوردی ننگ و شرم و زینهارا — به ننگ اندر زدی خود را و ما را
ز دین و راستی بیزار گشتی — به چشمِ هر که بودی خوار گشتی

14. R146/T190/M127/D153:

شنیدستم که آن بدمهر بدخو — دگرباره شد اندر بندِ ویرو
همین آهوست ویسِ بدنشان را — بود هر روز دیگر دوستان را

transgressive love-affair, Gorgāni can capitalize on this rupture to critically reappraise the underlying assumptions of his own genre, inverting and breaking the normative structures of the romance to see how and when they reveal their internal incoherence when put under duress. We must acknowledge that this would have been a conscious decision on the author's part; had he not wanted to deal with the many problems raised by Vis's situation, he could have chosen to alter it, as did the poet Lāmiʿī (d. 938/1531) in his translation of the story into Ottoman Turkish. In the latter work, Viru is recast as Vis's cousin, transforming an incestuous marriage into an ideal one, and when he is cruelly poisoned in a political intrigue (thus shutting out any chance for adultery to occur), Rāmin appears on the scene and avenges him; Vis then marries him in gratitude, showing none of the angst and hand-wringing that is so prominent in the Persian text.[15] But just because Gorgāni is willing to let his characters violate the rules of the game does not mean that the rules go away; on the contrary, they are all the more visible due to the enormous pressure they exert on the deviant characters to revert to an acceptable mode of behavior. As Tim Whitmarsh explains:

> Most people's intuitive idea of a cowboy movie might involve a pistol duel, but the absence of such a scene would not disqualify a particular movie from the genre. Similarly, a number of the Greco-Roman novels feature abduction by pirates and shipwrecks, but that does not make those without such episodes any less novelistic. In fact, arguably, quite the opposite is true: it is when a text subverts or frustrates our expectations that the idea of a generic 'law' is most forceful.[16]

Genres thrive on having their boundaries tested. Even the most subversive and irreverent of the ancient novels, the ones that seem to break every rule in the book, inhabit the same "ideological framework" as their "idealistic" counterparts, depicting the same events and scenes and concluding with the same happy ending for the protagonists.[17] The French tale of *Aucassin & Nicolette* makes extensive allusions to other texts, "inviting readers to measure the distance between them and it," as Sarah Kay writes: "Once it is read as parodic, *Aucassin*, a text of no established genre (it announces itself as a *chantefable*, but there is no other example), becomes a major tool for codifying the genre of other works."[18] Such

15. See Minorsky, *Iranica*, 189; for a summary of the story, see E. J. W. Gibb, *History of Ottoman Poetry*, ed. Edward Browne, vol. 3 (London: Luzac, 1904), 360–62.

16. Whitmarsh, "Introduction," 7.

17. Holzberg, *The Ancient Novel: An Introduction*, 11.

18. Sarah Kay, "Genre, parody, and spectacle in *Aucassin et Nicolette* and other short comic tales," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval French Literature*, ed. Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 171–72.

comic and carnivalesque moments are visible as well in *V&R*, such as the scene when the decrepit Nurse takes her place in Mobad's bed, or when the king, still basking in the glow of his military victories, returns home only to find he has been locked out of his own castle. But while I would hesitate to call *V&R* a "parody"—for the tone of the story is by and large quite different from that of *The Golden Ass* or *Aucassin & Nicolette*—Vis's place at the center of an unhappy convergence of transgression, pressure, and blame makes her in a way the embodiment of anxieties that are latent within her genre: the first uneasy whispers of honor tarnished, wives corrupted, and the loss of control and authority can be heard in the subtext of even the opening pages. I am tempted to wonder if the gap that lies between Vis's determination to fulfill the conventions of her role and the structural impossibility of her succeeding might have contributed to a transformation and expansion of the romance genre in Persian literature, introducing a new range of possibilities and raising new questions for later writers to answer by challenging an assumed and naïve ideology of romantic love and forcing its internal contradictions into the open for all to see.

One of the fundamental engines for this transformation from within is found in the act of seduction. The story begins with Mobad's unsuccessful courtship of Shahru, resulting in his arranged marriage with Vis; when Vis comes of age, the Nurse sends her back to Shahru's palace, fearing that she will soon "take flight" and find herself a mate; Mobad is similarly anxious about Vis's chastity while she lives among the dandies and philanderers of Media, yet ironically, he finds that the only way he can obtain her is by seducing her mother; Rāmin, in a similar move, seduces the Nurse to seduce Vis on his behalf, a kind of seduction by proxy; and finally, after much debate and resistance, the Nurse prevails upon Vis to look upon Rāmin and allow love to enter her heart. Gorgāni's interest in the methods, techniques, and rhetoric of seduction certainly makes sense in terms of the plot, as the story proper cannot begin until he establishes how Vis and Rāmin became a couple. At the same time, the necessary presence of seduction—not as a test by which the protagonists prove their virtue, but as the means by which they get together—goes very much against the grain of the love-story genre, alerting us to the fact that *V&R* is already poised to engage with the themes of the romance from an unusual angle. Indeed, Gorgāni does not minimize this process, nor even excuse or justify it with some external element such as the love-

potion in *Tristan & Iseut*; he rather amplifies and expands the theme of seduction to the extent that it occupies the first third of the entire work, establishing it as one of the central concerns of his enterprise. While many romance heroines lament their unlucky fate at having fallen in love, the exceptional nature of Vis's case is evident in the scene of the polo match, in which she expresses her longing to be in love with someone who is *not* the story's hero. The implications of this desire deserve our close attention: as a product of negotiation, persuasion, and coercion, the stability of the lovers' relationship is not to be taken for granted; because Vis had to be talked *into* love with Rāmin, it seems conceivable that she could fall *out* of it as well. Thus, not only are the core ethics of chastity and fidelity undermined by the plot of the story, but the underlying assumptions about the nature of love itself are called into question through Gorgāni's manipulation of the material. This forces us to wonder in what way Gorgāni might have us reconsider the primary topic of the romance genre, love and its impact on lovers—or perhaps more specifically now, given the central role of seduction in this text, as the impact of men upon the women they desire.

To bring some focus to the discussion, the concept of seduction itself requires some elaboration. The key Persian term from my reading is *fariftan*, a word that appears regularly during these negotiations and even makes an appearance in two headings in the manuscript tradition: "Mobad's letter to Shahru and her *fariftan* by money" (*nāma neveshtan-e Mobad nazd-e Shahru va fariftan be māl*) and "The Nurse's *fariftan* of Vis on behalf of Rāmin" (*fariftan-e Dāya Vis rā be jehat-e Rāmin*, chs. 27 and 41 in Table 6). *Fariftan* is a fairly expansive term that can only be equated with the English "seduction" in its broadest semantic range, encompassing a number of other concepts like deception, subversion, beguilement, and temptation.[19] It can be practiced by women on other women, as in the case of Vis and her Nurse, or by men on other men: in the *Shāhnāma*, when Rostam tries to convince Esfandyār to call off his attack, offering him all that he has in his treasury, the latter scornfully replies that such deceit (*farib*) will have

19. Persian synonyms provided in Dekhodā's *Loghatnāma* include *gul zadan* (to trick), *gomrāh kardan* (to lead astray), and *bāzi dādan* (to play someone); and among the various testamonia he provides are the following verses by the poets Ferdowsi and Neẓāmi: "Certainly a demon has beguiled his heart, he is so intent on putting me in fetters" (*hamānā del-ash div befrifta-st · ke bar bastan-e man chonin shifta-st*); "You were not patient with crown and throne, and thus you cheated your reason" (*to bā tāj o bā takht nashkifti · kherad rā bedinguna befrifti*); "It's better for me to abstain from Shirin; I'm no child to be seduced by sweetness" (*marā ān beh ke az Shirin shekibam · na ṭefl-am tā be shirini faribam*). Cf. ʿAlī Akbar Dihkhudā, *Lughat-nāmah*, 136 vols. (Tehran: Chāpkhānah-i Majlis, 1325– [1946–]), 87:240, s. v. "fariftan."

no sway over him.[20] Thus, when I speak of seduction in this chapter, I mean any form of persuasion, enticement, or entrapment that might be made through an appeal to (false) logic, greed, or sexual desire. However, regardless of the form it takes, *fariftan* is a morally charged action, a moment in which the seducee is guided into choosing an evil road over a good one. As Vis asserts, the dangers of seduction are especially acute when it comes to women:

> Women are incomplete in their creation, for they are lustful and of ill repute.
> They'll lose two worlds for the sake of one desire; when desire comes upon them, they never seek honor in wisdom.[21] (41.110–11)

Such misogynist language, invoking all-too-familiar tropes about the lustful, irrational, and deficient female, might seem strange coming from the voice of the story's heroine; how could she consciously participate in an ideology that denigrates her so? The first and most obvious reply is simply that she is a fictional character written by a man, thus serving as a vehicle that confirms his convictions and justifies the other characters' worst suspicions of her flawed and corrupt nature. But there is something much more complex to be unearthed when women—even fictional women—perform and enact these stereotypes, as E. Jane Burns writes: "When the woman's body speaks, it does not simply reverse the terms of the standard equation, assuming the place of the rational male voice that stands traditionally in opposition to a bodily female silence. The female speaker moves toward subjectivity in a way that necessarily destabilizes and redefines the notion of subjectivity itself."[22] In other words, the paradox of the "speaking woman," that is, the meeting of the supposedly incompatible worlds of body and mind, suggests the possibility for such binary oppositions to merge together and dissolve. In this chapter, we will look for such moments in the context of the seduction attempts experienced by the three female protagonists, Vis, Shahru, and the Nurse, who are forced by this external pressure into moral dilemmas inextricably

20. Firdawsī, *Shāhnāmah*, 5:409, v. 1351. Cf. Firdawsī, *In the Dragon's Claws: The Story of Rostam & Esfandiyar from the Persian Book of Kings*, trans., with an introduction by Jerome W. Clinton (Washington, DC: Mage, 1999), 85, 97, 117–18 for this and other examples, and more broadly, Jerome W. Clinton, "The Uses of Guile in the *Shāhnāmah*," *Iranian Studies* 32, no. 2 (1999): 225–26.

21. R108/T136/M90/D96:

زنان در آفرینش ناتمام اند ازیرا خویش‌کام و زشت‌نام اند
دو گیهان گم کنند از بهرِ یک کام چو کام آمد نجویند از خرد نام

22. E. Jane Burns, *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), xv.

tied to conceptions of the female body as a site of weakness, carnality, and material corruption. But even as the women themselves participate at times within this misogynist discourse, their words and actions point to alternative considerations that undermine the narrative they seem to put forth. We shall therefore follow the next few seduction scenes, or scenes in which seduction appears imminent, with an eye for how the female characters, and Vis in particular, articulate a morality of love that is simultaneously conventional and transformative.

3.1 Like unto like

To better understand the tradition that Vis is up against, we should preface our discussion with a little intertextual background. As stated in Chapter 2, I feel that our appreciation for the innovations of *Vis & Rāmin*, as well as our sensitivity to the problems it confronts, is enhanced once we have gotten a feel for the "rules of the game" of its genre in a broad sense; in that same chapter, I argued that these rules are not confined to a single literary or linguistic environment, but are evident and active in various permutations over a period of centuries and in multiple literary traditions, thanks to conditions made possible by the transnational empires that dominated the landscape of southwestern Asia from the Achaemenids to the Abbasids (and beyond). One of the ground rules of the game, something I might venture to call a bedrock principle of the genre, is the trope of natural love born of mutual similitude and suitability, theorized by Michel Foucault and David Konstan as "sexual symmetry" but perhaps more familiar to the general reader as the simple adage of "like unto like."[23] This is a central premise of the romance tradition, a generic reality that acts with as much force and certainty within the world of the novel as gravity works within ours. It guides the likely trajectory of the plot, conditions the choices of its characters, and most importantly, delimits the ethical and moral practices implicit within the ideology of romantic love. Tropes and clichés as familiar to us today as falling in love, love at first sight, the one-and-only, the soulmate, true love, "till death do us part," and so on are all informed by this given that demands a certain self-comportment and self-orientation *vis-à-vis* the beloved. As such, it provides a useful benchmark against which we can investigate the implications of Vis as an adulteress and the ethical considerations

23. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 3:228–32; Konstan, *Sexual Symmetry*.

that undergird her choices. I should add that when I speak of "choices," I am not just interested in exploring personal or psychological impulses that cause her to view the world in a particular way—an important but at times problematic strategy when speaking of fictional characters—but rather that Vis enacts a type of morality that is normative and typical within the literary genre she inhabits. When we take this bedrock into account, it allows us to unearth the complexity of Vis's affair, an act that paradoxically stems from the very principles it violates.

Let us first look at some structural elements held in common by these texts and consider how this structure might be conditioned by the ethos described above. The early Greek novels tend to begin *ab initio* with an introduction of the protagonists or their parents, their lineage, and their place of residence, thus situating the story in a particular time and place. The general purpose of these introductions is to introduce the protagonists as people of high social rank, good breeding, and astonishing beauty; the most business-like version of this model, delivered in a language reminiscent of an oral storyteller, is found in the *Ephesiaca*: "There was in Ephesos a man named Lycomedes, who was one of the most powerful people there. This Lycomedes and his wife Themisto, who was also an Ephesian, had a son, Habrocomes, a prodigy of exceptional handsomeness. Looks like his had never been seen in Ionia or any other land" (1.1).[24] These opening sentences immediately foreground two features about the hero, Habrocomes: that he is noble, and that he is beautiful. Soon after, we are introduced to his future lover, Anthia, with similar nods towards her lineage and her divine beauty. Once the protagonists have been introduced, the story then provides an occasion for them to meet and fall in love. This tends to occur at a public celebration, usually the festival of one of the major goddesses.[25] Again, the *Ephesiaca* provides the most straightforward account: having boasted of his immunity to Love's arrows, Habrocomes is guided by a vengeful Eros to attend the city-wide parade in honor of Artemis (an appropriate deity for the context):

> Then the two saw each other—Anthia was captured by Habrocomes, Habrocomes defeated

24. Chariton and Xenophon of Ephesus, *Two Novels from Ancient Greece*, 131. On the register of *Ephesiaca*, see James N. O'Sullivan, *Xenophon of Ephesus: His Compositional Technique and the Birth of the Novel* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995). It seems that as the genre matured in the third and fourth centuries, writers began to experiment with its formal elements, such as telling the story in the first-person (*Leucippe & Cleitophon*) or beginning *in medias res* (the *Aithiopica*). The fact that *V&R* most closely resembles these earlier texts bolsters Minorksy's thesis that it dates back to the Parthian era, probably the first or second century CE, the same period that saw the composition of *Callirhoe* and the *Ephesiaca*.

25. For discussion of the significance of this feature, see Michael David Muchow, "Passionate Love and Respectable Society in Three Greek Novels" (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1988), 106–119.

> by Eros. He stared at the girl constantly. He wanted to stop looking but couldn't as the god held him mercilessly in his power.
>
> Anthia had her own problems. She took in Habrocomes' beauty as it flowed into her wide open eyes and soon forgot the proprieties that apply to maidens.[26] (1.3)

This topos, incidentally, recurs in Chaucer's *Troilus & Criseyde* (w. ca. 1385), where the hero mocks his friends for falling in love; then, at the festival of Athena, he walks through the temple, looking here and there, until "His eye percede, and so depe it wente, / Til on Criseyde it smot, and ther it stente" (I.272–23).[27] The meeting of Chaireas and Callirhoe also occurs at a public festival of a goddess, this time that of Aphrodite; in this excerpt, the hero and heroine are again introduced as the fairest youths in the land, their nobility is stressed, and their mutual passion (*erōs*) is ignited the instant they lay eyes on each other.

> The Syracusan general Hermocrates, the one who defeated the Athenians, had a daughter named Callirhoe. She was a marvel of a girl, an ornament in all Sicily. Her beauty was not mortal but divine, and not that of a Nereid or a mountain Nymph but of Aphrodite herself. Report of the extraordinary sight spread everywhere. . . . There was a handsome young man, Chaireas, who was more handsome than all the others, on par with Achilles, Nireus, Hippolytos, and Alicibiades as sculptors and artists portray them. His father Ariston was the second most important man in Syracuse after Hermocrates, and there was so much political ill will between them that they would sooner have made a marriage alliance with anyone besides each other. . . .
>
> There was a public festival of Aphrodite, and almost all the women went off to her temple. Callirhoe had not previously appeared in public, but her mother took her out because her father urged her to pay reverence to the goddess. At that precise moment Chaireas was walking home from the gymnasium, shining like a star, the flush of the wrestling yard standing out against the pale radiance of his face like gold on silver. So by chance they ran into one another at a narrow bend in the road and met, the god orchestrating this encounter so that each could see the other. Swiftly they aroused in each other a passion of equal intensity, remarkable beauty meeting its match.[28] (1.1)

In addition to these elements of beauty, nobility, and the instantaneous emergence of love, the temporal setting of *Callirhoe* is also worth noting: Hermocrates was a real historical figure who fought in the Peloponnesian War and was killed in 407 BCE. This pulls the story out of the fairly indeterminate world

26. Chariton and Xenophon of Ephesus, *Two Novels from Ancient Greece*, 133.
27. Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry Dean Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 477.
28. Chariton and Xenophon of Ephesus, *Two Novels from Ancient Greece*, 3–4.

of "the days of yore" and into a slightly more "believable" historical moment.[29] Similar semi-concrete details are found in another early novel, *Metiochos & Parthenope*, which only exists now in fragments; but the Persian translation of this text, *Vāmeq & ʿAẕrā*, confirm that it too follows this narrative pattern. The story begins by introducing the locale and the father of the heroine:

> In a city known as Samos, there was a king of good fortune
> Named Polycrates, a great man of the line of Aiacos, Jupiter's son.[30] (frag. 107–8)

We then learn that in the Thracian Chersonesos (modern-day Gallipoli), Vāmeq, son of Militiades, is forced to flee his home by his vindictive step-mother and comes to Samos to seek asylum.[31] Again, both Polycrates (d. 522–21 BCE) and Militiades (d. ca. 489 BCE) are historical figures, although the author of *Callirhoe* has taken the liberty of making them brothers, so that Vāmeq and ʿAẕrā are not just lovers but paternal cousins, drawing their natural affinity and mutual sympathy ever closer together.[32] Just as Vāmeq arrives at the temple of Hera to do homage, ʿAẕrā appears from the interior:

> As Vāmeq approached the temple, he looked within at once;
> And behold! ʿAẕrā emerged from its door, and the world turned bright.
> So long did Vāmeq gaze at that face that she who would adorn the idols of Gang[33] was entranced by him—
> Those musky curls like a knot tied around a rose, strewn across the breast like chain mail.
> She stared back at Vāmeq and beheld a king at the temple threshold.
> The two youths' hearts began to boil, and their souls were emptied of reason.
> From one look, all upheaval will arise, the sharp fire of love will enter the mind.[34] (86–90)

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29. Tomas Hägg adds that two of the earliest extant examples, *Callirhoe* and the fragmentary *Metiochos & Parthenope*, which are speculated to have been in circulation by the middle of the first century CE, can be seen to exhibit the qualities of a "historical novel": set in a realistic geographic setting in the known (as opposed to mythical or general) past, featuring actual historical figures, and conveying the sense of veracity or verisimilitude; see Hägg, "*Callirhoe* and *Parthenope*: The Beginnings of the Historical Novel," 191. This speaks to the novel's occasional description by the classical critics as a *suntagma dramatikon*, "a fictional narrative depicting the kind of everyday life otherwise portrayed in comedy"; see Holzberg, *The Ancient Novel: An Introduction*, 11.

30. Hägg and Utas, *The Virgin and her Lover*, 216; Persian text 174:

به آیین یکی شهر شامس به نام — یکی شهریار اندر و شادکام
فلقراط نام از درِ مهتری — هم از تخم آقوس بن مشتری

31. Herodotus, *The Histories*, 6.103–17.

32. See ibid., 3.39 *ff.* and Tomas Hägg, "Metiochus at Polycrates' Court," *Eranos* 83 (1985): 92–102.

33. "Gang" is a legedary temple of idols in Turkestan; cf. Hägg and Utas, *The Virgin and her Lover*, 93.

34. ibid., 92–93:

چو وامق به نزدیكِ هیکل رسید — بدان هیکل اندر یکی بنگرید
چنان بُد کی عذرا ز در ناگهان — برون آمد (و) گشت روشن جهان
نگه کرد بدان روی وامق درنگ — کزو خیره شد آن بت آرای گنگ

Even when the sources are not directly inspired from the Greek model, we find the same narrative setup at work with minor variations. The setting of ʿAyyuqi's *Varqa & Golshāh* (which, we remember, is taken from the body of anecdotes that had grown up around the love-poet ʿUrwa b. Ḥizām) is the age of the Prophet, now four centuries in the past, something quite akin to the "Golden Age" evoked by the Greek novelists who set their stories in the time of Pericles. In this glorious milieu, we meet Homām and Helāl, two brothers of the Banu Shaybah, who are outfitted with all the attributes of noble stock and good breeding: "In this [tribe] there were two noble heroes, skilled, auspicious, and beneficent" (*ba-ðu dar do sālār-e vālāmanesh · honarvarz o behruz o nikukonesh*, 5/14). Helāl has a daughter whom he names Golshāh ("Flower-Queen") on account of her shining face and houri lineage (*ke khwarshið rokh buð o ḥurān-nezhād*, 6/5), and Homām has a son of equal beauty called Varqa. As in the case of *Vāmeq & ʿAẕrā*, the lovers are paternal cousins, and the motifs of parallelism and symmetry emphasized by both texts even begin to affect the couples' physical appearance: just as the musky curls and rosy visage described in *V&ʿA* are not explicitly attached to either character, thus making it possible to ascribe them to both, ʿAyyuqi here replaces the lovers' names with the ambiguous pronoun *yak-i*, "one of them"; without any grammar inflection to determine who's who, their bodies collapse into interchangeable ideal figures.

> They were like two cypresses in the garden, swaying gracefully to their beloveds' pleasure:
> One with the face of the moon, one with tulip cheeks,
> one with silver arms, one of cypress height.
> They lived together in a single place, for they were cousins.[35] (6/7–9)

As in the famous story of *Layli & Majnun*, the protagonists of *Varqa & Golshāh* do not fall in love as teenagers when they see each other for the first time, but rather discover the depths of their mutual affection as they mature.[36] This makes the instinctive quality of their bond all the more certain—as the

سر و زلفِ مشکینِ او چون گره   فکنده به گل کرده بر بر زره
همی کرد عذرا به وامق نگاه   یکی شاه دید از در (و) گاه
دلِ هر دو برنا بر آمد به جوش   تو گفتی تهی ماند جان‌شان ز هوش
ز دیدار خیزد همه رست‌خیز   بر آید به مغز آتشِ مهرِ تیز

35. ʿAyyūqī, *Varqa va Gulshāh*, 6; cf. Melikian-Chirvani, "Varqe et Golšâh," 104:

چو دو سرو بوذند در بوستان   گرازان به کام و دلِ دوستان
یکی ماهْ عارض یکی لالهْ خد   یکی سیمْ ساعد یکی سروْ قد
به یک جا بوذند هر دو به هم   کی این ابنِ عمّ بوذ و آن بنتِ عم

36. This is unusual but not unheard-of in the Greek tradition: in the pastoral romance of *Daphnis & Chloe*, the protagonists also grow up together as children and gradually become aware of the erotic dimensions of their mutual affection as they reach puberty.

narrator of *V&G* puts it, it was as though destiny itself had made them for one another: "By divine decree and celestial will, love tied them together as children" (*ze raft-e qażā v-az goẕasht-e sepehr · ham az kuđaki-shān bepayvast mehr*, 6/10). We find the same motif active in French literature: in the twelfth-century stories of *Floire & Blancheflor* and *Aucassin & Nicolette*, the protagonists grow up in the same household and fall in love with as little thought or effort as breathing. They too show the same tendency towards physical isomorphism; when Floire and Blancheflor are inevitably separated, it is the hero's uncanny resemblance to his beloved that enables him to track her down, as though he were a walking MISSING poster: "By my faith," says a bystander, "when I look at him, he seems just like fair Blancheflor. He has just the same face, figure, and appearance as hers; I bet she's his twin sister, or that they're close relatives, so marvelously do they resemble one another" (1732–40).[37] The lovers in *Aucassin & Nicolette* receive identical descriptions in the text, where only the pronouns are swapped: "He/She had blond hair in tight ringlets, bright and cheerful eyes, a shining, slender face, and a high-bridged, well-positioned nose" (II.12, XII.20).[38]

This is our first crucial element of the story: characters who are perfect matches and mates for each other, bound together by an intrinsic affinity of good family, kinship, noble character, and dazzling good

37. Robert d'Orbigny, *Le conte de Floire et Blanchefleur: nouvelle édition critique du texte du manuscrit A* (*Paris, BNF, fr. 375*), ed. Jean-Luc Leclanche (Paris: Champion, 2003), 86. For similar passages, see vv. 1291–96, 1464–76, and 1541–44; English translations of these can be found in Merton Jerome Hubert, *The Romance of Floire and Blanche-fleur: A French Idyllic Poem of the Twelfth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 55, 60, 62, 67.

> Sire, fait Licoris, par foi,
> çou m'est avis, quant jou le voi,
> que çou soit Blanceflor la bele.
> Jou cuit qu'ele est sa suer jumele:
> tel vis, tel cors et tel sanlan
> com ele avoit a cest enfant.
> Jou cuit qu'il sont proçain parant,
> car a merveille son sanlant.

38. Jean Dufournet, ed., *Aucassin et Nicolette* (Paris: Flammarion, 1984), 44, 78: "Il/Ele avoit les caviax/caviaus blons et menus recercelés et les ex vairs et rians et le face clere et traitice et le nes haut et bien assis." Cf. Roger Pensom, *Aucassin et Nicolete: The Poetry of Gender and Growing Up in the French Middle Ages* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1999), 47–48. As in the debate about links between *V&R* and *T&I*, the motival and structural features of these tales have prompted many scholars to speculate on their "oriental" origins. Ahmed Ateş, Ẕabiḥollāh Ṣafā, and Italo Pizzi believe that *Varqa & Golshāh* is the parent of *Floire & Blancheflor*, a theory rejected by Melikian-Chirvani; other scholars attribute *Floire & Blancheflor* to Hispano-Arabic origins (Basset, Huet, Ten Brink, Paris, Bonilla, Brunner); meanwhile, Grieve writes, "If there is any majority opinion, it is probably that the story is of Byzantine origin." See ʿAyyūqī, *Varqa va Gulshāh*, xix–xx; Melikian-Chirvani, "Varqe et Golšâh," 10–11; Patricia E. Grieve, *Floire and Blancheflor and the European Romance* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 18–20.

looks; with such a potent blend of ingredients, it is no wonder that they completely lose their minds for each other the moment they recognize their mirror image.[39] This experience is rarely easy, for both characters have never before faced the turmoil of love, and may not even recognize the strange ailment that afflicts them: when Vāmeq first sees ʿAẕrā, for example, he mutters to himself, “What calamity has befallen me, melting my heart with grief?” (*che patyāra pish-e man āvord bāz · ki del rā gham āvord o del rā godāz*, 106). After their first wordless encounter, the protagonists of *Callirhoe* stagger home and wrestle with their newfound feelings: “Night fell, and it was terrible for them both, for the fire [of love] burned hotter. The girl suffered worse because she could sway nothing, afraid her secret would get out” (1.1).[40] In the *Ephesiaca*, Habrocomes and Anthia also refuse to disclose their their feelings, casting them into such a pitiable state that their anxious parents summon doctors, soothsayers, and priests to cure them of their malady—we might recall the motif of the sages of Yamama and Hajr in the story of ʿUrwa b. Ḥizām. These inner sufferings provide the characters with a potent theme through which they can privately explore the doubts, worries, and pains of a love that they dare not reveal, such as we hear in the inner monologue of Anthia:

> This is not good. What’s happened to me? I’m a girl in love, but I’m too young. I’m suffering weird pains that a good girl shouldn’t feel. I’m crazy for Habrocomes—he’s so handsome . . . but so conceited. How far will my desire go? Where will my trouble end? This man I love only thinks of himself, and I’m a girl who’s constantly being watched. Who will I get to help? Who can I share all this with? Where will I see Habrocomes?[41] (1.4)

Like Callirhoe and Anthia before her, ʿAẕrā takes great pains to conceal her emotions: “She went on her way, turning round so as not to show her face to her mother, lest she realize that her heart was lost, that her fresh face had turned sallow” (103–4).[42] But it is a losing battle, for, as the love-critic Ibn Ḥazm

39. See Muchow, “Passionate Love and Respectable Society in Three Greek Novels,” 13–16.

40. Chariton and Xenophon of Ephesus, *Two Novels from Ancient Greece*, 4.

41. ibid., 134. Passages like this compare very well with scenes in medieval French romances, such as Alexander’s monologue in *Cligès* (Staines, *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, 95):

> The first moment I felt this sickness, had I dared disclose it, I might have spoken to the physician empowered to restore me completely. But it is most painful for me to speak out. Perhaps she would not deign to hear me, or be loath to accept my fee. Therefore it is no wonder that I am worried, for I am very ill. And yet I don’t know what sickness overpowers me, nor whence my pain has come. Do I not know? Yes indeed, I believe I know. Love has brought this sickness on me.

42. Hägg and Utas, *The Virgin and her Lover*, 94–95:

همی رفت عذرا به رَه پیچ پیچ   به مادر همی روی ننْمود هیچ
بدان تا نداند کی بی دل شدست   به رُخ سبز رنگش بزار[ی]د ست

(d. 456/1064) writes, "Love has signs that the astute can follow and the intelligent can discover."[43] That evening, the king's minister Anaximenes notices the "stolen glances" (*dozdida didār*) between the lovers and perceives that ʿAẕrā's eyes have grown as shiny (that is, bloodshot) as a cock's (146–47). Worried by his daughter's declining health, Polycrates has the sage Philetas keep an eye on her; and after witnessing a secret encounter between the lovers, he confronts the miserable girl and berates her for her breach of protocol:

> He said to ʿAẕrā, "Has the world ever seen a harlot like you?
> What hardships await you, now that you've dishonored your family?"[44] (321–22)

Thus willingly or unwillingly, the secret is disclosed, nearly always to a member of the older generation: a parent, a nurse, a sage, or an older, more experienced friend. But these figures usually take the side of the suffering lovers—even Philetas cannot stay angry for long—and through their intercession, the mutual feelings between the two are recognized and acknowledged. The initial joy and relief that the lovers feel at this moment is almost immediately disrupted by external forces that can take all manner of form, ranging from envious rivals to abduction by pirates to, perhaps most unusually, the lovers' own innocence as to the nature of their passion, as we see in *Daphnis & Chloe*.[45] It is during this period of separation and trial that chastity, fidelity, and self-control (*sōphrosynē*) become the central issues at stake, especially for the female characters: Leucippe, after staving off numerous attempts at rape and seduction, is forced to undergo a public ordeal to prove her virginity before she can be wedded to Cleitophon (8.13–14); Anthia remains chaste despite being married twice and working in a brothel (2.9, 2.13, 5.7) Charicleia is described as having "made a god of her virginity" (2.33.5).[46] The heroine's vigilant defense of her

43. ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad Ibn Ḥazm, *Ṭawq al-ḥamāmah fī al-ulfah wa-al-ullāf*, ed. Ṭāhir Aḥmad Makkī (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1975), 27, cf. ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad Ibn Ḥazm, *The Ring of the Dove: a Treatise on the Art and Practice of Arab Love*, trans. A. J. Arberry (London: Luzac Oriental, 1994), 33: *wa-lil-ḥubbi ʿalāmātun yaqfūhā l-faṭinu wa-yahtadī ilayhā l-zakī*. See also Béroul, *The Romance of Tristran*, ed. and trans. Norris J. Lacy (New York: Garland, 1989), 28–29, vv. 573–78: "Oh, God! Who could love / for a year or two and still keep it secret? / For love cannot be hidden: / Often one lover nods to the other; / they often meet to speak together, / both in private and in public."

44. Hägg and Utas, *The Virgin and her Lover*, 124–25:

به عذرا چنین گفت اندر جهان　　بلایه‌تر از هر زنی در زمان
تو اندر جهان از چه تنگ آمدی　　کی بر دودهٔ خویش ننگ آمدی

45. In this latter example, the lovers are well aware of their sexual desire for one another, but they have no idea how to consummate it; see Reardon, *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, 306–7, 323.

46. Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, trans. Tim Whitmarsh, with an introduction by Helen Morales (Oxford University Press, 2001), 140; Chariton and Xenophon of Ephesus, *Two Novels from Ancient Greece*, 148, 152, 173; Reardon, *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, 406, also 46–49, 162–63, and 279–81.

chastity is also a feature of *Layli & Majnun* and *Varqa & Golshāh*. Perhaps most interestingly, Callirhoe does accept marriage with another man, but the decision is made only to save the life of Chaireas's child (3.10–11).[47] To a lesser extent, the male protagonists are subject to the same rules, as Cleitophon affirms to his beloved, "You will find that I have imitated your virginity, if there be any virginity in men" (5.20).[48]

From our discussion thus far, we can extract two fundamental points about the nature and praxis of love in this literary world. The first is that the love between the protagonists of these stories is born from within as an immediate, mutual, and instinctual inclination of the soul; as one character in *Leucippe & Cleitophon* puts it, we need merely wait the moment when the gaze of the beloved penetrates our eyes and conceives the seed of love that lies dormant inside us: "It is the same as with newly born babies: no one teaches them how to feed, but they master the art of their own accord, and they know that their food lies in their mother's breasts. Likewise, a young man who is pregnant with his first desire also needs no instruction to give birth to it. Whensoever the birth-pangs strike, and fate's appointed time arrives, you will unerringly discover a means of parturition, though it be your first pregnancy" (1.10).[49] The second point derives from the first: if love is inextricably linked with the soul and its sometimes inscrutable nature, then total faithfulness and devotion to one's love is the only appropriate response; to go against the natural inclination of the soul is not only a betrayal of the beloved, but of the self, a violation of the soul's integrity by forcibly severing it from the natural object of its desire.[50] In other words, we have in these

47. Perhaps to absolve herself, Callirhoe holds an internal council with herself, her absent husband, and her unborn baby: "I'll put forward my opinion first. I want to die the wife of Chaireas alone. This—not to know the touch of another man—means more to me than my parents, my home, my child." However, she is overruled by her husband, who visits her in a dream, and the unborn child, on the grounds that *he'll look just like his father*, a very important motif we shall encounter in *V&R*. See Chariton and Xenophon of Ephesus, *Two Novels from Ancient Greece*, 36.

48. Cleitophon's insinuation that virginity can never exist in men is very much tongue-in-cheek, as he did have sex with Melite during his separation from Leucippe, to "cure" her of her passion, as he puts it (6.1). Despite its apparent hypocrisy, some scholars read this statement as sincerely meant, since the Greek conception of virginity (*parthenia*) has more to do with marriage and maturity rather than sexual activity; see Giulia Sissa, "Maidenhood without Maidenhead: The Female Body in Ancient Greece," in *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, ed. David M. Halperin, John J. Winkler, and Froma I. Zeitlin (Princeton University Press, 1990), 357–58; Romain Brethes, "How to Be a Man: Towards a Sexual Definition of the Self in Achilles Tatius' Novel *Leucippe and Clitophon*," in *Narrating Desire: Eros, Sex, and Gender in the Ancient Novel*, ed. Marília P. Futre Pinheiro, Marilyn B. Skinner, and Froma I. Zeitlin (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 143–46. In general, however, "these novels move from a heroine with two husbands, through novels which playfully maintain the chastity of its heroines while the hero enjoys the licence of double standards, to a more austere world where both hero and heroine are passionately committed to chastity" (Goldhill, "Genre," 198).

49. Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, 12.

50. As we learn in the story of *ʿAzīz & ʿAzīza* in the *Thousand and One Nights*, "loyalty is beautiful, treachery despicable" (*al-wafāʾu malīḥ, wa-l-ghadru qabīh*); ʿAzīz, who fails to honor this maxim, will find himself castrated for his faithlessness. See

works a metaphysical claim about love and its relation to the soul, and the ethical practice of fidelity that emerges from this claim. Konstan groups these points together under a concept he calls "sexual symmetry," a theory that posits love's genesis from within the soul when it encounters its like in another—the love between soul-mates, as we say today. This premise comes with the crucial corollary that love relationships generated through alternative means—negotiation, coercion, or seduction—have no place in this schema. When news gets out that Chaireas is to wed Callirhoe, one of his rivals complains to his fellows, "When the guy *who didn't do a bit of work to get the girl* is picked instead of us, I won't put up with the insult. We're the ones who stood at her front door, getting no sleep, chatting up babysitters and maids, sending presents to nurses" (1.2).[51] That is precisely the point that the rival has failed to grasp: Chaireas did not *need* to do any "work" to gain his prize, and had he needed to, the love would not have been genuine; the couple's mutual affection was always and already there inside them, just waiting to be born.[52] It is as Gottfried von Strassburg says in his *Tristan*: "When anyone enters at Love's door who has not been admitted from within, it cannot be accounted Love, since it is either Deceit or Force."[53] A seduced lover, in short, is not a lover at all.

As we have seen, some of the early Persian romances are derived from or date to the same era as the Greek novels; but an important question to ask at this point is to what extent do we find these ideas reflected in the wider Islamicate tradition? A full response to this inquiry is a project (or many) unto itself, but we may allow ourselves a few pages to see how a particular topos found in ancient Greek philosophy did indeed find widespread circulation in a variety of sources written by Muslim authors. One of the most famous stories in Plato's *Symposium*, often cited as an important precursor to the metaphysics of sexual symmetry, is the "Myth of Aristophanes," in which the celebrated dramatist tells us of love's origins as a great primordial wound inflicted upon humanity. Once, he says, "the shape of each human being was completely round, with back and sides in a circle; they had four hands each, as many legs as hands,

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Wen-Chin Ouyang, "The Epical Turn of the Romance: Love in the Narrative of ʿUmar al-Nuʿmān," *Oriente Moderno* 22, no. 2 (2003): 494–98; Andras Hamori, "Notes on Two Love Stories from the Thousand and One Nights," *Studia Islamica* 43 (1976): 65–80.

51. Chariton and Xenophon of Ephesus, *Two Novels from Ancient Greece*, 6. Emphasis mine.

52. It is also worth noting the kinds of work the rival describes as necessary to getting to the beloved: seduction, it seems, is a two-step process of first winning over the maid, babysitter, or nurse to one's cause, before setting sights on the main target.

53. Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan: With the 'Tristan' of Thomas*, trans. Arthur Thomas Hatto (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin, 1967), 265.

and two faces, exactly alike, on a rounded neck" (189e).[54] These circular humans were so powerful and so dangerous to the gods that Zeus had to contrive a way to limit their power, and so he split them in two. "This," Aristophanes concludes, "is the source of our desire to love each other":

> Love is born into every human being; it calls back the halves of our original nature together; it tries to make one out of two and heal the wound of human nature. . . . When a person meets the half that is his very own, whatever his orientation, whether it's to young men or not, then something wonderful happens: the two are struck from their sense by love, by a sense of belonging to one another, and by desire, and they don't want to be separated from one another, not even for a moment. (191d, 192c)

The importance of this genesis narrative lies in the fact that it naturalizes love as an instinctual force, an always-already interior presence that forever yearns for an ancient wholeness lost in prehistory. Thus ingrained into the very constitution of the human subject, love does not require any active awareness, effort, or cultivation to be activated; it need only be brought into the presence of its other half, and once awakened, it will never willingly relinquish its object of desire; moreover, as Aristophanes says, this kind of love is a force that drives humanity towards the good, for it guides the lover towards bodily and spiritual reintegration, the recovery of "that which is already ours" (193d).

Although the *Symposium* was unknown by name in the Arabic translations of Greek philosophy, the myth of Aristophanes nevertheless made its way *incognito* into Arabic literary and scientific thought. Through a series of brilliant connections, Dimitri Gutas establishes that Kindī's (d. after 256/870) now-lost *Agreement of the Philosophers about the Allegories of Love* (*Risāla fī khabar ijtimāʿ al-falāsifa ʿalā al-rumūz al-ʿishqīya*) contained a summary of the *Symposium*, that it was circulated among practitioners of medicine in the eleventh century, and that it was recast by Abu Saʿīd b. Bakhtishūʿ (d. after 450/1058) in the following form:

> Certain Ṣābian [= pagan] scholars believe that when humans were first created they were connected [with each other] at the place of the navel, and that Zeus commanded that they be cut apart on account of their strength and power and the deeds they were committing on earth. Thus, a male who was attached to another male now loves males, a female who was attached to another female now loves females and one who was attached to a male now loves males, and < a male > who was attached to a female now loves females. Whoever falls

54. This and subsequent translations are from C. D. C. Reeve, ed., *Plato on Love:* Lysis*,* Symposium*,* Phaedrus*,* Alcibiades*, with Selections from* Republic *and* Laws (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 2006), 47.

> in love, falls in love only with the person to whom he was originally attached and of whose stuff and substance (*ṭīnatihi wa-jawharihi*) he is.[55]

In addition to the treatise by Abu Saʿīd, Gutas draws our attention to another versions of the myth, one by Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq (d. ca. 260/873), and another by the physician Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Tamīmī (d. 370/980), who writes in *The Mingling of the Spirits/Souls* (*Imtizāj al-arwāḥ/al-nufūs*):

> The opinions of Plato, his teacher, Aristotle, Aristodemos, Eryximachos, Aristophanes, and Alkibiades are agreed about [love]: it is a congruence of natural dispositions (*ittifāq akhlāq*), a similarity and kinship of affections (*tashākul maḥabbāt wa-tajānusuhā*), and the craving of every soul for its similar and kindred partner (*shawq kull nafs ilā mushākilihā wa-mujānisihā*) in their original state, which was in the supernal world, before their fall and existence in bodies.[56]

The myth soon found its way into literary writing. Not long after the deaths of Kindī and Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq, the Baghdadi jurist Ibn Dāwūd Isbahānī (d. 297/910), usually remembered as the son of the founder of the Ẓāhirī legal school and the inveterate enemy of the mystical poet and preacher Ḥallāj, composed an influential anthology of love poetry entitled *Kitāb al-zahra* ("The Book of the Flower" or "The Book of Venus").[57] Lois Anita Giffen writes that Ibn Dāwūd "lived in that time when Arabic literature burst into full flower under the competing influence of Hellenism, Persian tradition, and orthodox reaction against these two," and it is possible that his work was intended to incorporate material from all three traditions into a theory that would have been persuasive and palatable for all audiences.[58] He does this by retroactively combing through the Arabic poetic corpus, arguing that the finest verses in the

55. Dimitri Gutas, "Plato's *Symposion* in the Arabic Tradition," *Oriens* 31 (1988): 37 (Arabic text 59).

56. ibid., 40 (Arabic text 56). Note that all of these characters save Aristotle appear in the *Symposium*. Another interesting version of this idea is found in a treatise by Aḥmad al-Sarakhsī (d. 286/889), where he explains the origins of kissing as the desire of one soul to blend with its partner; the discussion concludes: "When the soul of the lover shows the will to (find) the affection of the beloved <and> the soul of the beloved joins it in its affection through (an act of) will on the part of the soul of the lover, the two souls become one through their union by having achieved commonness. It is for this reason that the Sage said: 'Your friend is someone else who is identical to you'." See Franz Rosenthal, "From Arabic Books and Manuscripts VIII: as-Saraḫsî on Love," *JAOS* 81, no. 3 (1961): 224; Lois Anita Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love Among the Arabs: The Development of the Genre* (New York University Press, 1971), 7.

57. Authors who are known to have responded to the *Zahra* include Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064), Sarrāj al-Qārī' (d. 500/1106), Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200) and Ibn Qayyim Jawzīyah (d. 731/1350), the authors of *The Ring of the Dove in Intimacy and Intimates* (*Ṭawq al-ḥamāmah fī l-ulfah wa-l-ullāf*), *The Deaths of Lovers* (*Maṣāriʿ al-ūshshāq*), *The Condemnation of Passion* (*Dhamm al-ḥawā*), and *The Garden for Lovers and Diversion for Yearners* (*Rawḍat al-muḥibbīn wa-nuzhat al-mushtāqīn*) respectively. See ibid., 13; Joseph Norment Bell, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1979), 9; Gutas, "Plato's *Symposion* in the Arabic Tradition," 49.

58. Giffen, *Profane Love*, 12.

canon were the ones that expressed love as an eternal, innately-born affinity for another soul; here, the myth of Aristophanes reappears, woven within a highly intertextual fabric of qur'anic verses, prophetic hadith, the sayings of the philosophers, anecdotes, and citations from poets both before and after the advent of Islam:

> We are told . . . that the Prophet (God bless him and grant him peace) said: "Spirits are regimented battalions: those which know one another associate familiarly together, while those who do not know one another remain at variance." In a similar vein Ṭarafa b. ʿAbd [a pre-Islamic poet] says:
>
> > The spirits of men know one another when they meet:
> > Some of them are enemies to be wary of and [others are] bosom friends.
> > A man who does not some day forgive the joke
> > Of somebody who meant no ill by it is an ignorant fool.
>
> And some philosophers have claimed that God—great be His praise—made every soul in a circular shape, like the body of a ball; He then cut it in half, and thus a half is in every body, and every body that finds the body that bears the other half that was severed from the first half, there arises a love for the old occasion. The different kinds of states people have in this regard are dependent on the refinement of their natures. Jamīl said:
>
> > My soul joined with hers before we were created, or a drop of sperm, or babes
> > in the cradle.
> > As we grew, so did our love; even in death, the covenant shall not be broken.
> > It remains eternal, visiting us in the darkness of our graves and tombs.[59]

59. Abū Bakr Muḥammad Ibn Dāwūd al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Zahrah*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Sāmarrā'ī (al-Zarqā', Jordan: Maktabat al-Manār, 1406 [1985]), 1:53–54. See also Gutas, "Plato's *Symposion* in the Arabic Tradition," 50 and Jamīl ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-ʿUdhrī, *Dīwān*, 77:

أَخبرَنا أَبو بكر محمدُ بنُ إِسحاقَ الصاغاني قال حدثنا ابن أبي مريم قال أخبرنا يحيى بن أيوب عن يحيى بن سعيد عن عمرة عن عائشة عن النبي ﷺ أنَّه قال: الأرواحُ جُنودٌ مُجَنَّدَةٌ فما تَعارفَ منها ائتَلَفَ وما تناكرَ منها اخْتَلف. وفي مثل ذلك يقول طرفة بن العبد:

تعارفُ أرواحُ الرِّجالِ إذا التقَوْا — فمنهمْ عدوٌّ يُتَّقى وخليلُ
وإنَّ امرءاً لَمْ يعفُ يوماً فكاهةً — لمَنْ لمْ يُرِدْ سوءاً بها لَجُهولُ

وزعم بعض المتفلسفين: أنَّ اللهَ جلَّ ثناؤه خلقَ كلَّ روحٍ مدوَّرَةَ الشكلِ على هيئَة الكُرَة. ثمَّ قطعَها أيضاً، وجعل في كلِّ جسدٍ نصفاً، وكلُّ جسدٍ لقِيَ الجسدَ الذي فيه النصفُ الذي قُطع من النصف الذي معه، كان بينهُما عشقٌ للمناسبة القديمة. وتتفاوت الأَحوالُ النَّاسِ في ذلكَ على حسبِ رِقَّةِ طبائعهم. وقد قالَ جميل في ذلك:

تعلَّق روحي روحَها قبلَ خَلْقِنا — وَمِن بعدِ ما كنَّا نِطافاً وفي المهدِ
فَزادَ كما زِدْنا فأَصْبَحَ نامياً — وليسَ إذا مُتنا بِمُنتَقِضِ العهدِ
ولكنَّهُ باقٍ على كل حالةٍ — وزائرُنا في ظُلمةِ القبرِ واللحدِ

Even when the myth of Aristophanes was not explicitly invoked, it is clear that the idea that like souls attract one another was already established by the time the earliest extant treatises on love in Arabic were written. The Basran belletrist Abu ʿUthmān al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868) composed two stand-alone essays that dealt with the theme of love, the *Book on Women* (*Kitāb al-nisāʾ*) and the *Essay on Singing-Girls* (*Kitāb al-qiyān*), which demonstrate the extent to which Neoplatonic love theory had become engrained in the Arabo-Hellenic synthesis of the early Abbasid period. The *Book on Women* offers an analysis of love that bears remarkable affinity with Plato's *Phaedrus*, insofar as it conceives of *ʿishq/erōs* as an excessive state in which desire has swelled beyond the boundaries that reason has set for it (*zāda ʿalā miqdārih*).[60] More pertinent to our discussion is the *Essay on Singing-Girls*, in which Jāḥiẓ defines eros (*ʿishq*) as the admixture of affection, passion, similitude, and familiarity.[61] These first two states can easily exist between two dissimilar or unequal entities: "Affection and passion can combine without forming eros, for this can exist for a child, a friend, a country, or various kinds of clothing, blankets, or pack-animals. But we have never seen one whose body grew ill or whose soul was ruined by affection (*ḥubb*) for his country or his child, even if he burns with longing upon separation."[62] True eros—which, in an interesting alignment with the conventions of the Greek novel, Jāḥiẓ contends can only take place between a man and a woman—can only occur with the presence of *mushākala*, that mutual affinity between two like substances or spirits, "the responding of certain dispositions to one another, the yearning of particular spirits for each other, and the mutual rapprochement of souls."[63]

> So know that if complementarity (*mushākala*) is added to love and to passion—I mean the complementarity of nature, that is the love of men for women, and women for men, which is engrained in the males and females of all animals—then it becomes true eros.[64]

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60. See *Phaedrus* 237d–238c (Reeve, *Plato on Love*, 100–101); Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, *Rasāʾil al-Jāḥiẓ*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanjī, 1964), 3:139–40; Charles Pellat, *The Life and Works of Jāḥiẓ: Translations of Selected Texts*, trans. D. M. Hawke (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 257; and Giffen, *Profane Love*, 85.

61. al-Jāḥiẓ, *Rasāʾil*, 2:166–67: cf. *Life and Works*, 263. The Arabic terms are *ḥubb, hawā, mushākala*, and *ilf*.

62. al-Jāḥiẓ, *Rasāʾil*, 2:168; cf. Pellat, *Life and Works*, 263:

ثمَّ قد يجتمعُ الحبُّ والهوى ولا يسمَّيانِ عشقاً، فيكونُ ذلكَ في الولدِ والصديقِ والبلدِ، والصنفِ من اللباسِ والفُرشِ والدوابِّ. فلم نرَ أَحداً منهم يسقمُ بدنُهُ ولا تتلفُ روحُهُ من حبِّ بلدِهِ ولا ولدِهِ، وإنْ كانَ قد يصيبُهُ عندَ الفراقِ لوعةٌ واحتراق.

63. al-Jāḥiẓ, *Rasāʾil*, 2:169; cf. Pellat, *Life and Works*, 264:

وقلَّ ما يظهرُ المعشوقُ عشقاً إلَّا بدائِهِ، ونكت في صدرِهِ وشَغف فؤادَه. وذلكَ من المشاكلةِ، وإجابةِ بعضِ الطبائع بعضاً، وتَوَقانِ بعضِ الأَنفسِ إلى بعضٍ، وتقاربِ الأَرواح.

64. al-Jāḥiẓ, *Rasāʾil*, 168; cf. Pellat, *Life and Works*, 263:

After Jāḥiẓ, this topos continued to be recycled by later chroniclers of court culture and anecdote literature. The historian Abu l-Ḥasan Masʿūdī (d. ca. 345/956) and the mystic ʿAlī b. Muḥammad Daylamī (fl. late tenth c.) recount the debates of an evening symposium (*majlis*) convened by the Barmakid vizier Yaḥyā b. Khālid on the nature of love; the bulk of the conversation revolves around this same theme of similitude, with terms like concordance (*muṭābaqa*), homogeneity (*mujānasa*), and suitability (*munāsaba*) coming into play.[65] After the tenth century, the topos of similitude continued to propagate itself within the major discourses that engaged with the theory of love; in his survey of later treatises that discuss this topic, J. N. Bell observes that it had become "one of the most fundamental and widely accepted elements in Muslim theories of love during the Middle Ages."[66]

To be fair, though this may have been an important concept about love in late antiquity and into the middle ages, the notion of similitude and inborn affection was by no means the only representation of love to be found. Long before the advent of the Greek novel, love (*erōs*) was understood as an external force that attacked people as though a malady, enervating the body and casting the soul into disorder. In the *Theogony*, Hesiod names *erōs* both the fairest and the most dangerous of the primordial forces, the "limb-melter" who "overpowers the mind and the thoughtful counsel of all the gods and of all human beings in their breasts" (120–22); Plato's *Phaedrus* describes how love casts the soul into "anguish and helpless raving: in its madness the lover's soul cannot sleep at night or stay put by day; it rushes, yearning, wherever it expects to see the person who has that beauty" (251d).[67] The same idea of love as a madness or malady is very much a part of the Arabic tradition; the philologist Aṣmaʿī (d. 213/828) is said to have asked a bedouin Arab about the meaning of the word *ʿishq* and received the following reply:

> It is too sublime to be seen and it is hidden from the eyes of mortals, for it is concealed in the breast like the latent fire in a flint, which when struck produces fire, this fire remaining

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فاعلم أنَّه إذا أُضيفَ إلى الحبِّ والهوى المشاكلةُ، أَعني مشاكلةَ الطبيعةِ، أَي حبَّ الرجلِ النساءَ وحبَّ النساءِ الرجالَ، المركَّبَ في جميع الفحولِ والإناثِ من الحيوانِ، صارَ ذلكَ عشقاً صحيحاً.

65. Grunebaum, "Avicenna's *Risâla fî 'l-ʿišq*," 235–36 and Bell, *Love Theory*, 109. It is interesting to note the makeup of the vizier's gathering, which consists mostly of Shi'i and Mu'tazili theologians, a Khariji, a Murji'i, a jurisconsult, and a Zoroastrian priest (*mōbad*).

66. ibid., 107–8.

67. Hesiod, *Hesiod: Volume I, Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia*, ed. Glenn W. Most (Harvard University Press, 2007), 13; Reeve, *Plato on Love*, 116.

> hidden as long as it is left alone. . . . *ʿIshq* is a kind of madness. Madness has its varieties and *ʿishq* is one of them.[68]

Galenic principles upheld these beliefs: the relentless desire caused by *ʿishq* was known to create an excess of black bile, leading to confusion and insanity, and as evidenced by the hot sighs and flushed extremities of the lover, the gaze of the beloved could literally boil the blood of the poor soul it was trained upon.[69] These motifs receive extensive elaboration in both the Greek novels and the Persian romances: we saw, for example, how "the two youths' hearts began to boil" in *Vāmeq & ʿAẕrā*, and the somewhat hypochondriac narrator of *Leucippe & Cleitophon* provides us with a first-hand account of this experience:

> Beauty wounds deeper than any arrow and floods down through the eyes to the soul ("for the eye is the channel of the wounds of desire"). All kinds of reactions possessed me at once: admiration (*epainos*), stupefaction (*ekplēxis*), trembling (*tromos*), shame (*aidōs*), shamelessness (*anaideia*).[70] (1.4)

The act of spiritual penetration through the gaze and bodily penetration through intercourse were often closely aligned, dividing the archetypal figures of lover and beloved into active and passive roles.[71] Naturally, this dichotomy is far less tidy in practice than the theory would have us believe, but it is still an important mechanism in organizing the structure of literary texts. In the world of the "heroic" story, the

68. Giffen, *Profane Love*, 64.

69. See Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnūn: Love, Madness and Mystic Longing in Niẓāmī's Epic Romance*, 20; Dimitri Gutas, "The Malady of Love," *JAOS* 104, no. 1 (1984): 22; Michael W. Dols, *Majnūn: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society* (Oxford University Press, 1992), 664–66, 84–85, 90–91.

70. Froma I. Zeitlin, "Gendered Ambiguities, Hybrid Formations, and the Imaginary of the Body," in *Narrating Desire: Eros, Sex, and Gender in the Ancient Novel*, ed. Marília P. Futre Pinheiro, Marilyn B. Skinner, and Froma I. Zeitlin (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 123; cf. Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, 7; Reardon, *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, 179. For examples of "boiling blood" in the Persian romances, see pages 158 and 181 in this work.

71. David Halperin writes that in ancient Greek society, sex was both polarizing and hierarchical, a mechanism that defined its participants and sorted them into higher and lower positions on the social ladder. The case was virtually identical in the medieval Persian context, as Lewis writes: "Amorous attention was from the dominant party, the phallocrat, towards the penetrated party, male or female. When a boy passed a certain age and grew facial hair, he himself became a member of the sexually dominant class and would no longer submit to penetration. Violation of these social norms led to scandal and legal prosecution." See David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 30 and Franklin D. Lewis, *Rumi, Past and Present, East and West: The Life, Teachings and Poetry of Jalâl al-Din Rumi* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), 323; also Rowson, "The Effeminates of Early Medina," 685–87; Walter G. Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı, *The Age of Beloveds: Love and the Beloved in Early-Modern Ottoman and European Culture and Society* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 13; Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World* (University of Chicago Press, 2005), 13–51; Hugh Kennedy, "Al-Jāḥiẓ and the Construction of Homosexuality at the Abbasid Court," in *Medieval Sexuality: A Casebook*, ed. April Harper and Caroline Proctor (New York: Routledge, 2008), 175–188; and many of the essays in J. W. Wright and Everett K. Rowson, eds., *Homoeroticism in Classical Arabic Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

male protagonist is generally expected to take the initiative in pursuing and eventually winning possession over his beloved; as Konstan observes, there is no phenomenological requirement that the object of desire love him back to the same degree.[72] However, the opening gambit of two lovers matched in youth, beauty, class, and mutual attraction sets up a different kind of story in which the lovers *fall into* their mutual love instead of pursuing it, and display their heroism not through proactive deeds but through unwavering steadfastness and devotion to the other in the face of the unpredictable forces of fate and happenstance, mastering those aspects of themselves over which they have control. Hence Foucault's notion of *le souci de soi*, the care of the self: the "work" of love is not directed outwards, but inwards; inner constancy, manifested if possible through physical chastity, becomes the "moral center of the Greek novel."[73]

The notion of a love that inspired fidelity, constancy, and chastity among its practitioners was a feature much commented on and praised by medieval Muslim intellectuals. Even when love ended in suffering and death—perhaps the rule rather than the exception—"the dark depths of passion are essentially tragic rather than evil; as long as one conducts oneself honorably such love appears to be a noble adventure of the spirit or at least a noble form of suffering."[74] The running commentary that Ibn Dāwūd provides in his anthology of love-poetry is illustrative of this: for example, in response to the verse "I want for my soul someone other than her, while I see none on par with her and my soul desires her" (*urīdu li-nafsi ghayrahā ḥīna lā arā · muqārabatan minhā wa-nafsī turīduhā*), he writes: "These words, too, are nice on the surface but foul within, for he says of his beloved that he loves her only as long as she is in contact with him, and were she to leave, his heart would turn away from her."[75] Love is not a matter of words, but must be proven through endurance, fortitude, and sincerity. The classic *exemplum*, of course, was found in udhri tales like *Layli & Majnun* and *ʿUrwa & ʿAfrā'*, whose lovers renounced the pleasures of the flesh with the dogged perseverance of desert monks; when they die as a result of their suffering, their

72. Konstan, *Sexual Symmetry*, 36.
73. ibid., 48; cf. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 3:230–32.
74. Giffen, *Profane Love*, 118.
75. Dāwūd, *al-Zahrah*, 1:66:

وهذا الكلامُ أَيضاً حسنُ الظاهرِ قبيحُ الباطنِ، وذلكَ أَنَّهُ يُعبِّرُ عن صاحبتِهِ أَنَّهُ إنَّما يُريدُها ما دامت تواصِلُهُ، فإذا هجرتْهُ انصرفَ عنها قَلبُه.

tombs become sites of veneration and pilgrimage.[76] It is again Ibn Dāwūd who formalizes this in a chapter in the *Zahra* entitled "He who is noble must be chaste" (*man kāna ẓarīfan fa-l-yakun ʿafīfan*), where he relates the following hadith: "Whosoever loves, is chaste, hides his love, and perishes, is a martyr; and if the two lovers are not chaste and commit sin, it is incumbent on both of them that they abandon their love for each other."[77] This tradition was widely transmitted by a great number of subsequent writers, the majority of whom seem to have accepted passionate love as long as it entailed the suppression of the carnal self: even a theorist as suspicious of the dangerous allure of love as Ibn al-Qayyim Jawzīyah (d. 751/1350) cannot condemn it outright, but rather says that, if directed towards the same things God loves—namely, chastity, virtue, and moral rectitude—it can be a laudable state.[78]

Naturally, the archetype of sexual symmetry is rarely left uncomplicated, nor can it fully override other contentions about the nature and praxis of love. Critics responding to Foucault have warned us not to ignore the ongoing imbalances of power between men and women in this literature; Goldhill puts it succinctly when he writes, "for all the philosopher's arguments for the sharing of virtue and the harmony of marital reciprocity, symmetry is not equivalence (and certainly not equality)."[79] These caveats are very well taken, and indeed much of the following discussion will reveal the extent to which the love-negotiations between men and women in this story reveal a persistent asymmetry in terms of social autonomy and political power; but for the moment, it is important to recognize the concept of "like unto

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76. Cf. Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnūn: Love, Madness and Mystic Longing in Niẓāmī's Epic Romance*, 63–74, 89–113, 127–138. For two examples of this kind of narrative, see the story of ʿUrwa b. Ḥizām in Appendix C and *Layli & Majnun* in Khairallah, *Love, Madness, and Poetry*, 135–43; the anecdotes in Ibn Qutayba's *Choice Reports*, under the heading "On Lovers (Except Those Who Were Poets)" (*Bāb al-ʿushshāq siwā ʿushshāq al-shuʿarā'*) provide some shorter examples of the same; see Ibn Qutaybah, *ʿUyūn al-aḫbār*, 128–30. An interesting variation on the motif is found in the story of *ʿAzīz & ʿAzīza*, where the woman who has diverted ʿAzīz's attention away from his cousin ʿAzīza, who dies in grief at losing him, visits the latter's grave to venerate the martyred lover; see J. C. Mardrus and Powys Mathers, trans., *The Book of the Thousand Nights and One Night*, 4 vols. (London: Routledge, 1986), 1:506–7.

77. Dāwūd, *al-Zahrah*, 1:117:

مَن عَشِقَ فعَفَّ فكَتَمَهُ فماتَ فهو شهيدٌ ولو لم تكُنْ عفَّةُ المتحابَّين عن الأَدناسِ وتحاميهما ما يَنْكَرُ في عُرف كافة النَّاس محرَّماً في الشرائعِ ولا مستقبحاً في الطَّبائعِ لكانَ الواجبُ على كلِّ واحدٍ منهما تَركَهُ إبقاءِ ودّه عند صاحبِهِ وإبقاء على ودِّ صاحبه عنده.

78. Cf. Bell, *Love Theory*, 163; Hamori, "Notes on Two Love Stories from the Thousand and One Nights," 70–71; Lutz Richter-Bernburg, "Plato of Mind and Joseph of Countenance: The Notion of Love and the Ideal Beloved in Kay Kā'ūs b. Iskandar's *Andarznāme*," *Oriens* 36 (2001): 276–287. For a thorough review of the "martyrs of love" tradition in Arabic love-treatises, see Giffen, *Profane Love*, 99–115.

79. Simon Goldhill, *Foucault's Virginity: Ancient Erotic Fiction and the History of Sexuality* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 160; see also Morales, "The History of Sexuality."

like" *as an ideal*, and its corollary practices of constancy and chastity as a generic norm, as the backdrop in which *V&R* and similar stories unfold. We can see the weight of such norms in the concluding scene of the *Ephesiaca*, in which Anthia and Habrocomes are finally reunited: even before the lovers can celebrate their union, they must reassure one another that their honor is inviolate—a need, as the narrator notes in a wry afterthought, that is borne out by the expectations of their story.

> "Husband and master, I've got you back after I wandered over so much land and sea, after escaping bandits' threats, pirates' plots, the pimps' outrages, chains, pits, clubs, drugs, and tombs. But Habrocomes, master of my soul, I've come to you just as I was when first I left for Syria from Tyre. No one persuaded me to stray. Not Moiris in Syria. Not Perilaos in Cicilia. Not Psammis or Polyidos in Egypt. Not Anchialos in Ethiopia. Not my master in Taras. No, I used every trick of faithfulness and have remained pure for you.
>
> "And you, Habrocomes, did *you* stay true? Or did some other beautiful woman find greater favor than me with you? Or did someone force you to forget your oaths and me?"
>
> As she said this, she kissed him continually.
>
> "No!" Habrocomes said. "I swear to you by the day that we have desired and attained at long last that I found no girl beautiful, nor did it please me to look upon any other woman. No, you have your Habrocomes back as pure as you left him in prison in Tyre."
>
> All night long they made their cases to each other and easily convinced each other since that's what they wanted.[80] (5.14)

At this point, we may pause and take stock of some of our general conclusions from this overview, an attempt at a "thick description" of a number of literary traditions that are built around the topos of the adventures of two lovers. Though a survey of this breadth of material cannot be exhaustive, I believe it is possible to identify a number of shared premises that allow us to lay down the ground rules of something that looks to be a fairly stable genre of writing across these various traditions, the bedrock expectations of the romance:

- It is apparent to the reader who the lover and beloved of the story are, and it is equally apparent to the protagonists who their significant other is going to be; they fall in love at once, and madly so. The narrative is built around the protagonists' love-affair, and (as we saw in Chapter 2) their names usually constitute the title of the story.
- The story, as Bakhtin observed, is built around two temporal poles: the moment the heroes fall in love, and the moment that their love is consummated in marriage—or, in a variation of the theme, the moment that they die in the pain of their mutual absence. Between these two poles can fall a

80. Chariton and Xenophon of Ephesus, *Two Novels from Ancient Greece*, 180.

theoretically unlimited number of episodes that recount the various adventures and trials faced by the two lovers over the duration of their separation.[81]

- In either case, the lovers' heroism and nobility is proven by their steadfast loyalty to one another. Chastity, especially in women, is a cardinal virtue; lovers who are unchaste are not lovers at all. Those who are united in marriage are rewarded with honor and veneration; those who perish in the attempt are remembered as saints and martyrs.

These rules are a combination of prescription and description; were we to take any text named in the course of this discussion, we would find some amount of adherence to these rules, loosened with many variations and, occasionally, outright violations. Yet the bond is held up by repetition and redeployment: even with works as distinct from one another as *Callirhoe*, *Leucippe & Cleitophon*, and the *Aithiopica*—*Vāmeq & ʿAẕrā*, *Varqa & Golshāh*, and *Vis & Rāmin*—*Aucassin & Nicolette*, *Floire & Blancheflor*, and *Troilus & Criseyde*—we can see that they are speaking to one another through their general engagement with these time-honored strategies, premises, motifs, and structures. As we shall see, these literary features exert an enormous influence over the characters in *Vis & Rāmin*, almost like a normative gravity; it is when the rules are broken that things get interesting.

3.2 A tryst deferred

> Just as the audiences like formulae and repetitions, so too they like stock openings. They feel immediately at home; their uncertain attention is caught without difficulty by the familiarity of the theme, and they listen to see how it is developed and what new point is given to it. . . . The themes which open poems or episodes may often be quite simple and conventional, but it is instructive to see how they are made to fit into a narrative of action.
>
> —C. M. Bowra[82]

The opening scene of *Vis & Rāmin* adheres to a narrative convention that seems to have been well-established by the time we reach the earliest extant versions of the Greek novel. As we have seen in *Callirhoe* and the *Ephesiaca*, the plot is set in motion when the protagonists meet and fall in love at a public festival. *Metiochos & Parthenope*, and its Persian adaptation *Vāmeq & ʿAẕrā*, offer a variation on the theme by telling the story of how the heroine's parents met, fell in love, and got married, essentially

81. Cf. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 84–110.
82. Cecil Maurice Bowra, *Heroic Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1964), 280.

Table 6: Part II: The seduction of Vis (8–45)

A. Mobad propositions Shahru at the Nowruz feast.	Mobad celebrates the new year with a great banquet (8); a description of the beautiful women present, Shahru of Media the most splendid among them (9); Mobad asks Shahru to be his consort; she refuses, but promises him her daughter, should she have one (10).
B. Vis is born, raised, and married to Viru.	Many years later, Vis is born and given to her Nurse to be raised in Khuzan (11); Vis and Rāmin grow up in the Nurse's care until Rāmin is recalled to Marv at the age of ten (12); the Nurse complains of Vis's vanity to Shahru, who recalls her daughter to Media (13); Shahru marries Vis to her brother Viru (14).
C. Mobad demands Vis and is rejected.	At the wedding celebration, Mobad's brother Zard appears with a letter from the King summoning Vis to his court in Marv, fearing the poets and philanderers of Media (15); Vis ridicules Zard and rejects Mobad (16); Zard returns to Marv and tells Mobad of his humiliation (17); incensed, Mobad musters an army to march on Media (18); Viru learns of Mobad's march and gathers his own army (19); a great battle is fought in which Vis's father Qāren is killed (20); Viru rallies his troops and routs Mobad from the plain, but is distracted by an uprising in Daylam; Mobad, meanwhile, steals away to Vis's fortress in Gurab (21); abandoned by Viru, Vis laments her state (22).
D. Mobad seduces Shahru with bribes and admonitions, and Shahru surrenders Vis.	Mobad sends a message to Vis imploring her to honor her mother's contract and come to him (23); Vis rejects Mobad's offer, citing her oath to Viru, and reveals that she is still a virgin (24); the messenger returns with Vis's reply, and Mobad's ardor is only enflamed by this news (25); Mobad consults with his brothers; Rāmin advises him to give up, while Zard tells him to bribe Shahru (26); Mobad follows Zard's advice and writes Shahru a letter reminding her of her sacred oath (27); a description of the bountiful treasures Mobad sends to Shahru (28); Shahru surrenders and opens the castle gates; a description of the night sky (29); Mobad enters the castle and captures Vis (30); Viru learns of his mother's treason and mourns his loss, while Mobad revels in his success (31).
E. Rāmin falls in love with Vis and wins the Nurse over to his side.	On the journey home, Rāmin espies Vis inside her litter and falls in love (32); Mobad brings Vis to Marv with much pomp and circumstance, but Vis withdraws to her quarters (33); the Nurse joins Vis and advises her to accept her new circumstances (34); Vis replies that she will accept no man save Viru (35); the Nurse convinces Vis to at least leave her seclusion for the sake of her honor (36); the Nurse arrays Vis, while Mobad plays polo (37); Vis asks the Nurse to 'bind' Mobad through magic, which the Nurse reluctantly does, but the talisman is washed away (38); Rāmin walks in the garden, lamenting his love for Vis (39); he encounters the Nurse and asks her to intercede with Vis on his behalf; when she refuses, he wins her over through seduction (40).
F. The Nurse seduces Vis on Rāmin's behalf.	The Nurse counsels Vis to take Rāmin as a lover and Vis vehemently rejects the proposal (41); Rāmin implores the Nurse to try again, so she resorts to a number of stratagems that all fail; Rāmin then despairs of his life, and the Nurse returns to Vis and begs her to have mercy, a request she cannot refuse (42); the Nurse brings Vis to the roof to look on Rāmin at court; Vis falls in love upon seeing him, but fights within herself over what to do, while the Nurse tells Rāmin that she has succeeded (43); Vis chastises the Nurse for leading her into sin, but consents to have a meeting with Rāmin (44); while Mobad is out, Rāmin enters Vis's quarters through the roof; Vis presses Rāmin to swear his loyalty, and gives him violets as a token of their mutual oaths; they become lovers (45).

providing a prequel to the story proper.[83] *Vis & Rāmin* also begins with a prequel, using the scene of the feast to relate the circumstances surrounding Vis's birth; but although it builds off the same narrative armature as these other texts, it initiates a variation on the theme with profound implications for the relationships that will form in its aftermath. While the festival scenes in *M&P* and *V&ʿA* result in union and birth, the prospective liaison in *V&R* is botched and leads to a sexual tryst deferred onto the body of an unborn child. The narrator is unequivocal in his condemnation of this move: immediately after the contract is signed, he exclaims, "Look at what hardship they fell into, when they gave one yet unborn away in marriage!" (*negar tā dar che sakhti uftādand · ke nāzāda ʿarusi rā bedādand*, 10.54). Something seems to have gone awry; rather than offering the conditions for an ideal love relationship to form, the prequel is an account of these conditions' violation, setting up all those involved for a rough time ahead.

Yet on first glance, one could not find a more appropriate time and place for love: the time is spring; the locale, a royal garden. Again, this is a classic topos in the broad tradition of love-stories: the narrator of *Leucippe & Cleitophon* begins his tale in a grove thick with plane-trees and running water, "a setting," his interlocutor remarks, "just right for erotic fiction" (*mythōn erōtikōn*, 1.2).[84] So too does the story of *Troilus & Criseyde* begin in "Aperil, whan clothed is the mede / With newe grene, of lusty Ver the pryme, / And swote smellen floures whyte and rede" (1.156–58). Kaykāvus b. Eskandar confirms the association of springtime and love in the Iranian context in his *Qābusnāma*:

> Spring is the best suited [for love] of all the seasons, for during springtime, the air is moderate, the fountains overflowing, and the whole world turns to joy and delight. The world that was old becomes young again, and by its influence, our bodies, which are microcosms, do the same: the humors within our bodies become balanced, the blood in our veins increases, the semen in the loins grows abundant, and without any intention, men grow needful of sex and pleasure.[85]

83. Hägg and Utas read this as a way of widening the scope of the novel and lending the protagonists greater depth and characterization; see *The Virgin and her Lover*, 217. This narrative technique is further developed in the French romance *Cligès*, which expands the "prequel" to such an extent as to create diptych featuring two generations of lover-kings, the father and his son. A similar back-story is found in Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, 45–64.

84. Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, 5; cf. Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, trans. S. Gaselee, Loeb Classical Library 45 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 10. See also *Leucippe & Cleitophon* 1.15 for a lengthy—and highly erotic—description of the garden where Cleitophon makes his first move on Leucippe.

85. Kaykāvūs ibn Iskandar ibn Qābūs, *Qābūs nāmah*, 86; cf. *Qābūs nāmah* (*tr. Levy*), 77–78.
از همه وقتی وقتِ بهار سازد و از این بُوَد که در فصلِ بهار هوا معتدل گردد و چشم‌ها زیادت گردد و جهان روی به خوشی و راحت نهد. پس عالم که پیرست جوان شود از تأثیرِ وی، تنِ ما که عالمِ صغیرست همچنان شود. طبایع اندر تنِ ما معتدل شود

With all its connotations of renewal, abundance, pleasure, and fertility, the amorous promises of spring are brought to the foreground by the specific occasion that begins the poem: the day is Nowruz, the beginning of the Iranian new year that takes place on the vernal equinox. King Mobad has invited all of his vassals to partake in the feast and merry-making at his palatial garden in Marv. "What a joyous springtime feast!" (*che khorram jashn bud andar bahārān*, 8.22) cries the narrator, as he proceeds to list the many lords and nobles who have gathered around the king, augmenting his royal splendor. But the women receive equal attention in this empyrean gathering, as we shall see in a moment; even in the king's presence, it looks as though the lords and ladies have more than royal decorum on their minds:

> Before him sat warriors, and around him stood moon-faced beauties:
> Nobles like hunting lions, and idols like gazelles in the field.
> Neither did gazelle shy at seeing lion, nor did lion tire of watching her;
> Wine-full cups were passed among them, like the shining moon in its phases.
> Blossoms rained from the trees like a shower of dirhams upon the fortunate,
> Cloyed by clouds of burning musk, in color and scent like a maiden's locks.
> Here the minstrels sang their odes to wine; there the nightingales wooed the rose.
> The wine made lips more beautiful, just as the birds accompanied the bards.
> Two kinds of tulips bloomed on the beloved's face:
> one out of beauty, one from the chalice.[86] (8.33–41)

This passage thrums with erotic energy: the amorous, nearly hungry glances cast between the lions and gazelles; the goblets full of wine, loosening tongues and opening hearts; the trees in full blossom, releasing their musky fragrance; the songs of birds and minstrels comingling in the air. The king's banquet offers an intoxicating assault on all the senses, whose intensity is only bolstered by the next section of the poem, entitled "Gazing at the moon-faced beauties at King Mobad's feast" (*naẓāra kardan-e*

و خون اندر رگ‌های ما زیادت شود و منی در پشت زیادت گردد، بی‌قصد مردم حاجتمندِ تمتّع و بماشرت گردد.

86. R42/T34/M20/D2:

به پیش اندر نشسته جنگجویان — ز بالا ایستاده ماهرویان
بزرگان مثلِ شیرانِ شکاری — بتان چون آهوانِ مرغزاری
نه آهو می‌رمید از دیدنِ شیر — نه شیرِ تند گشت از دیدنش سیر
قدح پر باده گردان در میان‌شان — چنان کاندر منازل ماهِ رخشان
همی بارید گلبرگ از درختان — چو بارانِ درم بر نیک‌بختان
چو ابری بسته دادِ مُشک سوزان — به رنگ و بوی زلفِ دلفروزان
ز یکسو مطربان نالنده بر مُل — دگر سو بلبلان نالنده بر گل
نکوتر کرده می نوشینْ‌لبان را — چو خوشتر کرده بلبل مطربان را
به روی دوست بر دو گونه لاله — بتان را از نکویی وز پیاله

māhruyān dar bazm-e Shāh Mobad).[87] Such an activity was counted among the most erotic activities one could do in medieval Islamic love-theory; the majority of hadith transmitters and jurists contended that all glances after the first were strictly forbidden, lest they engrave the image of the beloved in the onlooker's mind and torment him night and day, robbing him of sleep, self-control, and sanity.[88] Again, the parallel with Greek literature is illuminating: the narrator of *Leucippe & Cleitophon* tells us that "the eyes receive each others' reflections and they take an impression of images of the body as in a mirror. Such outpouring of beauty, flowing down through them into the soul is a kind of copulation at a distance" (1.9).[89] Gorgāni thus treads on the borders of the illicit of this passage, turning this "copulation from a distance" into a literary spectacle in which the reader or listener is invited to picture the titillating image of one beauty after another, like so many models strutting down the cat-walk:

> The fairy-faced beauties of the world all came under view at Mobad's feast:
> Like Shahru, the moon-daughter of Māh; like Sarveāzād, from Azerbayjan;
> From Gorgan came Ābnush, of moon-like form; from Dehestan, Nāzedelbar;
> From Rayy, Dinārgis and Zaringis; from Kuhestan, Shirin and Farangis;
> From Isfahan, two favored idols like the sun and moon, Ābnāz and Ābnāhid:
> Both of them the daughters of scribes, and Golāb and Yāsmin, the daughters of ministers;
> Two of enchanting gaze, Golbuy and Minuy, their faces a compound of rose and wine;
> From Saveh, the margrave's renowned daughter, whom the spring itself would rob for beauty
> and color;
> So too was Nāz and Āzargun and Golgun, of snow-white face and blood-red cheeks;
> The king's tall wife, Sahi, of silver body, honeyed lips, and moonlike mien;
> And sweet-lipped Nush from Hamavar, a jasmine in color, scent, and breast.
> Every moon-faced one among them was attended by thousands of beautiful maidens,
> Idols from China, Turkestan, Greece, and Africa; violet-haired, rose-faced,
> jasmine-breasted.

87. Not all of the manuscripts include this heading, but the section that follows is universally attested. See Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī, *Vis & Rāmin* (*eds. T'odua and Gvaxaria*), 36, note 15.

88. This is discussed in detail by Ibn al-Jawzī in his *Condemnation of Passion*; cf. Giffen, *Profane Love*, 117–32 for an extensive discussion of this debate; also Bell, *Love Theory*, 125–47. The erotics of the gaze played an essential role, and were somewhat systematized, in the sufi-inflected practice of *shāhed-bāzi*, gazing at the forms and faces of beautiful boys, of which there is a rich reserve of theoretical and literary scholarship: cf. Sīrūs Shamīsā, *Shāhid'bāzī dar adabīyāt-i Fārsī* (Tehran: Firdaws, 2002); Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women With Mustaches and Men Without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 17–18; Cyrus Ali Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics: Beauty, Love, and the Human Form in the Writings of Ibn 'Arabi and 'Iraqi* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2011), 85–119; Lloyd Ridgeon, "The Controversy of Shaykh Awḥad al-Dīn Kirmānī and Handsome, Moon-Faced Youths: A Case Study of *Shāhid-Bāzī* in Medieval Sufism," *Journal of Sufi Studies* 1, no. 1 (2012): 3–30; and Chapter Four in the forthcoming dissertation by Matthew Thomas Miller, "The Poetics of the Sufi Carnival: The 'Rogue Lyrics' (*Qalandariyyāt*) of Sanā'ī, 'Aṭṭār, and 'Erāqī" (PhD diss., Washington University in Saint Louis, 2016).

89. Zeitlin, "Gendered Ambiguities," 123; cf. Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, 11. I removed the transliterated Greek terms from this citation.

> The fairest and most beautiful of all was Shahru, her eyes and lips both pain and salve to the soul.[90] (9.1–13, 18)

According to Pierre Briant, such a "parade of beauties" was common practice among the Achaemenid kings: "The most beautiful women of the Empire were required to come to enchant the nights of the Great King, just as the most celebrated products of the various countries were required to come to enhance the luxury of the royal table, and the scents of the exotic plants accompanied the Great King on his paradisiacal promenades."[91] But this scene seems to be more a celebration of love than of royal power; the emblematic character of the women presented, with names like "Noble Cypress" (Sarveāzād), "Sweet Water" (Ābnush), "Heart-stealing Coquetry" (Nāzedelbar), "Golden Hair" (Dinārgis and Zaringis), "Rosewater" (Golāb), "Jasmine" (Yāsmin), and so on, emphasizes the erotic overflow of this scene in a way that would have not been possible if the poet had listed more pseudo-realistic historical figures.[92] Again, the eroticized setting has precedent in the Greek novels and other romances. In the scene where Anthia and Habrocomes meet, the narrator begins by describing the other girls in the procession, concluding with his heroine, who surpasses her comrades in beauty: "Each of them was dressed as if she was meeting a lover. Leading the contingent of maidens was Anthia . . . Anthia's beauty was something to marvel at, far beyond that of the other girls" (1.2).[93] We can also observe Troilus and his buddies observing the girls in *Troilus & Criseyde*:

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90. R43/T36/M21/D3:

پریرویانِ گیتی هامواره   شده بر بزمگاهِ او نظاره
چو شهرو ماه‌دخت از ماه‌آباد   چو آذربادگانی شروِ آزاد
ز گرگان آبنوشِ ماه‌پیکر   همیدون از دهستان نازدلبر
ز ری دینارگیس و هم زرین‌گیس   ز بومِ کوه شیرین و فرنگیس
ز اصفاهان دو بت چون ماه و خورشید   خجسته آب‌ناز و آب‌ناهید
به گوهر هر دوان دختِ دبیران   گلاب و یاسمن دختِ وزیران
دو جادوچشم چون گلبوی و مینوی   سرشته از گل و می هر دو را روی
ز ساوه نامور دختِ کنارنگ   کزو بردی بهاران خوشی و رنگ
همیدون ناز و آذرگون و گلگون   به رخ چون برف و بر وی ریخته خون
سهی نام و سهی بالا زنِ شاه   تو از سیم و لب از نوش و رخ از ماه
شکرلب نوش از بومِ هماور   سمن‌رنگ و سمن‌بوی و سمن‌بر
نکوتر بود و خوشتر شهربانو   به چشم و لب روان را درد و دارو

91. Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbraun, 2002), 203.

92. T'odua discusses this further in "Yik dū sukhan," xxiii; cf. Hanaway, "Formal Elements in the Persian Popular Romances," 155 for more general info on emblematic or generic naming in the Persian romance.

93. Chariton and Xenophon of Ephesus, *Two Novels from Ancient Greece*, 132. The author of *Callirhoe* is more direct in his approach: "Who could describe that assembly, where Eros was the demagogue?" (1.1). ibid., 5; cf. Reardon, *Collected Ancient Greek Novels*, 23.

> This Troilus, as he was wont to gyde
> His yonge knightes, ladde hem up and doun
> In thilke large temple on every syde,
> Biholding ay the ladyes of the toun,
> Now here, now there, for no devocioun
> Hadde he to noon, to reven him his reste,
> But gan to preyse and lakken whom him leste. (183–89)

With this in mind, it is notable that Mobad's wife Sahi, presumably the high queen, is just one of the many beauties named in this parade; it is the one and only time she makes an appearance in the story. It is rather Shahru (short for *Shahrbānu*, "Lady of the Land") who both heads the list and concludes it, with the remaining dozen lines of this section devoted exclusively to the description of her matchless beauty. The stage is set, one would imagine, for an amorous encounter between this loveliest of maidens and the King of Kings.

This encounter does indeed happen, but not at all in the way we would be led to believe from the precedent established in the other romances. We might expect love to take root instantly and automatically, along the lines of texts we have discussed above; we might expect a marriage and the auspicious birth of the story's protagonist. However, the actions and language of the actors seem strangely detached from the prevalent discourse of love invited by this landscape. Mobad's proposition is rooted in an objectifying impulse, the idea that love can be contained within parameters of material value, while Shahru's rejection of his offer reveals the abiding presence of social pressures and responsibilities that constrain her as a woman of lesser rank, even in this elysian landscape. Although they differ in their points of concern, both conceptualizations reflect a pragmatic approach, materially and socially grounded, that lacks the idealistic and sometimes iconoclastic dimensions of erotic love. Let us watch Mobad make his move:

> Thus it happened that one day the King of Kings, whom everyone called Mobad Manikān,
> Saw that graceful cypress of silver body, that smiling idol and moon among ladies,
> And summoned her in private. He sat her upon the throne like the new moon,
> Gave her a bouquet of roses to match the color of the face of that fairy-born houri,
> And said with a smile and a wink, "May you always be gay and joyful!
> You should join my embrace, as wife or as lover, for it is good to seek the world's pleasures with you."[94] (10.1–7)

94. R45/T38/M23/D5:

This nonchalant overture immediately raises a number of red flags. The first warning lies in what Mobad does *not* say, or do: he does not cry out in anguish as his gaze falls upon Shahru; there is no talk of bleeding hearts and blood-shot eyes; pain and suffering are absent from this place of bounty and rebirth. His proposition is unexpectedly candid; he simply sees a beautiful woman, decides he likes her, and summons her to his chambers to make his offer. Such a move is practically unthinkable in the love-stories of the Helleno-Arabic tradition, which is never too distant from the ancient conception of love as a madness that enters the body through the eyes and disorients the soul. We have witnessed the reactions of Chaireas and Callirhoe, Habrocomes and Anthia, and Vāmeq and ʿAẕrā when they first meet each other, the overwhelming flood of confused emotions they experience when their souls come into proximity with their natural counterpart and receive the "wound of desire" as Cleitophon described it. Therein might lie the difference between the love of a youth, who sees the most beautiful thing in the world for the first time, and that of a mature king who is used to getting what he wants; for we shall see the motif of "love at first sight" in *V&R* as well, but not here at the Nowruz banquet, nor in the person of Mobad. It is only later, when Rāmin sees Vis's face through a chance breeze that pulls aside the curtain of her litter, that we see Gorgāni pull out the stops in describing the devastating effect of love's arrows, a reaction so intense that the astonished onlookers believe the young man has suffered an epileptic fit (*bād-e ṣarʿ*, 32.33).[95]

> When Rāmin saw that moon's visage, you'd say he was suddenly struck by an arrow:
> He fell from the back of his mighty horse, like a leaf blown off the tree.
> His brain began to boil from the fire in his heart; soul and reason fled from body and mind.
> Love for Vis entered his heart through his eyes, sealing his heart in a single glance.
> He laid there for a while, fallen like a reeling drunkard;
> His rosy cheeks saffron, his ruby lips now blue as the sky.

چنان آمد که روزی شاهِ شاهان — که خواندندش همی موبد منیکان
بدید آن سیمتنْ سروِ روان را — بتِ خندان و ماهِ بانوان را
به تنهایی مرُو را پیش خود خواند — بسانِ ماهِ نو بر گاه بنشاند
به رنگِ روی آن حورِ پری‌زاد — گلِ صد برگ یک دسته بدو داد
به ناز و خنده و باز و خوشّی — بدو گفت ای همه خوبی و گشّی
به گیتی کام‌راندن با تو نیکوست — تو بایی در برم یا جفت یا دوست

95. It is perhaps worth wondering if the phrase "A strong spring breeze arose" (*bar āmad tondbād-e nowbahāri*) is meant to resonate with Ferdowsi's parable of the death of Sohrāb at the hands of his father, a story deeply concerned with the question of fate and its workings. The full passage goes as follows: "When a strong wind arises and throws an unripe fruit to the ground, do we call it just or unjust? Accident or design?" (*agar tondbād-i bar āyad ze konj · be khāk afganad nāresida toronj / setamgāra khwānim-ash ar dādgar · honarmand gu'im-ash ar bihonar*). Firdawsī, *Shāhnāmah*, 2:118, vv. 1–2; cf. Cross, "If Death is Just."

The color of life had fled his face,
and the sign of love was manifest upon it.[96] (32.17–20, 23–26)

If this is what the classic meeting of soul-mates looks like in *V&R*, it is difficult to believe that Mobad has fallen in love at all. His speech to Shahru is controlled, rational, and wholly couched in economic and material terms; even his professions of love, replete with clichés of every sort, cannot escape the transactional language of their conception: "I will only look upon you with the eye of love," he says, because "I prefer you over all else I *have*"; "I shall live for your pleasure, year in and year out," he continues, "bestowing you my heart, soul, and *property*."[97] His promises to obey her every command are coupled with political incentives to worldly power: "I hold you equal to my soul, and shall place the whole kingdom in your hand. I shall always be at your beck and call, just as the world is mine to command."[98] Nor is Mobad constrained by concern for public propriety and decorum, for as the King of Kings, he is in a social position that allows him to consort with Shahru whether she be his wife or his mistress (*yā joft yā dust*, 9.6).[99] In short, he has very little to lose, unlike lovers like Chaireas, who must overcome the historic animosity between his family and his beloved's, or Cleitophon, who is already engaged to his half-sister when he falls in love; or especially like women like ʿAẕrā, who was chastised by the king's minister and threatened with public exposure and disgrace. The lack of tension, even emotion, in his voice shows that he is simply offering the terms for the acquisition of a beautiful object, one that he esteems

96. R82/G94/M60/D57:

کجا چون دید رامین روی آن ماه   تو گفتی خورد بر دل تیر ناگاه
ز پشتِ اسپِ کُهْپیکر بیفتاد   چو برگی کز درختش بفْگنَد باد
گرفته زاتشِ دل مغز سرجوش   هم از تن دل رمیده هم ز سر هوش
ز راهِ دیده شد عشقش فرو دل   ازان بستَد به یک دیدار ازو دل
زمانی همچنان بود اوفتاده   چو مستِ مست بی حد خورده باده
رخِ گلگونش گشته زعفران‌گون   لبِ میگونش گشته آسمان‌گون
ز رویش رفته رنگِ زندگانی   برو پیدا نشانِ مهربانی

97. In some manuscripts, "gold, silver, and wealth" (*zar o sim o māl*). See *Vis & Rāmin* (*eds. T'odua and Gvaxaria*), 39, n. 6.

98. All of these lines are found in *V&R* 10.7–11, R45/T39/M23/D5:

که من دارم ترا با جان برابر   کنم در دستِ تو شاهی سراسر
همیشه پیشِ تو باشم به فرمان   چو پیشِ من به فرمان است گیهان
ترا از هرچه دارم بر گزینم   به چشمِ دوستی جز تو نبینم
به کامِ تو زیم با تو همه‌سال   ببخشایم به تو جان و دل و مال
تن و جان در رهت قربان کنم من   هران چیزی که گویی آن کنم من

99. It is worth noting that his promise that he will give Shahru all his money and property might be understood as a kind of dower in exchange for marriage, something that came standard with contractual *pādixšāy* marriage. See Maria Macuch, "The Pahlavi Model Marriage Contract in the Light of Sasanian Family Law," in *Iranian Languages and Texts From Iran and Turan*, ed. Maria Macuch, Mauro Maggi, and Werner Sundermann (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007), 198–201.

and admires greatly, but ultimately something he can do without.

For her part, Shahru seems willing to negotiate the affair in similar terms. In principle, it seems, she has little objection to the idea, for his proposition awakens a sudden reverie within her of the many loves and dalliances she entertained in her youth: "You did not see me in the days of my youth, a time of delight, flirtation, and joy," she murmurs, "How many faces lost their color upon seeing me! How many eyes lost all sleep!" (10.19, 23).[100] Her memories are hardly exaggerated; it is later revealed that she has married over thirty times and born a child from each marriage! However, there is one complication that renders the tryst with Mobad out of the question:

> Now my age has reached its autumn, and the spring of beauty has deserted me.
> Time has scattered yellow flowers upon my face, has mixed camphor into my musky hair;
> Has separated fresh beauty from my face, and has bent my shining cypress stature in two.
> The world of anyone old who pretends they're young grows shameful and disgraced.
> Were you to see me commit an unseemly act,
> I too would become ignoble in your eyes![101] (10.25–30)

In other words, Shahru's too old for this. As much as the thought of a new amorous adventure might appeal to her, there seems to be an unspoken rule that erotic love is not proper after a certain point in life, and as a woman of inferior rank to Mobad, she cannot afford to ignore the bounds of propriety. This "ageist" sentiment has a centuries-long pedigree within Helleno-Arabic love theory; in Plato's *Symposium*, Agathon says, "Love was born to hate old age and will come nowhere near it. Love always lives with young people and is one of them: the old story holds good that like is always drawn to like" (195b). ʿAẕrā echoes these words in a similar symposium on the topic convened by the king's philosopher Anaximenes; in response to Vāmeq's assertion that Love (*Eros*, personified in Persian as *Dusti*) has the body of an old man, she counters:

100. R45/T39/M23/D6:

ندیدی تو مرا روزِ جوانی — میانِ کام و ناز و شادمانی
بسا رویا که از من رفت آبش — بسا چشما که از من رفت خوابش

101. R46/T40/M24/D6:

کنون عمرم به پاییزان رسیدست — بهار نیکوی از من رمیدست
زمانه زرد گل بر روی من ریخت — همان مشکم به کافور اندر آمیخت
ز رویم آبِ خوبی را جدا کرد — بلورین سروْ قدّم را دوتا کرد
هر آن پیری که بُرنایی نماید — جهانش ننگ و رُسوایی فزاید
چو کاری بینی از من ناسزاوار — به زشتی به چشمِ تو شوم خوار

> Love does not have the body of an old man, for his [arrows aren't] for old hearts.
> The young man obeys all his counsels and [finds] love through his essence.
> When a youth's heart yearns for another, his [face lights up] when he finds his beloved.
> It's right for her to be the same, for like and [like always appear together].[102]
> Such talk doesn't suit in regards to the old; it is the young man's heart that [seeks love].[103]
> (172–6)

It is worth noting, to cite from Hägg and Utas, how the return of the topos of sexual symmetry in this passage again stresses the lines of continuity between Greek, Arabic, and Persian traditions: "Through this double filtering process, from Plato to the novelist and from the novelist (via an intermediary?) to 'Unṣurī, the old proverb about 'like clinging to like' (*homoion homoiō aei pelazei*) has passed intact."[104] We see an interesting variation of this theme in the story of *Zāl & Rudāba*, for Zāl is born an albino with white hair; when Rudāba announces to her handmaidens that she has fallen in love with him, her handmaidens are astonished that one of fresh face and scarlet lips could pursue an old man (*chonin sorkh do bossad-e shirbu'i · shegefti bovad gar bovad pir-ju'i*).[105] The admonition to avoid love in old age applies to men as well, with special import for kings and princes; as Kaykāvus advises his son in the *Qābusnāma*,

> If you pursue love in your youth, you'll be all right in the end, for they'll look and know that you're excused, saying that you're young; but strive to never become a lover in old age, for the old man has no excuse. This sort of thing is easier when you're one of the common people, but don't even think about it if you're an old king, and make sure to never publicly attach your heart to someone else; for a king to lose his head in love in old age is very bad indeed.[106]

Other characters in *V&R* agree with this premise; we recall that one of Vis's complaints against her husband was that he was "malicious, evil, and old," and Rāmin will later advise his brother to give up his

102. Note that I am assigning arbitrary genders to these pronouns; the "he" and "she" could easily be reversed.
103. Hägg and Utas, *The Virgin and her Lover*, 102–5. The bracketed passages are the editors' reconstruction.

از آن پیکر دوستی پیر نیست — کزو مر دلِ پیر را تیـ[ـر نیست]
همـه رای او مـردِ بـرنـا کـنـد — ز گوهر هنر مهر [پیدا کند]
چه برنا به برنا رسد دل به مهر — بیار آمده [تازه گردد به چهر]
کی همتا بُوَد در خوَر آید همه — کی همتا بـ[ـهمتا بر آید همی]
ز پیران نباید چنین گفت گوی — دلِ مردِ برنا بُوَد مـ[ـهرْجوی]

104. ibid., 230.
105. Firdawsī, *Shāhnāmah*, 1:189; cf. Firdawsī, *Shahnameh* (*tr. Davis*), 73.
106. Kaykāvūs ibn Iskandar ibn Qābūs, *Qābūs nāmah*, 83; cf. *Qābūs nāmah* (*tr. Levy*), 73.

اگر به جوانی عشق ورزی آخر عذری بود هر کس که بنگرد و بداند معذور دارد گوید که جوانست؛ جهد کن تا به پیری عاشق نشوی که پیر را هیچ عذری نباشد. چنانکه از جملهٔ مردمانِ عام باشی کار آسان‌تر بود پس اگر پادشا باشی و پیر باشی زینهار تا ازین معنی اندیشه نکنی و به ظاهر دل در کس نبندی که پادشاه را به پیران سر عشق باختن دشوار کاری بود.

claim on Vis using the same argument. While we are given no indication as to the relative age of Shahru and Mobad, it is clear that as far as she is concerned, to fool around at her age is only asking for trouble. She thus rejects Mobad's proposition, not out of moral considerations or personal disinclination, but out of her acute awareness of and sensitivity to the social expectations of her environment.[107]

As the Nurse later says, in what could be a proverb, "No one with any sense offends kings" (*nāzārad shahān rā hich hoshyār*, 34.36); but here, it seems, Shahru has managed to successfully extricate herself from a delicate situation. Mobad is not hurt or affronted in the slightest; he is rather delighted by Shahru's reply, and even congratulates her as an eloquent speaker (*sokhangu*, 10.31). This bland reaction shows that Mobad was, as we suspected, not in love with Shahru for herself, in stark contrast to his later behavior around Vis; his was a commodified and objectified form of desire, something that could be obtained and possessed for the proper price.[108] Because of her inferior social position, Shahru has to take other external factors into account—the very "unromantic" concerns of politics, money, and social standing not least among them—and therefore rejects the offer; but she defends her decision with a line of argumentation that also treats love as a pragmatic, rational, and transparent discourse of exchange. In short, Mobad and Shahru are speaking each other's language, and the conversation seems to be more about a political negotiation than a love-affair. Though Shahru deftly sidesteps the king's offer without making it look like a rejection, she leaves the door open just wide enough for Mobad to make another grab at what he wants: if he cannot have Shahru herself, why not someone of her likeness in her stead?

> Now if you won't be my mate and lover, and fill my days with happiness,
> Give me a daughter of your seed, for it is good for the pine and jasmine to be united in joy.
> Since the fruit will doubtless resemble the seed,

107. There are other ways to consider this transaction: it has been suggested to me that the failed bargain between Mobad and Shahru, as the respective monarchs of the eastern and western poles Khorasan and Media, might also point to a political tension between the two sides. This argument is bolstered by the fact that Shahru has married so many times; after thirty husbands, what harm could lie in a thirty-first, especially if he is the Great King among kings? On the other hand, the reliability of our knowledge is questionable, as it comes from Mobad as he curses Shahru in a fit of rage, saying "The child of a snake is nothing but a snake; a bad branch can only bear rotten fruit. Shahru has had thirty children, not two of them born from a single husband; . . . every one of them born of a contemptible woman and nursed by the milk of prostitutes!" See *V&R* 48.45–46, 49, R138/T179/M119/D141:

نباشد مار را بچه بجوز مار　　نیارد ساخِ بد جز تخمِ بد بار
بچه بودست شهرو را سی‌واند　　نزادست او ز یک شوهر دو فرزند
یکایک را ز ناشایست زاده　　بلایه دایگانی شیر داده

108. For a similar discussion of commodification in the story of *Tristan & Iseut*, see Burns, *Bodytalk*, 211–13, 238 n. 15.

your daughter will be jasmine-breasted, like you.[109] (10.38–40)

Despite its brevity, the importance of Mobad's logical leap from the mother to the daughter must not be overlooked. It is an unexpected twist on the idea of similitude, that on the basis of physical equivalence, love could be transferable from one individual to another.[110] Having negotiated the affair as though it were a commodity, an object that can be exchanged between them given the right terms, Shahru is left with no choice but to give her assent to this new proposition; the only way she could refuse him is by not having a daughter at all—which, given her age, she might have thought was a safe bet. Herein lies the germ of the story's conflict, for the proposed love-affair was never fully rejected, but merely deferred onto another party. Had Mobad listened more carefully, he might have realized that Shahru is potentially speaking as much about him as she is of herself, and perhaps would have wondered if his desire for some pretty thing was entirely advisable. If we wish to psychologize his character somewhat, it would not astonish us that he fails to catch this hint; occupying the highest echelon of political authority, he has probably never had reason to think about the social repercussions of his behavior in the same way that a woman of lesser rank like Shahru has done. And so the bargain is sealed, the contract is signed, and Vis is wedded to an old man before her birth, thus setting up the debacle and tragedy that is to be her romantic life.

The tryst deferred is the first of a series of troubling contrasts in which the promises of romantic love go awry. The bucolic reverie of *V&R*'s introduction, setting the scene for an amorous encounter between king and queen, is rudely interrupted by Shahru's refusal, in which she refers to the normative structures that restrict sexual practice to certain acceptable forms. For all its invocations of fertility, abundance, and natural, spontaneous love, the world of the springtime garden is in some ways a chimera, unable to deliver on its promise to turn the old back into the young, as the poet Rudaki says:

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109. R46/T40/M24/D7:

کنون گر تو نباشی جفت و یارم   نیارایی به شادی روزگارم
ز تخمِ خویش یک دختر به من ده   به کامِ دل صنوبر با سمن به
کجا چون تخم باشد بی‌گمان بر   بوَد دختِ تو مثلِ تو سمن‌بر

110. Some interesting appearances of this doppelgänger effect can be found in the Greek novels; for example, Callirhoe convinces herself not to commit suicide on the grounds that her unborn child will be "the exact likeness of my beloved husband" (3.8); in *Leucippe & Cleitophon*, the hero's sister Calligone is abducted having been mistaken for Leucippe (2.18). See Chariton and Xenophon of Ephesus, *Two Novels from Ancient Greece*, 52; Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, 30.

Spring has come in joy with sweet colors and smells
with a hundred thousand joys and amazing decorations
It's right for an old man to become young;
the earth has traded its old age for youth.[111]

In our first taste of love in this story, we learn that Shahru and Mobad are unable to free themselves from the constraints that are dictated on them by their age, gender, and rank. Thus, love relationships in this world are not necessarily natural, instinctual, and somehow already present, like Davids waiting to be released from their marble prisons; rather, they must be negotiated into being and may even be rejected when certain terms or conditions are not met. Despite the seductive call of this erotic landscape, social rank and public propriety remain factors of paramount importance; indeed, one could say that the true danger of eros is the very fact that it is capable of eradicating such boundaries. *V&R* has taken a subtle but important departure from the narrative vector one usually finds in the prologues of these romantic stories; instead of leaving us with the birth of two beautiful people who are clearly destined for one another, we are still in the dark as to who would make a proper mate for Vis in the grand tradition of reciprocal, mutual, and already inborn love.

3.3 Vis speaks out

What we do know, however, is that Vis's body, even *ab ovo*, has become a site of political contention and sexual anxiety; as the object of a contract, she has already been claimed as Mobad's property, and as his bride-to-be, she has already been sexualized. The prenatal loss of autonomy and childhood casts her in a very different light than what we typically see in other romances and novels: we saw how Vis's closest generic neighbors, the heroines Golshāh and ʿAẕrā, were given a full education and even trained in the ways of war, but Vis is born, she is sent to Khuzan to be raised by the Nurse in seclusion.[112] However, she

111. Rūdakī, *Dīvān-i Rūdakī-yi Samarqandī*, ed. Saʿīd Nafīsī and I. S. Braginski (Tehran: Nigāh, 1373 [1994]), 68. Meter: *możāreʿ akhrab makfuf maḥẕuf* [– – ᴗ – | ᴗ – ᴗᴗ | – – ᴗ – | ᴗ –].

آمد بهار خرم با رنگ و بوی طیب — با صد هزار نزهت و آرایش عجیب
شاید که مرد پیر بدین گه شود جوان — گیتی بدیل یافت شباب از پسِ مشیب

112. See *V&ʿA* vv. 26–40 in Hägg and Utas, *The Virgin and her Lover*, 83–86; ʿAyyūqī, *Varqa va Gulshāh*, 6–9, 32–42. There is some disagreement about where Khuzan is exactly; Davis reads it as a shortened form of Khuzestan, a province in southwestern Iran bordering modern Iraq, but Minorsky believes that it must lie somewhere halfway between Media and Margiana. If

does have one playmate:

> Vis and Rāmin were there together, like red and white blooms in a garden.
> The two friends grew up there together, playing together day and night.
> When they had spent ten years in coquetry, they brought Rāmin back to Khorasan.
> Who could have guessed what fate the heavens had in store for those two,
> What destiny would do with them, what pretexts it had for their actions.
> They had not yet been born of their mothers, nor even conceived,
> But destiny had already involved itself with their affairs,
> and written every one of their deeds, one after another.[113] (12.3–9)

The language of this passage is almost identical with a parallel scene in *Varqa & Golshāh*, where the narrator describes the young couple as "two cypresses in the garden," living together in a single place, their fortunes joined "by divine decree and celestial will" (6/7–10). It therefore serves as a cue of no little significance that from the beginning, the lives of Vis and Rāmin were destined to intertwine; but the story is interrupted, so to speak, when Rāmin is taken away at the age of ten and restored to his brother's court at Marv. It is a common motif in the udhri tales for the lovers to be separated into a gender-segregated society when they come of age, and this is usually the beginning of their mutual crisis; yet here, they have not yet reached puberty, and see no signs of distress from either Vis or Rāmin at their separation. We are thus left with one of the many mixed signals of *V&R*'s opening; though it is clear that Rāmin has an important role to play in Vis's future, the seed of their love seems only to have been planted and will remain dormant for quite some time, leaving the door still open for new characters to enter the story.[114]

Nonetheless, the moment that precipitates the need for action is indeed Vis's sexual maturation, a physical transformation that immediately activates the latent anxieties surrounding her chastity. These

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we accept the latter possibility, this may heighten the latent political tension that between the two kingdoms, as both noble families send their children to this neutral "buffer state" to ensure their safety. See Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī, *Vis & Rāmin* (*tr. Davis*), 501; Minorsky, *Iranica*, 169–71.

113. R49/T44/M27/D12:

به هم بودند آنجا ویس و رامین　　چو در یک باغ آذرگون و نسرین
به هم رستند آنجا دو نیازی　　به هم بودند روز و شب به بازی
چو سالی ده بماندستند نازان　　پس آنگه رام بردند زی خراسان
که دانست و کرا آمد گمانی　　که حکمِ هر دو چونست آسمانی
چه خواهد کرد با ایشان زمانه　　در آن کردار چون دارد بهانه
هنوز ایشان ز مادرشان نزاده　　نه تخمِ هر دو در بوم اوفتاده
قضا پردخته بود از کارِ ایشان　　نبشته یک به یک کردارِ ایشان

114. The topic of "conflicting signals" and "false starts" is brought up by Davis, *Panthea's Children*, 42–43; we shall return to it in section 3.5.

anxieties are visible in two letters written to Shahru, one by the Nurse and the other by Mobad (chs. 13 and 15 in Table 6), which both reveal that Vis inhabits a world where she is first and foremost understood in terms of her body, with all the social and political perils presumed to accompany women who are sexually available.

> When statuesque Vis grew to such a height as to rival the garden's cypress,
> When her crystalline arms filled out, and her lariat locks were cast forth,
> When the tips of her tresses cast shadows on the rose, when she nurtured desire with her charms,
> Her name was spread throughout the land, and the Nurse sent a letter to Vis's mother.
> She scolded her mightily in the letter: "There are none in the world as unkind as you—
> Your soul is kind neither to your child, nor to the one sent to be her nurse.
> You don't indulge your child with love, nor are you happy to see her for even a day!
> You gave your daughter to me when she was born, but provided nothing suitable for her:
> Now she's grown before me with a hundred graces; this fledgling falcon will soon fly off,
> And I fear that when she does, she'll find some mate to her own liking."[115] (13.1–10)

The Nurse follows this worry with a litany of complaints against Vis's conduct in Khuzan, condemning her for her vanity, pride, and headstrong ways. We learn that she is never satisfied with her clothing and always demands something better; that she must be accompanied at all times by no less than eighty ladies-in-waiting; that she eats her meals off golden plates and bowls, an outrageous extravagance.[116] "I

115. R50/T46/M28/D13. Interestingly, Iseut is also described as a falcon in Gottfried's *Tristan*: "She sent her eyes roving like a falcon on its bough: they sought their quarry together, not too gently, nor yet too firmly; but softly they went hunting, and so smoothly and sweetly that there was scarce a pair of eyes to whom her two mirrors were not a marvel and delight." Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, 186; other references to her "rapacious feathered glances" and "sparrow-hawk figure" are also found in this passage.

چو قدّ ویسِ بت‌پیکر چنان شد　　که همبالای سروِ بوستان شد
شد آگنده بلورین بازوانش　　چو یازنده کمندِ گیسوانش
سرِ زلفش به گل بر سایه گسترد　　به نازِ دل نیازی را بپرورد
پراگنده شده در شهر نامش　　ز دایه نامه‌ای شد نزدِ مامش
به نامه سرزنش کرده فراوان　　که چون تو نیست بدمهری به گیهان
نه بر فرزند جانت مهربانست　　نه بر آن کس که وی را دایگانست
نه فرزند نیازی را نوازی　　نه بر دیدارِ او یک روز نازی
به من دادی ورا آنگه که زادی　　سزای دخترت چیزی ندادی
کنون بر رُست پیشِ من به صد ناز　　به پرواز اندر آمد بچهٔ باز
همی ترسم که گر پرواز گیرد　　به کامِ خود یک انباز گیرد

116. "Now she never accepts what we have, even if it is every kind of silk and brocade; when she sees gorgeous garments, she finds some fault in every one!" (*hami napsandad aknun ān che mā rā-st · va-gar che guna guna khazz o dibā-st / che binad jāma-hā-ye sakht niku · beguyad har yaki rā chand āhu*, 13.13–14); "There must be at least eighty women before her, for less than that would not suit to serve her; and every time she breaks bread with them, she always wants plates and bowls of gold" (*kam az hashtād zan pish-ash nabāyand · ke kamtar z-in nadimi rā nashāyand / har ān gāh-i ke bā ishān khwarad nān · hama zarrina khwāhad kāsa vo khwān*, 13.20–21). Eating with golden utensils is also forbidden in Islamic law, perhaps further setting up Vis as a reprobate in the eyes of her audience.

can't stand her anymore," the Nurse concludes, "and I cannot provide those things she desires!" (*ke man z-in bish u rā bar natābam · hamān chiz-i ke mikhwāhad nayābam*, 13.24). Coming so early in the story, the Nurse's diatribe associates Vis with a set of long-standing misogynist tropes about the lustful and intractable nature of women, the "woman-as-riot": always talking, always demanding, always desiring, "perpetual speech with respect to which no position of innocence is possible."[117] As is the case in many literary traditions, female sexuality is normatively construed as a "principle of disorder," "an uncontrollable threatening force . . . that needs to be strictly controlled to ensure social order and political cohesion in an male-dominated culture."[118] From the tale of Joseph to the queen's orgy in the opening scene of the *Thousand and One Nights* to the fantastic isle of Waqwāq, whose all-women inhabitants sexually devour any man who treads on its shores, the repeated insistence on female insatiability is ubiquitous throughout Islamicate literature, deployed in a variety of genres and for all kinds of purposes.[119] Such tropes, of course, do not stop there; some examples from the European context, by way of comparison, include the tirade against women in the third book of Andreas Capellanus's *De Amore*, or the jealous husband in Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*, who claims that women "will never be so walled in that they do not hate Chastity so strongly that they all aspire to shame her. . . . Certainly, if the truth be told, women give great shame to God."[120] In short, Vis's proud demeanor and luxurious temperament casts her into immediate suspicion as a scandal waiting to happen, a virgin waiting to be deflowered; it is for this reason that the Nurse advises Shahru to bring Vis under her supervision and "tame" her wild spirit (*bokon tadbir*, 13.26). It is taken as a given that if she were left to her own devices, her insatiable appetites would soon drive her to "fly off" and take whatever lover she desired.

117. For a discussion of the "woman-as-riot" motif, see R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (University of Chicago Press, 1991), 17–22.

118. Fedwa Malti-Douglas, "Shahrazad Feminist," in *The Thousand and One Nights in Arabic Literature and Society*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian, George Sabagh, and Fedwa Malti-Douglas (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 44 and Gayane Karen Merguerian and Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Zulaykha and Yusuf: Whose "Best Story"?," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, no. 4 (1997): 487; see also Andrews and Kalpaklı, *The Age of Beloveds*, 167–68.

119. See Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Reading—and Enjoying—'Wiles of Women' Stories as a Feminist," *Iranian Studies* 32, no. 2 (1999): 207 and Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 85–92.

120. Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, trans. John Jay Parry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), 187–212; Guillaume de Lorris and Jean De Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Charles Dahlberg (Princeton University Press, 1995), 163–64, vv. 9013–62. A broader survey of this material is done in Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*.

It is important to note that this formative impression of Vis is not direct, but mediated; we have yet to meet her on the page, but already we have been negatively conditioned against her through the Nurse's letter to her mother. However, a strange discrepancy emerges at this juncture: when Vis arrives before her mother in Media, Shahru takes one look at her devastating beauty and says, "There are none in Iran fit to be your spouse save Viru, your own brother" (*dar Irān nist joft-i bā to hamsar · magar Viru ke hast-at khwad barādar*, 14.5). She has evidently forgotten all about Mobad, or, perhaps privately decided that the King of Kings is no match for her daughter. Vis's reaction to this decision is deafening in its silence:

> When Vis heard this from her mother, she grew so shy her face turned saffron.
> Love stirred within her heart, and in silence, she displayed her consent.
> She said neither yea nor nay to her mother's face, for love for her brother was in her heart.
> In love, her heart grew joyful, shining like the celestial moon.
> Every moment, her cheeks turned their color; her twisting locks fell before her face.
> At that moment, her mother knew in her heart that her daughter had taken the way of silence,
> For she was an old, experienced woman who had seen much of the world's good and ill:
> She had undergone that same state in her youth, and kept that same silence.[121] (14.10–17)

Given the Nurse's unflattering description of Vis the scene prior, this is not the kind of reaction we might have expected. We have been primed to anticipate a demanding and outspoken woman, a caricature of every misogynist trope; instead, we are greeted by a shy maiden who expresses her consent through shame, self-abnegation, and "the way of silence." Such modesty would have been considered exemplary behavior for one of Vis's age, sex, and status; the theologian Abu Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) indicates that godly women are to indicate their assent to engagement with averted eyes and sealed lips.[122] Shahru, too, notes this decision with approval; as a successful and experienced lady of the court, she recognizes

121. R52/T49/M30/D18:

چو بشنید این سخن ویسه ز مادر   شد از بس شرم رویش چون معصفر
بجنبیدش به دل بر مهربانی   نمود از خامُشی همداستانی
نگفت از نیک و بد بر روی مادر   که بود اندر دلش مهرِ برادر
دلش از مهربانی شادمان شد   فروزان همچو ماهِ آسمان شد
به رنگی می‌شدی هر دم عذارش   به رو افتاده زلفِ تابدارش
بدانست از دلش مادر همانگاه   که آمد دخترش را خامُشی راه
کجا او بود پیرِ کاردیده   بد و نیکِ جهان بسیار دیده
به بُرنایی همان حال آزموده   همان خاموشی او را نیز بوده

122. See Ghazzālī, *Marriage and Sexuality in Islam: A Translation of al-Ghazālī's book on the etiquette of marriage from the* Iḥyāʾ, trans. Madelain Farah (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1984), 79–80.

the wisdom and nobility of such self-comportment. Vis therefore does not seem to be rebelling in any way against the expectations held of her, either in the world of the text or outside of it, but is rather conforming to the ideal standard of a virtuous woman: loyal, obedient, and silent. Such behavior is again reflected in the many love-stories we have encountered in the Greek and Arabic traditions; one need only think of Callirhoe's embarrassed silence when she first espies Chaireas, or ʿAẕrā's attempt to hide her feelings at her father's symposium, or Varqa and Golshāh's visits in the dead of night where none can discover them, to find the precedent upon which Vis aligns her actions: the path of silence is the path of virtue.

Vis's emulation of the actions performed by other heroines puts forth another cue for how we might construe her love for Viru, which the narrator tells us was in her heart; for her shy but joyful reaction evokes the innate, intuitive, and already-present kind of affection born of similitude we encountered in the other romances. This similitude is often expressed or epitomized through familial bonds, such as we find in the love-stories of the paternal cousins *Layli & Majnun* and *Varqa & Golshāh*.[123] The Greek novels sometimes feature endogamy as well: Cleitophon, for example, was betrothed to his half-sister Calligone before she was abducted from him (2.18).[124] However, the logic of kindred attraction can be brought to the limit in sources from pre-Islamic Iran such as *Vis & Rāmin*, for consanguine marriage (Mid. Pers. *xwēdōdah*) was sanctioned and at times encouraged by the Zoroastrian clergy.[125] One might very well imagine, then, a possible reading of the tale in which the best-suited match for Vis would indeed

123. In general, this was the closest match that was socially acceptable in Arab society; see Gelder, *Close Relationships*, chs. 1–3.

124. For further discussion of endogamy in the Greek novels in comparison with the Persian material, see Davis, *Panthea's Children*, 39–41, 65–71.

125. For an excellent and up-to-date introduction to *xwēdōdah*, its rules, and its historical ups and downs, see Touraj Daryaee, "Marriage, Property and Conversion among the Zoroastrians: From Late Sasanian to Islamic Iran," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 6 (2013): 91–100; see also Kappler, "Comment aimer," 59–62, who concludes that the brother-sister marriage of Vis and Viru is "a completely self-evident act that requires no justification" (c'est un acte tout à fait "évident" qui n'a besoin d'aucune justification). The Zoroastrians' reputed love for their sisters, mothers, and daughters was often taken up by Arab or arabophile writers as a motif to lambaste the Persian heritage during the *shuʿūbīya* debates; van Gelder, for example, cites these verses by Mutanabbī (d. 354/965) riffing on the motif (Gelder, *Close Relationships*, 69):

> O sister of him who 'embraces' knights in battle:
> your brother is truly gentler and more compassionate than you:
> He stares at you, but chastely, while thinking
> that the Zoroastrians are right in their rulings.

have been her brother, as Shahru puts it: "Nothing would make my days happier than to give two worthy people to each other" (*az ān khwashtar nabāshad ruzgār-am · ke arzān-i be arzān-i sepāram*, 14.10). Thus, we have another cue on our hands that plays against the signal we had just received about Vis and Rāmin: while she spent her childhood playing with her "foster" brother under the Nurse's care, suggesting one possible lead, she is now—as far as we are allowed to believe—in love for the first time with her blood brother, an equally valid and perhaps preferable union from a Zoroastrian perspective. If we accept this premise, and are also willing to take the Nurse's letter at face value, we learn something else about our heroine: Vis was apparently quite a riot back in Khuzan, causing no end of trouble and anxiety for her governess, but now that she is united with her heart's desire and kindred spirit, she is content; she has no need to speak.

At this point, we have received mixed signals on a variety of accounts: in addition to at least two possible partners for Vis's love-story, we have two apparently incongruous portraits of our heroine before us, the proud and uncontrollable Vis of the Nurse's letter standing against the shy and demure Vis we have just witnessed. These two images come together in the next section of the poem with the arrival of Mobad's emissary, such that Vis confirms the worst misogynist expectations that have been built around her, but never for the right reasons. Shahru consults with her astrologers to determine the best time for the wedding, and on the appointed day, she conducts the ceremony herself, leading her son and daughter to the royal palace and taking their hands in hers:[126]

> And then she said to those two noble [youths], "May you have joy and happiness!
> A brother and a sister together have no need for jewels or pretty knick-knacks.
> Nor is there need for a *mōbad*'s seal on the contract, nor for any witnesses:
> It's sufficient that your witnesses be the Just Creator,
> [the angel] Sorush, the moon, the sun, the heavens, and the stars.[127] (14.29–32)

126. The date of the wedding is surprisingly specific: Gorgāni names it as the sixth hour of *Day* in the month of *Āẕar*, which he says took place in the springtime (14.24–25). However, in the current Zoroastrian calendar, that would be either November 23, November 30, or December 8 (*Day* is the name of three different days in the month), so either things got distorted, or, perhaps more likely, it's a pseudo-date to give the occasion the ring of gravitas. For further discussion of this detail, see Zarrīn´kūb, "[Review: *Vīs & Rāmīn*]," 1017, Minorsky, "Vīs-u Rāmīn (IV)," 280–82, Minorsky, *Iranica*, 192, and Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī, *Vis & Rāmin* (*tr. Morrison*), 30, notes 4 and 5; see also footnote 125 for a similar date.

127. R53/T50/M31/D19. For a discussion of this scene, see Kappler, "Comment aimer," 58–59, who invites us to compare it against the marriage rites observed by Modi in *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Parsees* (Bombay: J. B. Karani's Sons, 1937), 31–33. Probably the most striking feature of this moment is Shahru's rejection of the need for witnesses or a *mōbad*, which, given the highly contractual nature of Zoroastrian marriage, was virtually a *sine qua non*; see Jenny Rose, "Gender," in

Yet no sooner do the celebrations begin than Mobad's half-brother and chief minister, Zard, appears on the horizon; he has come bearing a letter from the king, requesting that Vis be brought to him in Marv immediately. While of course it is the ideal moment, narratively speaking, to disrupt a wedding and throw a wrench in the works (we might recall Golshāh's abduction on the night of her wedding to Varqa), there is an additional significance to the timing of Zard's arrival. Mobad could not have dispatched the letter from far-off Khorasan knowing that Shahru was about to break her promise and marry Vis to Viru; as his letter suggests, he believes that she has been faithfully keeping his bride-to-be for him until the proper time. But that time has apparently arrived, and to understand why, we may think back to what we learned from the narrator when Vis reached maturity: word of her beauty has gotten out; "her name was spread throughout the land" (*parāganda shoda dar shahr nām-ash*, 13.4). This means that not only is Vis now eligible to be wed, she is vulnerable to being seduced. Yet Mobad is convinced that the fact that Vis was born at all is a sign that God approves of his claim to her, and indeed of his original claim to Shahru. The tryst may have been deferred, but now he's come to collect.

> You gave me Vis then, though you bore her thirty years later;
> Because I was a suitable groom for you, God gave you this daughter for my share.
> It was my good fortune that in your old age you gave birth, like a cypress bearing mallow
> and pomegranate.
> I'm so happy that you bore this daughter that I've given lavishly to the poor,
> For God has upheld my hopes, and satisfied my desires with this bond.
> But now that God has given me the moon, I do not wish her to be in Media,[128]
> For there, the young and the old alike are hedonists, wholly given to womanizing.
> The youth are the worst, full of tricks in their debauchery;
> Constantly seducing women (*zanfaribi*), bringing the same same mind to frivolity.
> May no woman see their faces, lest she adopt their contemptible natures!
> Women are fragile-hearted and weak-minded;
> they fall into any nature you bring to them.[129] (15.47–57)

The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism, ed. Michael Stausberg and Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina (John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 284–85 and Mansour Shaki, "Family Law ii. In Zoroastrianism," in *EIr*, online edition (1999), accessed June 11, 2015, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/family-law.

پس آنگه گفت با هر دو گرامی — شما را باد ناز و شادکامی
نباید زیور و چیزی دلارای — برادر را و خواهر را به یک جای
به نامه مُهرِ موبد هم نباید — گوا گر کس نباشد نیز شاید
گواتان بس بُوَد دادارِ داور — سروش و ماه و مهر و چرخ و اختر

128. Mobad here is making a pun that is both clever and poignant: he describes Vis as a moon (*māh*), and the name for the land of Media is *māh-ābād*, "where the moon resides." In other words, he is making explicit his desire to uproot the moon from its home, foreshadowing the themes of exile and homelessness that will be such a dominant aspect of Vis's story.

129. R55/T54/M33/D21. Mehdi Moḥaqqeq notes that this last verse could be a paraphrase of a famous line from the *Nahj al-*

Thus, Mobad is inspired to write Shahru for the same reasons as the Nurse, assuming that Vis, as a woman, cannot control her desires and must be swiftly brought to her proper place in society. On this note, he segues into a general denunciation of women, lamenting their susceptibility to flattery and praise, mimicking (in a surprisingly good parody) the lies, promises, and blandishments of the rakes and dandies and asserting that no woman, be she queen or empress, ascetic (*zāhed*) or virgin (*pārsā*), can resist the allure of such honeyed words (*bedin goftār-e shirin rām gardad*, 15.66). "Although Vis is pure and unsullied," he concludes, "my heart is filled with anxiety on this account" (*agar che Visa bi-āhu vo pāk ast · marā z-in ruy del-e andishnāk ast*, 15.67). Mobad's letter, like that of the Nurse, demonstrates that Vis's transition from childhood to womanhood has unleashed a flood of anxiety about what she will do with her now-visible sexuality, a transformation, the narrator muses, that will turn her life upside-down:

> Look at how the world toyed with her!
> It raised her in joy and delight, brought her up in honor and esteem,
> But when her height became the bane of the straight cypress,
>   and the full moon became enslaved to her face,
> And the tulips of her cheeks came into bloom,
>   and two pomegranates ripened from her silver breast;
> The world turned from the path of kindness, and all her fortunes changed.[130] (38.63–67)

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balāgha, a collection of sayings attributed to the Imam ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib: "Women are deficient in their minds, their apportions, and their faith" (*al-nisāʾu nawāqiṣu l-ʿuqūli wa-nawāqiṣu l-ḥuẓūẓi wa-nawāqiṣu l-īmān*); see Muḥaqqiq, "Yād´dāsht-hā," 462.

به من تو ویس را آنگه دادی   که تا سی‌سالِ دیگر دخت زادی
چو من بودم ترا شایسته داماد   به بختِ من خدا این دخترت داد
به بختِ من بزادی روزِ پیری   چو سروی بارِ او گلنار و خیری
بدین دختر که زادی سخت شادم   به درویشان فراوان چیز دادم
کجا یزدان امیدم را وفا کرد   بدین پیوند کامم را روا کرد
کنون کان ماه را یزدان به من داد   نخواهم کاو بُوَد در ماه‌آباد
که آنجا پیر و برنا شادخوارند   همه کنغالگی را جان سپارند
جوانان بیشتر زن‌باره باشند   در آن زن‌بارگی پر جاره باشند
همیشه زن‌فریبی پیشه داند   ز رعنایی همین اندیشه دارند
مبادا آن زن که بیند روی ایشان   که گیرد ناستوده خوی ایشان
زنان نازک‌دلند و سست‌رایند   به هر خو چون برآری‌شان برآیند
کنون کان ماه را یزدان به من داد   نخواهم کاو بُوَد در ماه‌آباد
که آنجا پیر و برنا شادخوارند   همه کنغالگی را جان سپارند
جوانان بیشتر زن‌باره باشند   در آن زن‌بارگی پر جاره باشند
همیشه زن‌فریبی پیشه داند   ز رعنایی همین اندیشه دارند
مبادا آن زن که بیند روی ایشان   که گیرد ناستوده خوی ایشان
زنان نازک‌دلند و سست‌رایند   به هر خو چون برآری‌شان برآیند

130. R94/T112/M73/D75:

. . . .   جهان بنگر چه بازی کرد با او
بپروردش به ناز و شادکامی   بر آوردش به جاه و نیکنامی

Thus, the emergence of Vis as an object of sexual desire has forced the hand of all of her elders—the Nurse, Shahru, and Mobad—to get her "under control" before it is too late; yet the cause of their worry and the impetus for their action lies not in the concrete evidence of what she has done, but in the dangerous possibilities of what she might do. These mounting fears, piling up one on top of the other, begin to push Vis's story forward at an ever more rapid pace: now she is off to stay with her mother, now she is married to Viru, now Mobad is demanding her back, and soon a fratricidal war of Homeric (or Ferdowsian) proportions will break out between the two kingdoms as the two rivals struggle over her. In a sense, Vis is indeed a riot, but ironically the clamor is coming for, around, and about her, while she herself has yet to utter a single word. It is only with the arrival of Zard and the news of Mobad's claim on her that this changes. Upon learning on the day of her wedding that she had been betrothed to a stranger years before her birth, Vis decides it is time to break her silence; in a powerful indication of events to come, her first vocalization in the story is not articulated in words, but in a cry of anger.

> She screamed at her mother,
>
> and said, "What's happened to you? Your wits and manners have fled;
> You strayed far from the path of reason when you went and gave away an unborn girl!
> Who would accept that as wisdom? It's right that all should laugh at you!"[131] (15.84–86)

She next turns to Zard, sarcastically asking him if polyandry is a custom in Marv, or does he not see that there is a wedding going on (16.8–21). Finally, she has a message of her own for Mobad:

> Your mind has gotten feeble with old age; your time in this world has passed on.
> If any wisdom was your friend, you wouldn't have wagged your tongue saying such things.
> You wouldn't have sought a young bride in this world, but rather provisions for *that* one!
> I have a brother and a mate, and both are Viru, just as my worthy mother is Shahru;
> My heart is joyful of him and glad of her; when would I give a thought to Mobad and Marv?
> . . . .
> My brother and I mix like milk and wine; I don't want Old Mobad in some foreign land!
> Why would I trade a youth for a greybeard?

چو قدّش آفتِ سروِ سهی شد   دو هفته ماه رویش را رهی شد
شکفته شد به رخ بر لاله‌زاری   به بار آمد زبر سیمین دو نارش
جهان با او ز راهِ مهر بر گشت   سراسر حال‌های او دگر گشت

131. R57/T55/M34/D23:

برو زد بانگ و گفتا چه رسیدت   که هوش و گونه از تن بر پریدت
زی هنجارِ خرد دور اوفتادی   چو رفتی دختِ نازاده بدادی
خرد کردار چونین کی پسندد   روا باشد که هر کس بر تو خندد

I speak openly; I keep no secrets in my heart.[132] (16.30–34, 39–40)

As in the case of ʿAẕrā, Vis's main beef against Mobad is his age: how could a young woman like her ever get along with an old man?[133] Implicit too is the underlying ideal of similitude: she presents her relationship with her brother as the best possible kind of match, while the thought of being with an old man is nothing less than repulsive to her. Her rejection of Mobad is an eloquent witness of Shahru's prior warning that he would be foolish to devote himself to love at his advanced age; nonetheless, the contrast between mother and daughter is almost diametric. Where Shahru demurred and offered this criticism in a language so flattering Mobad did not even feel the sting of rejection, Vis seems uninterested in such diplomatic niceties. She is clearly not afraid to break face—she "speaks openly," in her own words—and her public excoriation of her mother, Zard, and, most risky of all, the King of Kings does reveal a bit of that pride and forcefulness the Nurse's letter had hinted at. Doubtless these embarrassing confrontations do a great deal to contribute to her reputation as a proud and headstrong woman, which does not help her out in an already precarious social position. However, we must take into account the impetus for her actions: when we situate her most strident responses in their context, we find that she is consistently reacting from a position of moral outrage and indignation. First, she is angry at her mother for the egregious act of selling her down the river before she was born; as Kappler observes, the trauma of being separated

132. R58/T57/M36/D25:

ز پیری مغزت آهومند گشتست ز گیتی روزگارت در گذشتست
ترا گر هیچ دانش یار بودی زبانت را نه این گفتار بودی
نجُستی زین جهان جفتِ جوان را ولیکن توشه جُستی آن جهان را
مرا جفت و برادر هر دو ویروست همیدون مادرم شایسته شهروست
دلم زین خرّم و زان شاد باشد ز مرو و موبدم کی یاد باشد
بسازم با برادر چون می و شیر نخواهم در غریبی موبد پیر
جوانی را به پیری چون کنم باز ملا گویم ندارم در دل این راز

133. An interesting "real-time" question to ask is what might be the relative age gap between Vis and Viru and whether this poses a problem for her ageist sentiments. We never hear that the two are the same age, and we do see Viru present at Mobad's Nowruz festivities (which apparently took place some thirty years prior), which would suggest a significant age difference between the two siblings. However, Rāmin is also named in that same list of heroes at the banquet (*cho Viru-ye delir o gord-e Rāmin*, 8.27), which, as Maḥjub and others have noted, would be impossible if Rāmin later grows up side-by-side with Vis in *V&R* ch. 12: see Maḥjūb, "Muqaddamah," 87; T'odua, "Yik dū sukhan," xxiv; and ʿAbd Allāhiyān, "Girdāvardah," 122. This all goes to show that time, as Bakhtin noted, is not entirely uniform in these stories, and while counting years is always a fun exercise, it rarely adds up to any kind of realistic conclusion. A far more productive approach is to follow the lead of Kappler and look at the representation of these figures: in the case of Viru, she writes, "Viru is an angel of beauty, just like Vis, just like Rāmin. He is always presented as someone young" (Vîrou . . . est un ange de beauté, tout comme Vîs, tout comme Râmîn. Il est toujours présenté comme quelqu'un de jeune); see Kappler, "Comment aimer," 58.

from home and family is one of the chief hardships Vis will undergo.[134] As for Mobad, he is not merely foolish but *sinful* in pursuing her, as her reference to the other world suggests.[135] Rarely does Vis show such harshness unless there is a moral issue at stake, and when she attacks those she loves, she is quick to relent. For example, after hurling a volley of curses upon the Nurse for suggesting a tryst with Rāmin (42.72–90), she apologizes for her harsh words, but excuses herself saying that they were only suitable given the outrageous nature of the Nurse's suggestion.

> Though women are soft and weak, they are dear to the heroes of the world;
> They have thousands of bad traits, and it's best that one never grow attached to them.
> What I said is also because of this, for rashness is the temperament of women.
> That speech I heard from you was like a poison-tipped arrow in my heart;
> That's why I showed a little rashness, for I heard rash words.[136] (42.152–56)

It is significant that her apology here is dependent on the same misogynistic image of women we saw in the letters of the Nurse and Mobad: paradoxically, it is her weak nature that propels her to forceful action. What we glean from the moral tinge of Vis's outrage, then, is that she is speaking as a *participant* in the normative discourse of the romance, and not as an dissident voice from the outside: as far as she is concerned, illicit sex, or marriage between a young woman and an old man, is simply not an option.

We will discuss the war between Mobad and Viru in greater detail in Chapter 4; for now, suffice it to say that after much bloodshed, in which Vis's father Qāren is killed, Mobad suffers a humiliating defeat at the hands of Viru. Having lost the battlefield, he decides to make his way in secret to Gurab to petition Vis once more while Viru is occupied quelling a rebellion in the province of Daylam. His message to

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134. See Kappler, "Comment aimer," 56–57, 72–74, 77–79.

135. Again, Kappler's discussion is extremely insightful, for it also points out how Mobad, in breaking up a *xwēdōdah* marriage, was committing a grave sin by Zoroastrian standards; in essence, *Mobad* is the adulterer, stealing Vis from her rightful husband. See ibid., 66–67. A vivid example of this is found in *The Book of Arda Viraf*, ed. Hoshangjī Jamaspjī Asa, Martin Haug, and E. W. West (Govt. Central Book Depot, 1872), 197, ch. 86:

> Then I saw the soul of a woman, through whose body a grievous snake ascended, and came forth by the mouth. And I asked thus: "What sin was committed by this body, where the soul suffers so severe a punishment?" Srôsh the pious, and Âtarô the angel, said thus: "This is the soul of that wicked woman who violated a next-of-kin marriage."

136. R117/T148/M98/D109:

زنان هرچند سست و ناتوانند   دل‌آرایِ دلیرانِ جهانند
هزاران خویِ بد باشد دریشان   سزد گر دل نبندد کس بریشان
مرا نیز آنکه گفتم هم از آنست   که تندی کردن از طبعِ زنانست
مرا بود آن سخن در گوش چونان   که در دل رفته زهرآلوده پیکان
ازیرا لَختکی تندی نمودم   که گفتار از درِ تندی شنودم

her shows that his conception of love has not changed much since the day he propositioned Shahru, for just as he had promised to hold her soul equal to his own (*man dāram to rā bā jān barābar*, 10.7), he now extends the same pledge to Vis (*to rā bā jān-e khwad dāram barābar*, 23.18), complete with the same material benefits, in contrast to her spartan marriage with Viru: "I have so much gold and jewelry for you that the sun and moon will envy you" (*chonān dāram torā bā zarr o zivar · ke bar ru-ye to rashk ārad mah o khwar*, 23.14). At this latest attempt to seduce her, Vis's rancor towards Mobad only increases.

> When lovely Vis heard this message, you'd say she'd heard so many insults;
> She rent the silken garments on her body, and fearlessly struck her crystal breast.
> As she tore the silk on her body, her body appeared, neck to navel:
> A thrilling sight of love's enchanting passion,
> a calamity that melts bodies and deceives hearts,
> Of ermine and mink, and silk both painted and plain,
> burning the patience of reason, stealing sleep.
> When the full moon tore her clothes, she revealed dog-roses in bloom.
> With honeyed lips, she replied with stones; from a face of love, she hurled daggers of war.
> She spoke: "I've heard this evil message, I've tasted its biting poison.
> Go—tell that dotard not to cast the ball of disaster into the field:
> 'Don't trouble yourself in hopes of me; don't scatter your fortune in useless winds.
> I have an art that tells me your mind—I know where your thoughts will wander.
> Don't you ever think you'll bring me alive from this fortress,
> Nor will you ever attain pleasure of me, even if you be a master of sorcery!' "[137] (24.1–12)

This description of a semi-nude woman is very explicit for Persian literary conventions, perhaps only rivaled by Neẓāmi's depiction of Shirin bathing in a pool; but it again brings our attention to Vis's body, sexualized and under constant surveillance, as the locus of the conflict. Yet ironically, while Shirin was

137. R70/T76/M/D41:

چو ویسِ دلبر این پیغام بشنید	تو گفتی زو بسی دشنام بشنید
حریرین جامه را بر تن زدش چاک	بلورین سینه را می‌کوفت بی باک
چو او زد چاک بر تن پرنیانش	پدید آمد ز گردن تا میانش
هوای فتنهٔ عشقی نهیبی	بلای تن‌گدازی دلفریبی
حریری قاقمی خزّی پرندی	خرد بر صبر سوزی خواب بندی
چو جامه چاک زد ماهِ دوهفته	پدید آورد نسرینِ شکفته
به نویشن لب جوابی داد چون سنگ	به روی مهر بر زد خنجرِ جنگ
بدو گفت این پیامِ بد شنیدم	وزو زهرِ گزاینده چشیدم
کنون رو موبدِ فرتوت را گوی	به میدان در میفگن با بلاگوی
مبر زین بیش در امیدِ من رنج	به بادِ یافه‌کاری بر مده گنج
مرا کاری به رایت رهنمایست	بدانستم که رایت تا چه جایست
نگر تا تو نپنداری که هرگز	مرا زنده به زیرآری ازین دز
و یا هرگز تو از من شاد باشی	و گرچه جادوی استاد باشی

caught bathing when she did not expect to be seen, Vis chooses to strip herself in defiance of Mobad, a vivid example of the way she declares her virtue and sets herself up to be condemned as a moral degenerate in a single gesture. The silken clothes that cover her give way to reveal the riot and sedition (*fetna*, the same word used to describe the first wars for succession within the early Islamic polity) that her gender is supposed to represent; the admixture of desire and destruction is reflected too in her sweet lips and fetching countenance, now deployed as the stones and daggers of war. Even the language of her message performs the double motion of giving and withholding before Mobad, mediated through the gaze of his messenger: her admonition "Don't you ever think . . . " can also be parsed as a literal command to Mobad that he look (*negar*) upon her body and realize he will never obtain the object of his desire. As we shall discuss further in Chapter 5, this is only the first of many moments in *V&R* in which Vis utilizes her body, this corporeal thing that has so captured the world's attention, as the medium through which she will send her own message back.

This remarkable rebuttal shifts into another discourse of equal import for the story's ethos, now making explicit the underlying moral principles that Vis claims to represent. She begins by pledging her undying fealty to her brother Viru, naming him her "lord and king" (*khodāvand o shāh*) over whom she will never choose another, "For I have become my brother's lover, and have renounced love for all others" (*kojā man bā barādar yār gashtam · ze mehr-e digarān bizār gashtam*, 24.18). Her commitment to eternal fidelity in love receives further elaboration in the verses that follow:

> And if I were to betray him, what excuse would I bring before the Creator?
> Though I am young, I fear the Lord; do you, a helpless old man, not fear Him too?
> If you are wise, fear the Lord's justice, for this fear is better spent on the old.
> I've no lack of coin and brocade, I've plenty of treasure and land;
> Stop tempting me with baubles, for my adornments from God are without number.
> As long as I remember Qāren's death, how could my heart be pleased by trinkets?
> If coin and brocade could seduce me, the rank of "lady" would not become me.
> If I were content from all these trinkets, I could not be my father's child.[138] (24.27–34)

138. R70/T77/M49/D42:

وگر با او خورم در مهر زنهار   چه عذر آرم بدان سر پیشِ دادار
من از دادار ترسم با جوانی   نترسی تو که پیرِ ناتوانی
بترس ار بخردی از دادِ داور   کجا این ترس پیران را نکوتر
مرا پیرایه و دیبا و دینار   فراوان است گنج و شهر بسیار
به پیرایه مرا مفریب دیگر   که داد ایزد مرا پیرایه بی‌مر

In this short passage, Vis weaves together numerous interrelated themes that reaffirm her commitment to a normative moral system that would have been looked on with approval both from the standpoint of the expectations of romantic love in literature and the religious convictions held in Gorgāni's own time. The first is her undying and faithful commitment to her beloved Viru, the best-suited and closest-matched person for her to be with. The second is her four-fold invocation of pious fear (*tars*), something that she claims to have in abundance but that Mobad unwisely lacks. Third is the issue of family honor and nobility: how could Vis betray the memory of her father, whom Mobad has recently killed, by marrying his enemy?[139] The importance of kinship in Vis's estimation is made clear when she lets slip a fact she might have preferred Mobad not to know:

> Even my brother, my chosen match, has not yet taken his pleasure of me;
> How could you, a stranger, do so, even if you were the sun and moon?
> I've not given my silver body to my brother, and I was born with him of the same mother!
> How could I give myself to you, you fool, when my home has been ruined by your hand?[140]
> (24.41–44)

As a woman of rank and noble birth (an aspect of Vis's identity she will soon bring to bear to distinguish herself from her Nurse), Vis is clear in her resolve not to defile her honor, break her marriage vows, or betray her family for the promise of gold and silver. In other words, she is casting herself as incorruptible, a paragon of the virtues of steadfastness and loyalty so vaunted by the Greek and Arabic love-stories discussed in section 3.1. Yet she demonstrates the depth of these convictions as she stands half-naked

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مرا تا مرگِ قارن یاد باشد   ز پیرایه دلم کی شاد باشد
اگر بفریبدم دیبا و دینار   نباشد بانوی بر من سزاوار
وگر من زین همه پیرایه شادم   نه از پشتِ پدر باشد نژادم

139. Vis's bitter hatred of her family's enemies is reminiscent of Iseut's hatred for the family of Mark and Tristan; indeed, she attempts to slay her future lover in his bath when she discovers his identity (Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, 173–79, 191–94). In her analysis of this scene, Leslie Rabine argues that one of the themes of the *Tristan* cycle is the assertion of patriarchal authority over women, which can only happen once Iseut is taken away from her family and homeland; Kappler makes a similar claim about Vis's transition from the house of Qāren to the house of Mobad, from a marriage of equal siblings to a subservient role in her marriage to Rāmin. Given that Vis almost instantly vanishes from the story the moment Rāmin mounts his insurrection against Mobad, I find this interpretation compelling. See Leslie W. Rabine, "Love and the New Patriarchy: *Tristan and Isolde*," in *Tristan and Isolde: A Casebook*, ed. Joan Tasker Grimbert (New York: Garland, 1995), 58–69; Kappler, "Comment aimer," 79.

140. R71/T78/M49/D43:

برادر کاو مرا جفتِ گزیده‌ست   هنوز او کامِ خویش از من ندیده‌ست
تو بیگانه ز من چون کام یابی   وگر خود آفتاب و ماهتابی
تنِ سیمین برادر را ندادم   کجا با او ز کی مادر بزادم
ترا ای ساده‌دل چون داد خواهم   که ویران شد به دستت جایگاهم

before the royal envoy, giving him a piece of her mind—not exactly the conventional image of female modesty and decorum. This is the first in a series of moments in which the obligations of virtue place mutually conflicting demands on Vis's behavior: in standing up for her family and protecting her honor, she is providing endless ammunition for her critics to portray her as shameless, outspoken, and head-strong, the very qualities that link her back into the image of a woman of suspect morals that she is so keen to dispel.[141] With this pattern at work, it is almost a self-fulfilling prophecy that Vis will one day hook up with her husband's brother while the other characters shake their heads and say "I knew it all along," but as we see here, the motives behind every scandalous move on her part are rooted in values that the normative world of this story would deem laudable. Vis is a stubbornly righteous woman who breaks all the rules in her righteousness.

3.4 Queens and nursemaids

Despite her best efforts, Vis's unorthodox rejection of Mobad only serves to further kindle the king's desire for her, thanks to the virginal body that she has proudly displayed as proof of her moral purity (25.3–5, 26.1).[142] Seeing this, Rāmin is incited to intervene; we now learn that "he had always nurtured love for Vis in his soul, but kept his state hidden from others" (*hami parvard ʿeshq-e Vis dar jān · ze mardom karda ḥāl-e khwish penhān*, 26.5), and here he gives an impassioned speech to persuade Mobad to give up his quest:

> How could you seek the love and support of a child whose father you've killed?
> She fears no war, no army; she will not be seduced by money and jewels.

141. An interesting case to compare with Vis is that of the *Shāhnāma*'s heroine Gordiya, who, in telling her brother Bahrām that they ought to adhere to the established codes of conduct is also instrumental in the breaking of those codes; see Firdawsī, *Shahnameh* (*tr. Davis*), 762–67, 798–809. Many thanks to Dick Davis for pointing out this connection.

142. Gorgāni goes into a very interesting digression to tell us why this is the case. The astrologers didn't do a very good job in predicting an auspicious day for the wedding, for not only did Zard show up, but Vis was menstruating and was therefore unapproachable; as the narrator says, "if the [Zoroastrian] woman keeps this state hidden from her husband, she will become eternally forbidden to him" (*v-agar zan ḥāl az-u dārad nehāni · bar u gardad ḥarām jāvedāni*, 25.12). Indeed this is corroborated in religious and legal works like the *Bundahišn*, the *Šāyast nē Šāyast*, the *Book of a Thousand Judgements*, and the infernal journey in *The Book of Arda Viraf*, 169–70, 191–92, chs. 20, 22, 70, 72; cf. Modi, *The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Parsees*, 171–74; Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, 45. In the romance tradition, menstruation is a common defence mechanism employed by other heroines in the romance tradition to get out of sex with would-be lovers; when Golshāh is captured by Rabiʿ b. ʿAdnān, she tells him that she thinks the world of him and cannot wait to take him into her embrace—"but I have the excuse of women, and you must give me a week of time" (*valikan marā hast ʿoẕr-e zanān · yak-i hafta-am dāð bāyað zamān*, 14/12).

> You'll only attain her with great loss, and when you do, you won't weather the disaster.
> Keeping an enemy in your home as your beloved is like keeping a snake in your bed.
> And here's the worst of it: you are old, and that heart-stealer is young.
> If you take a wife, take someone else; young for the young, old for the old![143] (26.21–26)

As we will see in Chapter 4, Rāmin's warnings could not be more prescient; but here they achieve the opposite of their intended effect.[144] Being told "no" only fans the flames of the king's desire (26.39–42), and he interprets Vis's virginity in spite of her marriage as a sign that God is keeping her for him, as he expresses in his letter to Shahru: "Know that it was my fortune that the groom did not enjoy his union with Vis; how has another man come to my spouse? How could this accord with God's justice?" (*bedān k-az bakht-e man bud inke dāmād · nagasht az Vis o az payvand-e u shād / be joft-e man degar kas chun residi · ze dād-e kerdgār in chun sazidi*, 27.15–16). Ignoring Rāmin, he consults with his other brother Zard to devise a plan to achieve his aim: the key to Vis, they decide, is her mother.

The title of the following chapter, "Mobad's letter to Shahru and her seduction (*fariftan*) by money," suggests at first blush that winning Shahru over will simply be a matter of appealing to her innate greed for wealth, again asserting the trope that female desire is always there to be exploited. However, the larger context of the poem complicates this picture. We might recall Mobad's initial letter to Shahru, in which he reminded her of the oath and contract she had made: in claiming Vis as his *right*, Mobad also positions his claim in the language of *righteousness* and *rectitude*, concepts that are linked together (as they are in English) by the same root word. As we see in this passage, Mobad steeped his letter in the language of right behavior (*rāsti*), which begins with a praise to God,

> Who thus adorned the world in righteousness, and desires justice and righteousness from men as well.
> He who seeks bounty in righteousness will be guided by victory.

143. R73/T82/M52/D46:

چگونه دوستی جویی و پشتی　　ز فرزندی که بابش را بکشتی
نه بشکوهد ز پیگار و ز لشکر　　نه بفریبد به دینار و به گوهر
به بسیاری بلا او را بیابی　　چو یابی با بلای او نتابی
چو در خانه بُوَد دشمن ترا یار　　چنان باشد که داری باستین مار
بتر کاری ترا با ویس آنست　　که تو پیری و آن دلبر جوانست
اگر جفتی همی گیری جز او گیر　　جوان را هم جوان و پیر را پیر

144. Cf. Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, 276: "Hearts and eyes often go ranging along the path that has always brought them joy. And if anyone tries to spoil their sport, God knows, he will make them more enamoured of it."

> There is no transformative power in the world save righteousness, for the glory of right cannot be diminished.
> I desire my right from you—what do you seek? You must always speak and act rightly.
> You know well what we said to each other, how we joined hands in agreement.
> In friendship and amity we made a contract, and then we both swore oaths.
> Do not forget the oath and contract!
> Keep your word instead, and strive in righteousness![145] (15.40–46)

It here that Mobad's name (which is literally the Middle Persian word for Zoroastrian priest) begins to make sense. We are told at the beginning of the story that "he was both a mobad and a wise sage" (*ke ham mobad bod o ham bekhrad-e rad*, 8.16), but he is never observed presiding over religious ritual. However, he clearly sees himself as being in the right, so to speak, preferred by God and the upholder of divine injunction; as Morrison notes, his admonition to Shahru that she think, speak, and act in the way of righteousness is a paraphrase of the Zoroastrian triad of good thoughts, good words, and good deeds.[146] He seems to know Shahru's weak spot, for he does not waste his time promising presents or political favors as he has before, but rather goes straight to the point that the queen, try as she might, cannot evade: that she has indeed sworn an oath (*sowgand khward*), given her hand in pledge (*dast be paymān dād*) and signed a contract (*ʿahdi nebesht*, 10.50–52) with him.[147] The consequences of breaking such a contract cannot be belittled, especially in the Zoroastrian worldview, where the contract or *miϑra*, deified as the god Mithra, is among the most sacred and inviolate of undertakings: in the hymn (*yašt*) to Mithra in the Little Avesta, we learn that "the ruffian who lies unto Mithra [*miϑra-druj*, the one who breaks the contract] brings death unto the whole country, injuring as much the faithful world as a hundred evil-

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145. R55/T53/M33/D21:

چنان کز راستی گیتی بیاراست / ز مردم نیز داد راستی خواست
کسی کز راستی جوید فزونی / کند پیروزی او را رهنمونی
به گیتی کیمیا جز راستی نیست / که عزّ راستی را کاستی نیست
من از تو راستی خواهم که جویی / همیشه راستی ورزی و گویی
تو خود دانی که ما با هم چه گفتیم / به پیمان دستِ یکدیگر گرفتیم
به مهر و دوستی پیوند کردیم / وزان پس هر دوان سوگند خوردیم
کنون سوگند و پیمان را مفرموش / بجا آور وفا در راستی کوش

146. Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī, *Vis & Rāmin* (*tr. Morrison*), 33.

147. The solemn nature of the contract is reiterated by the narrator some lines later: "These two eminent figures made a compact and swore mutual oaths by the Truth" (*cho in do nāmvar paymān bekardand · dorosti rā be ham sowgand khwardand*, 11.6). Morrison correlates the phrase *dorosti rā*, which I translate as "by the Truth" (paraphrasing the idea of *ḥaqq*), and which he translates as "according to Righteousness," with the Avestan formula *ašāt hača*, "according to truth." See ibid., 25, note 2.

doers could do" (10.1).[148] Mobad's invocation of Shahru's sacred obligations thus sends the queen into a crippling inner turmoil:

> When Shahru read the King's perfumed letter,
> she fell in such a state that she forgot the world.
> Humiliated before the king, she despaired for herself;
> her heart was twisting over what she had done.
> Her head cast down like those in disgrace,
> she writhed inside like those who break their oaths,
> Fearing both the King and the Just Lord,
> for she had broken her oath and covenant.[149] (15.77–80)

From previous experience, we know that Shahru has been careful to observe the obligations and constraints of her position, both as a woman and as a vassal to the king; and while she was able to negotiate within those boundaries when she rejected Mobad's invitation to become his consort, his letter, with all its talk of right and retribution, left her as stuck and helpless as "a donkey whose foot is trapped in the mud" (*cho pay karda khari dar gel foru mānd*, 15.36). That time, she was delivered from her predicament by her children—first by Vis, who kicked out Zard, and then Viru, who defeated Mobad in battle—but it is clear that this is her vulnerable point, something that Zard will remember when it is time to approach her a second time. Thus he advises Mobad:

> Give her abundant presents, beguile her with money;

148. F. Max Müller, ed., *The Zend-Avesta*, trans. James Darmesteter, The Sacred Books of the East 3 (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1898), 2:120. See also the fourth book (*fragard*) of the *Vīdēvdād* (ibid., 1:34–49) and chapters 51–52 of *The Book of Arda Viraf*, 182 for some of the gruesome punishments that await the perfidious oath-taker in hell. There is a fascinating passage in the Hymn to Mithra in which those who break sacred covenants are punished by a demon in the form of a boar, the very agent of Mobad's eventual demise; see Müller, *The Zend-Avesta*, 2:137:

> We sacrifice unto Mithra, the lord of wide pastures, sleepless, and ever awake; before whom Verethraghna, made by Ahura, runs opposing the foes in the shape of a boar, a sharp-toothed he-boar, that kills at one stroke, pursuing, wrathful, with a dripping face; strong, with iron feet, iron fore-paws, iron weapons, an iron tail, and iron jaws; who, eagerly clinging to the fleeing foe, along with Manly Courage, smites the foe in battle, and does not think he has smitten him, nor does he consider it a blow till he has smitten away the marrow and the column of life, the marrow and the spring of existence. He cuts all the limbs to pieces, and mingles, together with the earth, the bones, hair, brains, and blood of the men who have lied unto Mithra. (10.18)

149. R56/T55/M34/D23:

چو شهرو خواند مشکین نامهٔ شاه　　چنان شد کش نبود از گیتی آگاه
ز شرمِ شاه گشت آزردهٔ خویش　　دلش پیجان شده از کردهٔ خویش
فرو افگنده سر چون شرمساران　　همه پیچید چون زنهارْخواران
هم از شاه و هم از دادار ترسان　　که بشکست این همه سوگن و پیمان

Make her hope for your munificence, then make her fear her God.
Tell her: "There is another world after this world, and your eternal soul will be trapped.
What excuse will it bring before the Creator, once ensnared by the bonds of sin?"[150]
(26.57–60)

Zard calls this process *fariftan*, and it is significant that this is not an action that is exclusively linked to women; he says, "With these two things [money and admonition], men have swayed kings; it is fitting that they should seduce beautiful women as well!" (*bedin do chiz befriband shāhān · ravā bāshad ke befriband māhān*, 26.44). While both the carrot and the stick play a role in this stratagem, Zard gives priority to the latter element, to which the former is merely a garnish: "Ornament your admonitions in this wise with coin and brocade" (*az in guna sakhon-hā rā biārāy · be dinar o dibā-yash bepirāy*, 26.63), as he puts it. Mobad implements this plan, and to Shahru's credit, Gorgāni plays up the scale and efficacy of the subsequent assault; the description of the astounding magnificence of the king's gifts to her is among the more sumptuous displays of material wealth in the work, while his letter to her thunders with a preacher's vehemence:

Think of your eternal shame when your soul sees the Judge!
Think of the Creator's judgement, the terror of Hell, and the end of things!
You know this world will one day come to an end, and when it is gone,
another world will come.
Don't receive ruin and eternal pain for the fleeting desires of this world!
Don't completely turn your back on God; don't defile pure speech to Ahriman's delight!
Don't be among the oath-breakers, for God is with the oath-keepers![151] (27.5–10)

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150. R75/T83/M53/D48:

برادر گفت شاها چیز بسیار   به شهرو بخش و بفریبش به دینار
به نیکویی امیدش ده فراوان   پش آنگاهی به یزدانش بترسان
بگو با این جهان دیگر جهانست   گرفتاری روان را جاودانست
چه عذر آرد روانت پیش دادار   چو دربندِ گنه باشد گرفتار

151. R75/T84/M53/D48. To be fair, this is not the only threat Mobad makes against Shahru; he also threatens to ravage her country if does not get his prize, saying "you will be accountable for every drop of blood we spill" (*be har khuni ke mā rizim idar · gereftāri torā bāshad dar ān sar*, 27.21).

به یاد آور ز شرمِ جاودانت   کجا از دادگر بیند روانت
به یاد آور ز داورگاه دادار   ز هولِ دوزخ و فرجامِ کردار
تو دانی کاین جهان روزی سرآید   وزو رفته جهانی دیگر آید
بدین یکْروزه کامِ این جهانی   مخر تیمار و دردِ جاودانی
بدین‌سان پشت بر یزدان مکن پاک   مگو بر کامِ اهریمن سخن‌پاک
مباش از جملهٔ زنهار خواران   که یزدان است با زنهارداران

As Zard predicted, Shahru cannot withstand this twofold assault. Dazzled by the opulent gifts, and with the fear of God freshly awakened within her (*ze yazdān niz āmad dar del-ash bim*, 28.19), she opens the castle gates and surrenders Vis to Mobad's joy and misfortune. This inaugurates one of the most celebrated scenes in the poem, the "Description of the Night" (*andar ṣefat-e shab*), in which Gorgāni unleashes a "travesty of the classical figures to underline the pernicious influence of that night: not only were the planets standing in bad positions, but even the constellations of the fixed stars—renowned for never changing their places and forms—had changed their forms, had turned into broken and damaged figures."[152] Meisami observes that the opening conceit of this passage places Mobad in a role analogous to that of a demon out to steal the moon, thus assigning him the brunt of the heavens' wrath, but the wording of the analogy also condemns Shahru for allowing moonlike Vis to fall into his clutches:

> When the Sphere sprung the demon of the night from his bonds,
> it then gave him the shining moon.
> In that fortress, too, Shahru did the same;
> she learned from what the Zodiac had done.[153] (28.19–20)

It is clear that Shahru is implicated in the outrage, but the letter that preceded this moment casts her choices in a strange and ambivalent light; had she reneged on her sacred oath, one wonders if the heavens would have been any less offended. In any case, the story that emerges of Shahru is that of a woman who is forced to choose between two reprehensible options, rather than one who is easily diverted from the right path by treasure and trinkets.[154] From her standpoint, the decision to give up Vis was probably the wiser thing to do, for she will have honored her own vows, and Vis will certainly not want for anything as Mobad's queen. The matter of who Vis loves, of course, is not a consideration at all, while that is in Vis's eyes the one and only thing that matters; this is one of the many ways that Shahru differs from her daughter. But if we read her decision on her own terms, we cannot chalk it up to womanly greed or frailty;

152. Kunitzsch, "Description of the Night," 98.

153. R77/T87/M56/D51. Cf. Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 106.

چو گردون دیوِ شب را بند بگشاد پس آنگه ماهِ تابان را بدو داد
بر آن دز نیز شهرو همچنان کرد بامخت آنچه برجِ آسمان کرد

154. The contrast with Golshāh's mother in *V&G* could not be starker. From the beginning, she is against Varqa marrying her daughter on the grounds that he is too poor; when the king of Syria's petition to wed Golshāh is turned down by her father, he turns to her avaricious mother and easily wins her over with his promises of untold wealth. The wife, then, prevails over her husband with the classic tounge-lashing, a favorite topos of misogynist polemic. See ʿAyyūqī, *Varqa va Gulshāh*, 72–74.

as Zard had said, *fariftan* is a mode of persuasion that can sway the hearts of men and women alike. By fulfilling her oath, Shahru has resolved her dilemma and brought her moral and legal obligations in sync with one another. It is now up to Vis to do the same.

Following Vis's capture, another woman, the Nurse, becomes entangled in the affairs of seduction. The Nurse is a unique character in a number of ways: in addition to her advanced age, experience, and pragmatism, she inhabits a decidedly inferior social rank in comparison to the other actors in the story.[155] All these qualities make her a ripe candidate for the role of the "Old Woman," a staple presence in the literature of the classical, late antique, and medieval Mediterranean.[156] Like many literary nannies, from Ovid's Myrrha to Jean de Meun's La Vieille, one of the most striking aspects of the Nurse is her frank and down-to-earth attitude towards sex, a feature that has caught the eye of critics like Davis and Southgate.[157] As an archetypal figure, the Nurse is also intimately associated with the arts of witchcraft and enchantment: "Over and over again, she is portrayed as a perpetrator of outright falsehood, a master of intrigues, 'a marvel of deceit,' 'a woman steeped in magic arts, in spells, and wiles.' "[158] It is worth noting, however, that the only out-and-out magic performed by the Nurse in *V&R* is the impotency charm she casts on Mobad; besides this, her spells seem to largely consist of persuasive speech, or "strategems" (*chāra*), as we might say. Yet the gift of gab should not be underestimated; as Rāmin says, knowing what to say and how to say it is indeed a kind of magic, a way of using words to effect one's will upon the world.

155. It is a little difficult to guess what her rank might actually be; though she and her kindred are repeatedly and vehemently cursed throughout the story as witches' spawn and of polluted blood, they are simply insults and cannot be taken as proof of anything. It is possible, in fact, that the Nurse owns a bit of property in her native land, for after Vis is born, we are told that "her Nurse brought her to Khuzan, where she had space, home, and abode" (*be khuzān bord u rā dāyegān-ash · ke ānjā bud jāy o khān o mān-ash*, 11.18). In any case, it is safe to say that the Nurse is definitely socially inferior to Shahru, Vis, and the other characters. A general discussion of her role in the story is found in George Morrison, "Flowers and Witchcraft in the 'Vīs o Rāmīn' of Fakhr ud-Dīn Gurgānī," in *Commémoration Cyrus: actes du Congrès de Shiraz 1971 et autres études rédigées à l'occasion du 2500e anniversaire de la fondation de l'Empire perse* (Tehran: Leiden: Bibliothèque Pahlavi; diffusion, E. J. Brill, 1974), 249–259.

156. Some valuable studies on this figure include: Leyla Rouhi, *Mediation and Love: A Study of the Medieval Go-Between in Key Romance and Near-Eastern Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 1999); Malti-Douglas, *Woman's Body, Woman's Word*; Farzaneh Milani, "The Mediatory Guile of the Nanny in Persian Romance," *Iranian Studies* 32, no. 2 (1999): 181–201; Cynthia Robinson, "Going Between: the *Ḥadīṯ Bayāḍ wa Riyāḍ* and the Contested Identity of the 'Ajouz in 13th-Century Iberia," in *Under the Influence: Questioning the Comparative in Medieval Castile*, ed. Cynthia Robinson and Leyla Rouhi (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 199–230.

157. Davis, "Introduction," xv–xviii; Dick Davis, "Vis o Rāmin," in *EIr*, online edition (2005), accessed June 11, 2015, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/vis-o-ramin; Southgate, "Anomaly." In this regard, she is not unlike the other mature figures in *V&R*: both Shahru and Mobad, as we have seen, demonstrate an approach to love that places material, political, and social concerns ahead of the idealist views evinced by Vis.

158. Milani, "Mediatory Guile," 185. Her citation also includes a quote from Dick Davis, *The Legend of Seyavash* (London: Penguin Classics, 1992), 22.

> With *chāra*, men can build mills for the wind or bring a foundation out of a river;
> They can pull birds from the sky, draw fish from the sea,
> Entrap raging lions, ensare trumpeting elephants,
> Entice snakes from the cracks to tame them or drive them wild.[159] (40.194–97)

This tremendous power may be why the Nurse, a lowly old woman who wields undue influence on those around her, is repeatedly cursed as a vile sorceress by many characters in the story, not least the narrator, who at one point describes her as an agent of the Devil, armed with treachery, tricks, deceit, and magic (*farib o ḥila o nirang o dastān*, 42.174). Despite these harsh judgements, she is a rich character to get to know, for she displays an understanding of love that is as unique to her as is her character. She also has a complex relationship with seduction, for she is placed into a mediatory position in which she both seduces and is seduced. The outcome of her choices in the passage we are about to discuss renders her subsequent relation with Vis much more complicated than before; while she initially appears as a loyal servant whose purpose is only to carry out the wishes of her mistress, her motives become murkier throughout the seduction process, and it gets more and more difficult to tell whether she is acting for the benefit of Vis and Rāmin or the directives of her own moral compass.

The sharp contrast between the Nurse's worldview and that of her charge is readily evident in the many conversations that take place between the two women. Having been brought against her will to Mobad's court in Marv, Vis locks herself in her quarters, weeping, screaming, refusing food, tearing her flesh, and refusing any interaction with Mobad:

> She neither listened to the words he said, nor showed her comely face to him.
> She always turned to face the wall, as bloody tears spilled down her cheeks.
> She was always thus, whether on the road or in Marv, and the king was not once happy with her;
> Like a garden was Vis's fair face, but the garden's door was tightly shut.[160] (33.33–36)

159. R103/T127/M83/D88:

به جاره آسیا سازند بر باد		بر آرند از میانِ رود بنیاد
به زیر آرند مرغان را ز گردون		ز دریا ماهیان آرند بیرون
به دام آرند شیرانِ ژیان را		به بند آرند پیلانِ دمان را
برون آرند ماران را ز سوراخ		به افسون‌ها کنندش رام و گستاخ

160. R85/T99/M64/D62:

نه گفتاری که او گفتی شنودی		نه روی خوبِ خود او را نمودی
نگارین روی در دیوار کردی		به رخ بر دیده را خونبار کردی

Hot on Vis's heels, the Nurse arrives to find her charge alone, dejected, and with no desire to live (*borida del ze jān o zendegāni*, 34.22). She immediately sets to work trying to remedy the problem, and, as we have seen, her advice largely revolves around accepting one's fate and making the best of a bad situation; and in Vis's case, that fate might not be so terrible after all: "Although Viru is a prince and king, he does not have the same glory and magnificence as Mobad. You may have lost a gold coin, but God has given you a jewel in return" (34.37–38).[161] Her advice, concluding with an invocation of God and a warning against ingratitude (*nabāyad nāsepāsi kard*, 34.44), is not devoid of its own moral imperative; in essence, it replaces the sacred ideal of chastity above all else with a willing acceptance of God's will. But Vis will have none of it, and responds with the grim resolve of a martyr prepared to die for her cause:

> My heart is satiated with smells and colors; I'll not wear fine clothes nor sit on a throne.
> Sackcloth is my raiment and dust is my seat;
>   my companions are sighs and a thousand terrors.
> . . . .
> If I must have a husband for the sake of desire, it's best for me to be without it;
> as Viru never enjoyed me in the end, may no one else have joy from me![162]   (35.2–3, 6–7)

Though Vis's resolve seems ironclad, Rāmin was right—the Nurse knows exactly what to say to sway her opinion. An appeal to pleasure would be futile, but Vis is clearly preoccupied with her honor and good name; and so the Nurse responds:

> Everyone who sees you in this state will immediately start talking:
> One will say you're rash, one will say you're foolish,
> Sometimes they'll say you dishonor us, as you show us no acceptance;
> Sometimes they'll say, "Who does she think she is? Why should we put up with this?"

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161. R87/T101/M65/D64:

چنین بود او چه در مرو و چه در راه — ازو خرّم نشد روزی شهنشاه
چو باغی بود روی ویس خرّم — ولیکن باغ را درِ بسته محکم

اگرچه شاه و شهزادست ویرو — به جاه و پادشاهی نیست چون او
درمی گرچه از دستت فتادست — یکی گوهر خدایت باز دادست

162. R88/T103/M67/D66. Vis's resolve to die a virgin compares well with that of the heroines in the Greek novels; cf. *Callirhoe* 2.11, *Leucippe & Cleitophon* 6.22; also Hägg's discussion of the *Parthenope Romance*, in which a beautiful girl who was abducted from her monastery by the Persian king and immolated herself before he could marry her; see "The *Parthenope Romance* Decapitated?," 237–39.

دلِ من سیر گشت از بوی و از رنگ — نپوشم جامه ننشینم به اورنگ
مرا جامه پلاس و تخت خاکست — ندیمم مویه و هزار باکست
اگر شویم ز بهرِ کام باید — مرا بی‌کام بودن بهتر آید
چو او را بود ناکامی به فرجام — مبیناد ایچ کس دیگر ز من کام

> If you are wise, this is what you should do: keep their tongues from wagging;
> For she who holds others in disdain will find herself with many enemies.[163] (36.22–27)

The Nurse's speech marks a reiteration of the woman-as-riot dilemma; even though Vis has decided to cut herself off from the outside world and erase herself from the public eye, in what would ostensibly be perceived as a virtuous course of action, her withdrawal will only incur further scorn and contempt from her community. Once again, her love of honor leads to dishonor: whether she acts as the strident champion of right behavior, as we saw in her denunciation of the Great King, or renounces worldly attachment and declares the life of an ascetic, as she does now, her reputation is pulled ever downwards by the unsolvable quandary of her position. By revealing the workings of this paradox, the Nurse plays a vital role in the ethical maturation of the story by demonstrating how considerations of virtue and righteousness must be broadened if one is to survive a world where women are damned if they do and damned if they do not. Leyla Rouhi emphasizes this element in her discussion of the Nurse, whose task, she writes, "consists of deciphering certain codes for the young girl, who hitherto has chosen to read the signs of honor and shame in more literal ways. It is thus no longer a question of employing ruses to facilitate a clandestine sexual encounter, but of a young woman's education within a system whose elaborate codes of conduct are prone to entirely contradictory interpretations."[164] Yet Vis is not the most obedient of pupils. The Nurse's appeal to her sense of honor does succeed in rousing her from her self-imposed imprisonment, but only on the condition that she find some way to ensure that Mobad will never be able to touch her; if not, Vis says, she will have no choice but to kill herself (38.5). This uncompromising commitment to honor or death is wholly in line with the normative ethos exhibited by lovers in the Greek novel (whose first impulse, when they are separated or their chastity threatened, is to commit suicide) and the udhri tradition in Arabic literature.[165] The Nurse, however, is shocked by this demand, saying,

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163. R89/T105/M68/D68:

هر ان کس کاو ترا بیند بدین حال بگوید بر تو این گفتار در حال
یکی بهره ز رعنایی شمارند دگر بهره ز بدرایی شمارند
گهی گویند نشکوهید ما را ز بهرِ آنکه نپسندید ما را
گهی گویند او خود کیست باری که ما را زو بباید بردباری
صواب آنست اگر تو هوشمندی که ایشان را زبان بر خود ببندی
هر آن کاو مردمان را خوار دارد بدان کاو دشمنِ بسیار دارد

164. Rouhi, *Mediation and Love*, 178–79.

165. See Konstan, *Sexual Symmetry*, 15–26. Of course, just because this is an *ideal* does not ensure its universal application in the Greek novels, as we discussed earlier (see page 162); but the point in this case is that it is always there, exerting moral

"An army of demon sorcerers has found its way inside you, turning you away from the path of love and justice" (*sepāh-e div-e jādu bar to rah yāft · torā az rāh-e dād o mehr bar tāft*, 38.29); but she is left with little choice but to do her part to preserve Vis's life.[166] She therefore forges a talisman to render Mobad impotent and buries it in a river-bed, expressing her disapproval as she does so:

> I have done as you commanded, though I am distressed by your orders,
> I've tried to make you happy, and thus I've "tied up" a noble man—
> On the condition that when a month passes, this day of your evil nature comes to an end;
> That, by God's decree, you will be happy and drive hatred and rancor from your heart.
> . . . .
> When you have made peace with my lord, I shall bring out the hidden charm
> And burn it at once, kindling joy in your heart as I do so.[167] (38.39–42, 44–45)

Unfortunately for Mobad, the Nurse's good intentions are overruled by the depredations of fate, for the river floods and washes the talisman away, leaving the hapless king sexually debilitated as though "his skin was a prison on his body" (*cho zendān bud gofti bar tan-ash pust*, 38.60). The responsibility for this latest grievance is therefore not fully attributable to the Nurse, despite her position as the story's resident sorceress; his impotence is rather the collateral damage of Vis's hardline pursuit of her own chastity.

It is at this juncture that the Nurse encounters Rāmin. The prince, we recall, had long harbored secret feelings towards Vis, and on the journey back to Marv after she was taken from her mother, he happened to catch sight of her face as the wind pulled back the curtains of her palanquin, inciting him to fall in love all over again.[168] Now he occupies his days wandering the gardens and lamenting his state,

force upon the characters.

166. This is reminiscent of the story of Myrrha in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, x.298–512, who attempts suicide as a way to escape her illicit desire for her father. Her nurse is equally horrified when she learns of this, but her love for her charge compels her to her aid, as Mieszkowski explains: "Incest is an affront to nature and the gods; suicide, however, is an even greater affront. . . . When the only possibilities for Myrrha are suicide or incest, it is quite in character for her old nurse to help her commit incest." See Gretchen Mieszkowski, *Medieval Go-betweens and Chaucer's Pandarus* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 60; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), revised by G. P. Goold, 2:85–99.

167. R93/T111/M72/D74:

بدو گفت آنچه فرمودی بکردم   اگرچه من ز فرمانت بدردم
ز فرمانِ تو خشنودیت جُستم   چنین آزادْمردی را ببستم
به پیمانی که چون یک مه برآید   ترا این روزِ بدخویی سرآید
به حکمِ ایزد خرسند گردی   ستیز و کینه از دل در نَوَردی
چو تو دل‌خوش کنی با شهریارم   من آن افسونِ بنهفته بیارم
بر آتش بر نهم یکسر بسوزم   شما را دل به شادی بر فروزم

168. See pages 181, 188, and 202. The apparent contradiction that Rāmin could have both grown up with Vis and then sees her for the first time as a young man falls into the larger issue of temporal logic in the story, such as the aforementioned fact

a favorite pastime of melancholy lovers. But when he sees the Nurse, he begs her to intercede on his behalf in a long passage that poetically describes the pains and woes of unrequited love:

> I'm like a wounded onager in the plain, struck in the heart by a poison-tipped arrow;
> I'm like a swift lion, running, roaring, searching for his lost cub;
> I'm like a little child, broken-hearted, separated from both nurse and mother;
> I'm like a delicate branch of myrtle, snapped in two by the heavens' will![169] (40.85–89)

These words have a rather curious effect on the Nurse: "When the old Nurse heard these words, you'd say an arrow struck her heart. Secretly, she gave her heart to Rāmin, but she showed nothing externally." (*cho beshnid in sokhan-hā Dāya-ye pir · to gofti khward bar del nāvak-i tir / nehāni del-ash bar Rāmin bebakhshud · valikan āshkār rā hich nanmud*, 40.136–37). It seems that Rāmin has succeeded in eliciting her love and sympathy, bringing her heart into harmony with his. At the same time, however, this is not enough to persuade her to help him; although the Nurse is genuinely moved by Rāmin's plight, she continues to argue back, insisting (with quite a lot of experience to back her up) that Vis is far too proud and fearless to be moved by any form of persuasion: "She won't be intimidated by mighty deeds, she won't be swayed by opulent treasures" (*na az kār-e bozorg āyad nahib-ash · na az ganj-e gerān āyad farib-ash*, 40.162). Nothing that Rāmin can say will change her mind, and as his desperation grows, he turns to more drastic measures. Throwing himself upon her (*andar u āvikht*, 40.182), he says:

> "You know more spells than anyone else by which you can devise solutions;
> You know so many words when words are needed, so many arts when skill is necessary.
> Join your speech and art together, and lay a snare for Vis!"
> . . . .
> He spoke, and then drew her tightly to his chest, and kissed her head over and over,
> Then kissed her on her lips and face—the demon came and entered her body.
> He soon attained his desire from the Nurse; you'd say he planted a seed of love in her heart.

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that Rāmin appears at Mobad's Nowruz banquet long before he could have been born. In this case, I think what matters is that we have two separate romance strategies being used to justify Rāmin's passion for Vis: one trope is to have the lovers grow up together (*Daphnis & Chloe*, *Varqa & Golshāh*, *Layli & Majnun*, *Aucassin & Nicolette*), and another is to have them fall in love at first sight (*Callirhoe*, the *Ephesiaca*, *Leucippe & Cleitophon*, *Vāmeq & ʿAẕrā*, *Zāl & Rudāba*). This double introduction may also be evidence for seeing *V&R* as a composite of many different narratives assembled about the famous lovers.

169. R99/T119/M78/D82:

به گورِ خسته منم در بیابان　　به دل بر خورده زهرآلوده پیکان
به شیرِ تند منم پوی پویان　　خروشان بچهٔ گم‌گشته جویان
به طفلِ خرد منم دل شکسته　　هم از مادر هم از دایه گسسته
به شاکِ مُرد منم نغزرسته　　قضای آسمان او را شکسته

> Know that once you've had your pleasure of a woman, you've placed a bridle on her head.
> When Rāmin rose from the Nurse's side, her heart was adorned with sympathy for him,
> For the veil of modesty was torn; at that instant, her cold words became warm.[170]
> (40.198–200, 203–8)

Although Rāmin is often singled out in the story as the one with the silver tongue, we have run against the limits of his rhetorical power in this scene: after a litany of useless pleas and entreaties, he can only resort to physical seduction in its most crude and violent form, seizing the Nurse and taking possession of her body as though he were a demon. It is a kind of seduction by proxy; knowing that the daughter of Shahru will not submit to force (*nagar tā dar del-at nāyad ke niru · tavāni kard bā farzand-e Shahru*, 40.141), he must instead use force upon the Nurse to enlist her aid, for only she possesses the skills of persuasion and stratagem that might succeed in seducing Vis. Yet as the Nurse rises from his side, she praises him for the compelling power of his peculiar brand of rhetoric: "O you seductive speaker! You've beat us all [lit., won the game] in eloquence!" (*bedu goft ay faribanda sakhon-guy · bebordi az hama kas dar sakhon guy*, 40.209).[171] Such a tongue-in-cheek assessment of Rāmin's verbal prowess, ironically juxtaposed against a moment in which his words could achieve nothing at all, deeply complicates the question of choice and seduction as we move forward in the story.

Just as Mobad had to seduce Shahru to get to Vis, now Rāmin has seduced the Nurse with his eye on the same prize. The routes of seduction were quite different from one another, and could possibly be understood as a successful targeting of that person's weak spot on the basis of her social position: Shahru,

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170. R103/T128/M84/D88:

تو نیز افسون ز هرکس بیش دانی   همیدون چاره‌ها کردن توانی
سخن دانی بسی هنگامِ گفتار   هنر داری بسی در وقتِ کردار
سخن را با هنر نیکو بپیوند   وزیشان هر دو بر نه ویس را بند
بگفت این و پس او را تنگ در بر   کشید و داد بوسی چند بر سر
وزان پس داد بوسش بر لب و روی   بیامد دیو و رفت اندر تن اوی
ز دایه زود کامِ خویش بر داشت   تو گفتی تخمِ مهر اندر دلش کاشت
چو بر زن کامِ دل راندن یکی بار   چنان دان کش نهادی بر سر افسار
چو رامین از کنار دایه بر خاست   دل دایه به تیمارش بیاراست
دریده شد همانگه پردهٔ شرم   شد آن گفتار سردش رد زمان گرم

171. She expands on this joke some lines later: "The Nurse who followed the ways of sorcery spoke with a smile: 'You're very talented in the ways of speech! / With such nectarine words and entreaties, you could restore wits to the witless. / You've wounded my heart with these words, when you bound my soul with this petition' " (40.230–32).

به خنده گفت جادو کیش دایه   تو هستی در سخن بسیارمایه
بدین گفتارِ نغز و لابه چون نوش   به مغزِ بیهُشان باز آوری هوش
دلم را تو بدین گفتار خستی   چو جانم را بدین زنهار بستی

the queen, seems most effectively intimidated by the threat of a higher power, while the Nurse, as a typological representative of the body and its physical pleasures, is perhaps most vulnerable to bodily enticement. But on the other hand, both cases blur the line between what is persuasive and what is violent. The threat of violence in Mobad's letter, audible but unrealized, is brought out in full display by Rāmin's physical rape, an action the Nurse, that most gifted of speakers, rebrands as the best kind of persuasion she has yet encountered. Now all eyes are on Vis; Shahru has surrendered her daughter, the Nurse has defected, and the stage is set for the old match between brother and sister to be dissolved and replaced by the union of the foster siblings Vis and Rāmin. It remains to be seen how Vis will react to this proposal.

3.5 New commitments

In his book *Panthea's Children*, in which he compares the tropes and motifs of the Greek novels with the early Persian romances, Dick Davis makes a passing observation that strikes me as profoundly significant:

> Reading according to the Greek narrative formulae one half expects the chief love interest of the tale to be between Vis and Mobed. Mobed abducts Vis from her wedding to another, and according to the Hellenistic romances this means he is her true lover. But then Mobed has been promised to Vis without her consent, and this, according to the romances, means he is *not* her true lover. The motifs are present but give conflicting signals, so that the Greek criteria will not allow them to be read unambiguously. And as we soon learn, Mobed's suit proves to be a false start; the true subject of the story only becomes apparent when Mobed's brother, Rāmin, meets with Vis.[172]

What I appreciate about this comment is that it shows how an attention to the details, read against the backdrop of literary precedent and genre, can destabilize the initial assumptions one might bring to a story of this kind. *Vis & Rāmin* is rife with "mixed signals" and "false starts," and with every new surprise comes an additional layer of doubt and anxiety regarding the role and intention of the characters, particularly regarding the three men who compete for Vis's love. Even Mobad, who seems like the easiest candidate to rule out, fulfills some of the expectations held of romance heroes, making him something of an anti-hero rather than an out-and-out villain, as we will discuss in Chapter 4. The line gets blurrier

172. Davis, *Panthea's Children*, 42–43.

still when we turn to Viru, who up to now has been Vis's declared love interest, contrary to the title of her story. Although he is a relatively minor character, it is impossible to fully understand Vis's objection to Rāmin until we first think about what Viru represents for her as a lover, and for the story as a romance. As we review the events leading up to Vis's seduction, we might ask ourselves a hypothetical question as a thought-experiment: what if the title of this love-story was not actually *Vis & Rāmin*, but *Vis & Viru*? How would that color our reading of these events?

If we imagine a story whose rules demand that Vis be loyal to Viru at all costs, then both Mobad *and* Rāmin are the enemies, the illegitimate claimants to her love. From this perspective, Vis's behavior snaps into focus: her quiet consent to marriage with Viru, expressed with nothing more than a blush and a downward glance; her fiery rejection of Mobad's advances in the name of fidelity to her husband, with whom she mixes like milk and wine; her threat of suicide should her chastity be jeopardized; her declaration that none shall have her body but Viru; her prevailing upon her Nurse to render her would-be husband impotent. This structural reorientation also alters the Nurse's role in the story from go-between to temptress: rather than performing the usual role of acting as a liaison to unite the heroine with her beloved, she is now attempting to persuade her to betray her chosen mate and legitimate husband and have a fling with her abductor's brother, destroying her reputation and condemning her soul in one fell swoop.[173] Thus the battle between Vis and her Nurse that unfolds in a chapter with the suggestive title "The Nurse's Seduction of Vis on behalf of Rāmin" (*fariftan-e Dāya Vis rā be jehat-e Rāmin*), is couched as a battle between right and wrong, good and evil. As far as Vis is concerned, Rāmin is about as welcome in her room as a snake, yet somehow, this is the man who is destined, as we have known all along, to become her lover. Deciding whether to call their eventual union a success or a disaster is a toss of the coin.

173. *Pace* Southgate, who argues that *Vis & Rāmin* provides a window into a time in pre-Islamic Iran when women of the aristocracy were autonomous and could freely marry and have affairs without fear of reprisal (Southgate, "Anomaly," 44–46), the affair with Rāmin is no laughing matter; cf. the *The Book of Arda Viraf*, which enumerates the many ghastly tortures that adulterers will undergo in Hell (chs. 24, 60, 62, 69, 71, 78, 81, 85, 86, and 88), such as the following (p. 195):

> Then I saw the soul of a woman whose tongue was cut away, and eyes scooped out; and snakes, scorpions, worms, and other noxious creatures (*xrafstar*s) ever devoured the brain of her head; and from time to time, she seized her own body with the teeth, and ever gnawed the flesh. . . . This is the soul of that wicked woman who was, in her lifetime, an adulteress.

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When the Nurse returns from the garden and enters Vis's chambers, she finds her charge weeping in her bed. This is hardly an unusual state for Vis these days, but the cause of her tears this time is striking. When asked what is the matter, Vis tells the Nurse:

> I've abandoned hope of this world, for I saw Viru in my sleep,
> Riding a great dunny horse, spear in hand and sword by his side;
> He had just returned from a successful hunting expedition,
> earning great renown in the fields.
> He joyfully drove his mount to me, and caressed me tenderly for a while,
> Saying in a voice like sugar, "How are you, my beloved, your brother's soul,
> In a foreign land, in the hands of the enemy? Tell me how you are without me."
> And then I saw him lying by me, embracing my silver breast,
> He profusely kissed my sweet lips and doe-like eyes[174] renewing my wound;
> His words to me last night still resound in my ears and heart;
> The sweet smell of his elegant body still lingers in my nose and mind;
> What worse could my cruel fate do, than that I always see Viru in my dreams?[175] (41.30–40)

As tortuous as these dreams are, the presence of sexual desire is an important element in Vis's experience of love, because it is through first the acknowledgement and then the suppression of this desire that she can demonstrate her fealty and devotion to Viru, as she previously stated: "If I must have a husband [Mobad] for the sake of desire, it's best for me to go unsatisfied" (*agar shuy-am ze bahr-e kām bāyad · marā bikām budan behtar āyad*, 35.6). Yet desire is there, and it is first on this perceived weakness that the Nurse directs her attack:

> You're only destroying yourself for Viru; in all the world, you seek none but him.
> You told me that in "stinking" Marv there is no slave who could be your lord like Viru.

174. Literally her "parrot lips" and "buffalo eyes," the former having to do with the trope of the parrot as a sugar-cruncher, the latter invoking the idea of large and beautiful eyes, but I domesticated the translation slightly so it wouldn't sound ridiculous.

175. R106/T132/M87/D92:

من امید از جهان اکنون بریدم	که ویرو را به خواب اندر بدیدم
نشسته بر سمندِ کوه‌پیکر	مر و را نیزه در کف تیغ در بر
ز نخچیر آمده با شادکامی	بسی کرده به صحرا نیک‌نامی
به شادی باره را پیشم بتازید	به خوشی مر مرا لختی نوازید
مرا گفتی به آواز چو شکّر	که چونی یارِ من جانِ برادر
به بیگانه زمین در دستِ دشمن	بگو تا حالِ تو چونست بی من
وزان پس دیدمش با من بخفته	برِ سیمینِ من در بر گرفته
لبِ طوطی و چشمِ گاومینشم	بسی بوسید و تازه کرد ریشم
مرا گفتارِ او کِم دوش خواندست	هنوز اندر دل و در گوش ماندست
هنوز آن بوی خوش زان پیکرِ نغز	مرا ماندست در بینی و در مغز
بتر زین کی نماید بختِ کینم	که ویرو را همی در خواب بینم

Though Viru's a proud king, he's not an angel raised in the heavens!
I've seen so many fine young men in Marv, world-heroes and kingdom-conquerors;
As tall as the river cypress, as fair in countenance as a springtime garden.
. . . .
Among them is a lion among men, a propitious hero, you'd call him a world in every skill.
If they are stars, he is the sun; if they are ambergris, he is pure musk.
His line makes him a lord and king over other men, for Mobad is his brother:
Happy-named and fortune-bright Rāmin! An angel on earth, and a demon in the saddle!
His fair face is very much like Viru's, all hearts are hostage to his love.[176]
. . . .
O silver vault, he's just like you in love; you'd say you're two halves of the same apple!
Look at how you are, so too is he, like tall reeds covered in gold.[177] (41.63–67, 70–74, 81–82)

This opening foray is deceptively sophisticated, for it challenges Vis to reevaluate her choices on a number of levels. The first and most obvious level is the appeal to pragmatism; as she will repeat on many an occasion, the Nurse suggests that Vis is destroying herself needlessly pining away for an absent lover, while there are many other fish in the sea. In this way, she is also appealing to Vis's acknowledged physical desire; we can almost see her wink as she praises Rāmin as a "demon in the saddle." Finally, and most insidiously, the Nurse's speech contains a clever interpretation of the terms of sexual symmetry as a relationship between Viru, Rāmin, and Vis: Rāmin is presented as a virtual clone of Vis's husband, a doppelganger unto whom her desires can be diverted without any apparent loss of integrity. Such a substitution is indeed conceivable when we consider the process by which love endures: as it is the image of the beloved that penetrates the eyes and brands the soul, one could say that the lover is technically

176. Vis admits this herself later on, when she beholds Rāmin for the first time, saying, "He's just as you said, his spirit shines brightly; he's skilled in great and noble arts, and he looks very much like auspicious Viru" (*mar u rā goft Rāmin hamchonin ast · ke to gofti vo bas rowshan ravān ast / honar-hā-ye bozorg o nik dānad · be farrokhbakht-e Viru nik mānad*, 43.30–31).

177. R108/T134/M88/D94:

تو با تیمارِ ویرو مانده و بس   نخواهی در جهان جُستن جز او کس
مرا گفتی که اندر مروِ گنده   خدایت را چو ویرو نیست بنده
اگرچه شاه و خودکام است ویرو   فرشه نیست پرورده به مینو
به مرو اندر بسی دیدم جوانان   دلیرانِ جهان کشورستانان
به بالا همچو سروِ جویباری   به چهره همچو باغِ نوبهاری
وزیشان شیرمردی کامرانیست   کجا در هر هنر گویی جهانیست
گر ایشان اخترند او آفتابست   ور ایشان عنبرند او مُشکِ نابست
به تخمه تا به آدم شاه و مهتر   به گوهر شاهْ موبد را برادر
خجسته‌نام و فرّخ‌بخت رامین   فرشته بر زمین و دیو در زین
به ویرو نیک ماند خوب‌چهرش   گروگان شد همه دل‌ها به مهرش
ترا ماند به مهر ای گنبدِ سیم   تو گویی کرده شد سیبی به دو نیم
نگه کن تا تو چونی او چنانست   چو زر اندود شاخِ خیزرانست

infatuated with the beloved's *image*, rather than the person herself.[178] The Nurse thus describes Vis and Rāmin as two individuals cut from the same cloth, "two halves of the same apple," suitable for each other in every conceivable way. This is a worrying take on the dictates of romantic love: in a sense, the Nurse is not asking Vis to break the rules, but to bend them, obeying the literal sense of "like unto like" while ignoring its deeper significance.

Vis, however, is unwilling to take the bait; at first, she is taken aback by the Nurse's "upside-down speech" (*vāruna goftār*): she hesitates and turns her eyes downward in embarrassment, unable either to respond or to smile (41.90–92). But soon she rallies and scolds the Nurse for even suggesting such a thing: "Shame on you, for both my sake and Viru's, that you turned your thoughts from us to Rāmin" (*ham az viru hm az man sharm bād-at · ke az mā su-ye Rāmin gasht yād-at*, 41.96). She follows this with a diatribe about the weakness of women and the treacherous charms of minstrels, a passage that jibes well with Mobad's views on the same topic (see page 194); her claim that women are created incomplete has already been cited, but it is worth lingering on the second half of her speech, where she reverses the usual "wiles of women" motif to say that no ploy or stratagem devised by woman can rival those of men.

> Although women have various tricks, they still buy the words and pleas of men.
> An unsatisfied man lays thousands of traps to gratify his lust.
> Woman is his prey in every sense, and he takes her all too easily.[179] (41.113–15)

Vis follows these words with a horrified contemplation of the fate that awaits those women who are foolish enough to heed such blandishments:

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178. The implications of this idea are beautifully drawn out in the "Hall of Statues" scene in Thomas's *Tristan* (vv. 944–91), where the lover both marries another woman named Iseut and builds a replica of the original Iseut that he loves and venerates in secret, only adding to the "double pain" (*doble dolur*) of simutaneously possessing and not possessing two images of his beloved; see Thomas of Britain, *Tristran*, ed. and trans. Stewart Gregory (New York: Garland, 1991), 50–55; *Tristan*, 315–16. So too does Rāmin attempt to overcome his love for Vis by marrying her mirror image in Gol, a topic we will explore in Chapter 5. See too this extended passage from *Leucippe & Cleitophon* (Zeitlin, "Gendered Ambiguities," 124):

> The pleasure of the spectacle flows through the eyes into the chest and sits there. Drawing up the little image (*eidôlon*) of the beloved constantly, it impresses it in the mirror of the soul, and forms a picture of the shape (*morphê*); then the beauty floods out again, drawn towards the desirous heart by invisible beams. This pleasure is impressed upon the soul's mirror, leaving its form there; then the beauty floods out again, drawn towards the desirous heart by invisible beams, and seals down a shadow image inside it. (5.13)

179. R109/T136/M90/D97:

زنان را گرچه باشد گونه‌گون چار — ز مردان لابه بپذیرد و گفتار
هزاران دام جوید مردِ بی‌کام — که کامِ خویش را گیرد بدان دام
شکارِ مرد باشد زن به هر سان — بگیرد مرد او را سخت آسان

Unlucky woman, fallen in the snare, given up her honor in return for shame!
Wretched, humiliated woman, the man towering over her body, the bow of disobedience drawn against her!
. . . .
Hopeful woman, who melts in the brand of her hope like sun-kissed snow!
Like a wounded onager in her love, bound heart and soul to the bonds of love!
She sometimes fears her husband, sometimes her kin; sometimes she wastes in her shame and fear of God!
On this side, shame and dishonor, on that side, the fires of Hell, equally innumerable!
. . . .
If I do a deed for my demon's desire, the Lord of my world will burn me.
And if the people learn of my secret, everyone will sow the seeds of my love.
Some will crave my body, committing their very souls towards satisfying their desire;
Some will seek my shame and humiliation, saying nothing but evil about me.
When everyone has had their way with me, there will be no place left for me but Hell![180]
(41.122–23, 126–29, 132–36)

This passage leaves little room to doubt that Vis is motivated by what we might call the normative ethic of the romance, its latent mistrust of women now drawn out into full view. As she puts it, women are weak and beset by enemies from all sides, and all it takes is a single slip for their shame to be exposed in the eyes of all and for divine wrath to fall upon them in the hereafter; death is far preferable to such a fate. As we have seen in previous passages, Vis continues to hold herself up as the paragon of romance virtues, unyielding to temptation no matter what form it takes or direction it comes from; as far as she is concerned, loyalty to Viru is her only route to salvation.

Nonetheless, the Nurse is undaunted, and presses on with every form of persuasion she can devise. Up to now a positive or at least neutral character in the narrative, it is at this scene that she suddenly transforms into an evil witch of wicked nature and intent (*cho jādu badgoman o badnehān shod*, 41.1), a

180. R110/T137/M90/D97:

زنِ بدبخت در دام اوفتاده	گرفته ننگ و آبِ روی داده
زنِ مسکین فروتن مرد برتن	کمانِ سرکشی آهخته بر زن
زنِ امّیدوار از داغِ امید	گدازد همچو برف از تابِ خورشید
به مهر اندر بود چون گورِ خسته	دل و جانش به بندِ مهر بسته
گهی ترسد ز شوی و گه ز خویشان	گهی کاهد ز بیم و شرمِ یزدان
بدین سر ننگ و رُسواییش بی مر	بدان سر آتشِ دوزخ برابر
اگر کاری کنم بر کامِ دیوم	بسوزد مر مرا گیهان خدیوم
وگر رازِ مرا مردم بدانند	همه کس تخمِ مهرم بر فشانند
گروهی در تنِ من طمع دارند	ز کامِ خویش جُستن جان سپارند
گروهی ننگ و رسواییم جویند	بجز زشتی مرا جیزی نگویند
چو کامِ هر کسی از من برآید	بجز دوزخ مرا جایی نشاید

demon-loving sorceress whose words weave dissimulations as mesmerizing as the frescoes of Noshad (42.105–10). For brevity's sake, her series of arguments can be summarized as follows: that Vis was destined to be in Marv ("Fortune snatched you from Viru and took you away from your home and from seeing Shahru"), that all are subject to love's command ("When love comes to you, you must bear its burden, whether at the pleasure or displeasure of others"), that her behavior is unreasonable ("Don't cast your youth to the sea, or melt your silver body in burning toil"), and finally, that sex is an activity well worth pursuing ("You haven't experienced this joy—you don't realize that life without it is joyless").[181] The latter argument is the most famous of her speeches, and the one that has garnered the most attention in the secondary literature; here she illustrates to her naïve protégé a *modus operandi* in which adultery is redefined as the social norm, and insufferable prudes like Vis are the odd ones out:

> The wives of nobles and notables, of the prosperous and heads of state,
> They are all with their husbands, youths like cypress, myrtle, and boxwood,
> and are glad of heart.
> Although they have famous husbands, they take other lovers in secret.
> Sometimes they take their pleasure in their good husbands' embrace,
> and sometimes with their charming lovers.[182] (42.128–31)

With these words, the Nurse offers what could be called the "reasonable" option for Vis, a way forward through which she can shed her grief, find joy, and preserve her good name all at the same time; the cost, of course, is that she must share her body with more than one man. As we might expect, Vis vehemently rejects such a notion. In this regard, her moral code is very much in sync with the "official" worldview of the poem as it is articulated by the narrator, for he immediately weighs in after the Nurse's speech with his own polemic: "When the Nurse said these words to Vis, the army of Satan came to her aid. She laid

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181. These are sections 41.141–48, 41.157–76, 42.45–72, and 42.111–41 respectively. The Persian for the lines cited are as follows: *cho bakht āmad torā bestad ze Viru · borid az shahr o az didār-e Shahru* (41.147), *cho mehr āmad bebāyad sākht nāchār · bebordan kām o nākām az kasān bār* (41.172), *javāni rā be daryā dar mayandāz · tan-e simin be tāb-e ranj magdāz* (42.62), *to in khwashshi nadida-sti nadāni · ke bi u khwash nabāshad zendegāni* (42.126).

182. R116/T147/M98/D108. In this passage, one is reminded of the stories of the *Mantel Mautaillié* and the *Lai du Corn*, where it is revealed that *all* the women of Arthur's court, and not just Guenevere, are guilty of adultery; see Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, 95–97; Peggy McCracken, *The Romance of Adultery: Queenship and Sexual Transgression in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 54–65.

زنانِ مهتران و نامداران بزرگانِ جهان و کامگاران
همه با شوهرند و با دلِ شاد جوانانی چو سرو و مورد و شمشاد
اگر چه شوی نام بردار دارند نهانی دیگری را یار دارند
گهی دارند شویِ نغز در بر به کامِ خویش و گاهی یارِ دلبر

thousands of snares before Vis and opened thousands of doors into her heart" (*cho Dāya in sakhon-hā goft bā Vis · be yāri āmad-ash bā lashkar-e Eblis / hezārān dām pish-e Vis benhād · hezārān dar ze pish-e del-ash bogshād*, 42.142–43). It must be noted, however, that the Nurse's account does seem to accord with the way amorous liaisons are discussed at court: Shahru and Mobad negotiated a romantic tryst in tones as casual as though they were arranging a time to get coffee, and when Viru learns that his sister and Rāmin have gotten together, he seems less outraged by the affair itself than by the fact that she has chosen a drunken tambour-player as her consort, asking her:

> Will you not say what you saw in Rāmin? Why did you choose him, of all people?
> What treasure does he guard, besides the lute and song, harp and tambour?
> All he knows is how to play a few scales and runs on the tambour,
> Nobody sees him save roaring drunk, pawning his clothes to the wine-sellers.[183] (47.72–75)

In the end, none of the Nurse's arguments are successful, and although Vis does not budge an inch, it is worth observing that her responses become especially strident when her caretaker appears to question her judgement and religious principles. When the Nurse asks rhetorically, "What is the purpose of this reason God has given you, if it won't be used as a remedy for your pain?" (*che bāyad in kherad ke-t dād Yazdān · cho dard-at rā nakhwāhad bud darmān*, 42.51), Vis flies into a rage, heaping curses upon her with a self-righteous zeal that brings out one of the uglier sides of our heroine. It is instances like these that truly justify the Nurse's description of Vis as a "proud" woman—proud not for her beauty, as we were led to believe in the Nurse's letter, but for her nobility, lineage, and purity; the passage below is an especially egregious example of Vis's pride getting the better of her.

> May none among those of good name give their child to an evil nurse like this!
> For whens she drinks the impure milk of one of stained lineage and impious nature,
> It will make her pure nature and unsullied lineage baser than her own!
> If the sun's babe were to drink this milk, one would despair of its ever giving light!
> May my mother be shamed before God, for despoiling my pure essence:
> She put me in the hands of a sorceress like you who have no shame, wisdom, or justice.
> You're my enemy, not my guardian! You would despoil my name and honor!

183. R133/T172/M114/D135:

نگویی تا تو از رامین چه دیدی   چرا او را ز هر کس بر گزیدی
به گنجش در چه دارد مردِ گنجور   بجز روز و سرود و چنگ و طنبور
همین داند که طنبوری بسازد   بر او راهی و دستانی نوازی
نبینندش مگر مست و خروشان   نهاده جامه نزدِ می‌فروشان

. . . .
I shall not offend the God of the heavens, nor shall I sell eternal Paradise,
For the sake of a shameless, faithless Nurse who has given up both worlds for Rāmin![184]
(42.79–85, 103–4)

Our thought-experiment seems to be holding up: Vis is acting exactly as she would be expected to if Viru were understood as the "true love" of her story. It is clear that seduction in the traditional sense will not get far with her; the manifold strategies of *fariftan* that effected a change of heart in Shahru and the Nurse are useless against this lonely idealist, trapped in a fallen world of unjust bargains and casual affairs. If we join Vis in seeing an affair with Rāmin as a defilement of a sacred commitment, rather than a match made in heaven, we are compelled to reevaluate the reasons for her seduction. In general, this has been explained by the logic that this text imagines a kinder and more lenient world for its protagonists, a world where moral transgression is taken with a tolerant nod and a grain of salt.[185] This attitude is sometimes ascribed to Vis herself; Davis, for example, writes that she is "happy to subvert the old order when she breaks her marriage vows to her husband."[186] This is of course true in the way Davis intended in writing about Mobad, but the statement could be expanded and qualified: she is quite willing to cuckold her *second* husband, to whom she was unjustly married, but this is not at all the case with the first. Her anger and recalcitrance during these early scenes in this story is motivated not by a desire to overturn the rules of her story (if not her society), but to uphold them: increasingly alone and isolated, Vis sees herself fighting a desperate battle to preserve her chastity against the myriad pressures lined up to divert her from her original commitment, be it by force or deceit. In other words, Vis's transgressions are themselves rooted in a steadfast commitment to the normative expectations held of her as a romance

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184. R115/T144/M96/D105:

مبادا هیچ‌کس از نیک‌نامان — که فرزندش دهد بد دایه زین سان
چو از دایه بگیرد شیرِ ناپاک — به آلوده‌نژاد و خویِ بی‌باک
کند ویژه نژادِ پاک‌گوهر — از آن گوهر که او دارد فروتر
اگر شیرش خورد فرزندِ خورشید — به نورِ او نباید داشت امید
از ایزد شرم بادا مادرم را — که کرد آلوده ویژه گوهرم را
مرا در دست چون تو جادوی داد — که با تو نیست شرم و دانش و داد
تو بدخواهِ منی نه دایهٔ من — بخواهی برد آب و سایهٔ من
نیازارم خدای آسمان را — نه بفروشم بهشتِ جاودان را
ز بهرِ دایهٔ بی‌شرم و بی‌دین — بداده دو گیتی را به رامین

185. See, for example: Kobidze, "On the Antecedents of Vis-u-Ramin"; Southgate, "Conflict"; Southgate, "Anomaly"; Bürgel, "The Romance."

186. Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī, *Vis & Rāmin* (*tr. Davis*), xix.

heroine. I am not sure that Vis is ever “happy” to subvert the old order, but something big has to change before she is even willing to consider, let alone commence, an illicit affair with a man she appears to loathe with all her heart, breaking her vows to the man of her (literal) dreams.

We must therefore turn to the moment of Vis’s seduction alert for clues that would explain what compelled her to make this self-damning choice, for at the moment, Vis and the Nurse appear to be locked in a stalemate; something in the terms and stakes of the debate must shift before any movement can occur. As in the case of the Nurse’s seduction, this shift is initiated by Rāmin, after the Nurse returns to him and admits that she has been defeated by Vis’s steadfastness: “Flattery, tricks, spells, deception—before her, these are like wise words to the drunk!” (*farib o ḥila vo nirang o dastān · bovad pish-ash cho ḥekmat nazd-e mastān*, 42.174). Frustrated by the Nurse’s failure, Rāmin once again must resort to violence. However, this time, Vis is not physically present to be forced; instead, he must threaten to do violence to himself. He instructs the Nurse to deliver one more message to Vis, in which he offers his final terms: fidelity or suicide.

> You know that I am worthy of adoring you—I’m not one of those who steals people away!
> And though many love you, there are none who adore you as I.
> If you took me in, then you would know what love and loyalty are like.
> . . . .
> Keep me alive, that I may spend a lifetime pursuing your love in vain!
> And if you desire to accept my soul, you may do so at that moment.
> And if I am left without recourse to you, I shall renounce my own soul.
> I’ll cast myself from a high mountain; I’ll leap into the waves of the deep sea!
> You’ll be accountable for taking my soul, and I shall take it back from you,
> Before the Judge who will mete out justice, who will give justice to the whole world.[187]
>
> (42.193–95, 199–204)

187. R119/T151/M100/D111. This gesture is comparable with Aucassin, who threatens to commit suicide when Nicolette says that she will leave him; see Pensom, *Aucassin et Nicolete*, 57.

تو دانی من پرستش را بشایم   نه آن باشم که مردم را ربایم
اگر بسیار کس باشند یارت   یکی چون من نباشد دوستدارت
اگر با من در آمیزی بدانی   که چون باشد وفا و مهربانی
مرا زنده بمان تا زندگانی   کنم در کارِ مهرت رایگانی
پس ار خواهی که جانِ من ستانی   هر آن روزی که خواهی خود توانی
وگر با خوی تو بیچار گردم   ز جانِ خویشتنِ بیزار گردم
فرو افتم ز کوهِ تندبالا   جهم در موجِ آبِ ژرف‌دریا
گرفتاری ترا باشد به جانم   بدان سر جانِ خویش از تو ستانم
به پیشِ داوری کاو داد خواهد   همه دادِ جهان او داد خواهد

As before, the threat of suicide has an electric impact on the Nurse; the narrator insists the pain she feels on Rāmin's behalf is greater than Rāmin's own (*mar u rā dard bar del z-ān-e u bish*, 42.207). More importantly, it changes the nature of her discourse with Vis. When she returns to her charge, there is no mention of her seeking new stratagems to weaken her defenses. She rather sits by her side, her heart filled with anxiety, and begins her plea on an entirely new note, revealing for the first time her own private fears:

> I'd like to confide one secret in you—shame before you has stopped my voice—
> I fear King Mobad in this, as all people fear the wicked;
> I fear shame and retribution, for through them my days grow dark;
> I also fear Hell in the end, that in Hell I'll be cursed and disgraced.
> But when I think of Rāmin, of his pale face and bloody tears,
> And of his cries of help to me, saying, "Mercy, Nurse! The world and my soul have become wretched in my sight!"
> He shows shut wisdom in my two eyes, and once again my heart burns for his sake.
> . . . .
> I fear that he will suddenly perish, and that God will judge me for his death.
> O moon, do not so! Have mercy on that wretched one—do not stain your soul with his blood![188] (42.211–17, 223–24)

This latest speech from the Nurse achieves two critical feats that none of her words up to now have accomplished. First of all, there is a realignment of moral frameworks; rather than challenging Vis's ideals as flawed, foolish, or old-fashioned, the Nurse acknowledges that framework as a legitimate one and places herself within it. When the Nurse confesses that she too fears political retribution, public shame, and the justice of God, she and Vis are, for the first time, oriented towards the same guiding principles. For her to admit, then, that despite all her fear, she can be moved by the plight of another soul, is to say that some things might compete with or take precedence over the normative principles of romantic love: fidelity, chastity, and godliness. It is a plea for the individual to take responsibility for the

188. R120/T151/M101/D112:

بخواهم گفت با تو یک سخن راز مرا شرمت فرو بستست آواز
همی ترسم ازین از شاهِ موبد که ترسد هر کسی از مردمِ بد
ز ننگ و سرزنش پرهیز دارم کزیشان تیره گردد روزگارم
ز دوزخ نیز ترسانم به فرجام گر در دوزخ شوم بد روز و بد نام
ولیکن چون بر اندیشم ز رامین وز آن رخسارِ زرد و اشکِ خونین
وز آن گفتن مرا ای دایه زنهار که شد جان و جهان بر چشمِ من خوار
همی ترسم که او ناگه بمیرد به مرگ او مرا یزدان بگیرد
مکن ماها بدان مسکین ببخشای به خونِ او روانت را نیالای

pain of others; if Rāmin is truly dying of love, it would be immoral for the Nurse to stand idly by. She adds her own pain and fear to the stakes, saying that she too is afraid of her own damnation if she allows Rāmin, her foster son, to follow through with his threat of suicide. Her request, then is both a confirmation of Vis's values and a plea that she look beyond the most direct or superficial means of pursing them. Love is reconfigured not as an act of withholding or forbearance, but rather as an act of mercy and self-sacrifice. Vis now has a choice laid out before her that bears enormous moral repercussions not only for herself, but on the people that she loves; and for the first time, we see her caught in a state of moral indecision. The right way is no longer clear for her; either she risks her soul and good name, or she will be held accountable in the afterlife for the pain and suffering of others. As love and mercy (*dusti* and *bakhshāyesh*, 42.233) penetrate her heart, she is left unable to speak; we are privy only to the physical manifestations of her inner conflict:

> She stood tongue-tied in her response, accompanied by silence.
> She kept turning her head for an excuse; sometimes she looked to the ground, sometimes at the sky.
> In shame, her face burned in two colors, sometimes flushed, sometimes pale.
> In shame, her body was like a spring of water, sweat dripping from her like lustrous pearls.
> Thus are the souls of those who keep love; they are generous to good lovers.[189] (42.236–40)

Vis's silence is as deafening as it was before, for the last time we saw her in such a state was when she indicated her consent to marry Viru. This is all the proof the Nurse requires to know that she has succeeded in finding a way to Vis's heart. Her ironclad commitment to virtue, which has successfully warded off all prior attempts at seduction, turns out to be itself the weak spot that effects a change in Vis's position. Yet one must stress how this change is realized not by subverting but by appealing to her ideals. The rules are bent, not broken, reconfigured in such a way as to permit a reassessment of adultery as an act grounded in, not contrary to, the bedrock principles of her character. Shame and modesty are still primary virtues for Vis, as we see in the refrain of *sharm* in this passage, but they are now challenged by

189. R121/T153/M102/D113:

بشد در پاسخش چیره‌زبانی — که بودش خامشی همداستانی
همی پیچید سر را بر بهانه — گهی دیدی زمین گه آسمانه
رخش از شرم دوگونه برشتی — گهی میگون و گاهی زرد گشتی
تنش از شرم همچون چشمهٔ آب — چکان زو خوی چو مُروارید خوشاب
چنین باشد روانِ مهرداران — که بخشایش کنند بر نیک‌یاران

a new issue that had not existed for her before, the necessity of mercy, generosity, and forgiveness. In learning to accommodate these considerations in her self-view as a virtuous person, Vis embarks on a moral realignment of herself in which the conventions that dictate proper action in a highly stratified social setting are destabilized and subject to question, opening the floor for new possibilities of action that require great moral courage and maturity to pursue, even and especially as the normative regiments of protocol break down.

3.6 Anxiety and autonomy

Though she has now permitted herself to at least contemplate an affair with Rāmin as a possibility, Vis is no less determined to remain in control of her circumstances and to dictate the terms of the liaison. As we have seen, she has gone to great lengths to preserve her physical and spiritual integrity, even as a prisoner in Mobad's castle. The preemptive strike against Mobad's sexual capabilities is only the most outstanding manifestation of this desire; but we may also have noticed that until now she has refused even to look upon Rāmin, let alone negotiate with him face-to-face. This reflects an interesting kind of meta-knowledge of the rules of her story; as is well-known in the tradition, one of the most common routes to love is through the gaze, either through a direct encounter with the beloved or through his or her image in a picture, a dream, or a vivid description.[190] By ensuring that her eyes never fall upon Rāmin, Vis avoids the risk of Cupid's arrows striking her, thus circumventing the conventional route to love in this literature—that is, until she has been convinced of the moral value of her choice to do so. In other words, the meeting of Vis and Rāmin is not a matter of chance, as is the case in so many love-stories, but a matter of choice: a carefully controlled process by which Vis attempts to mitigate against the likelihood of the disgrace and damnation that she fears so much. The desire to maintain control both arises from and reveals the ongoing battle of wills raging on inside of her; so long committed to Viru as her one and only beloved, she is understandably anxious about the possibility that she may soon violate this bond and all it represents for her.

190. In this chapter, we have discussed many examples of meetings in person; but some of the stories in which the lovers fall in love through indirect means include *Odatis & Zariadres*, *Zāl & Rudāba*, *Khosrow & Shirin*, and *Yusof & Zolaykhā*.

When the king hosts his next banquet, the Nurse takes Vis to the roof of her pavilion to look upon her future lover in secret. In doing so, she fulfills another generic expectation: as Davis notes, the motif of gazing down from the roof (or entering the room by it) is a common occasion for the first meeting of lovers in Persian romances.[191] As she gazes down, Vis's worst apprehensions are immediately confirmed: her bond with Viru is forever severed, revealing that her identification of him as her one true love was incorrect. All along, she had been committed to a mixed signal, her journey begun on a false start.

> Vis stared at Rāmin long and hard; you'd say she beheld her own sweet soul in him.
> As she scrutinized his face, she laid waste to her love and loyalty to Viru.[192] (43.21–22)

Realizing her inner betrayal of her husband, Vis is cast into a profound sense of shame, mortified at the apparent fickleness of her heart. Addressing it, she wonders, "What do you think I shall see from this heart-breaker who has destroyed my desire for Viru? (*che khwāham did, gu'i, z-in delāzār · ke Viru rā az u beshkast bāzār*, 43.24), then reflects on her separation from her mother and brother and the suffering she has undergone, "lamenting the days gone by" (*darigh-e ruzegār-e rafta mikhward*, 43.28). As Kappler observes in her perceptive study, Vis is forced to contemplate the idea of sundering her ties with Viru and Shahru and accepting her milk-brother Rāmin in Viru's place, with the Nurse as her surrogate mother.[193] Such treachery is hard for Vis to countenance; she returns to the palace garden, the "demon of Love" (*div-e mehr*, 43.37) and "Wisdom" (*kherad*, 43.40) waging a bitter struggle within her heart.[194] Torn apart by indecision, she turns upon the Nurse, who has just returned from congratulating Rāmin on their victory, and denounces her for destroying the bond between her and her brother which had until now been her only refuge.

> When the Nurse came to Vis's side, she beheld her in a terrible state,
> weeping rivers from her eyes.
> Again, Vis flew into a rage, speaking out of her shame and fear of God:
> "As I fear my Lord, neither Rāmin nor the world's shame befit me.

191. Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī, *Vis & Rāmin* (*tr. Davis*), 505.

192. R132/T154/M103/D114:

همی تا ویس رامین را همی دید　　تو گفتی جانِ شیرین را همی دید
چو نیک اندر رخِ رامین نگه کرد　　وفا و مهرِ ویرو را تبه کرد

193. Kappler, "Comment aimer," 73.

194. This debate is reminiscent of Gottfried von Strassburg's description of the battle between "anger" and "womanhood" that takes place in Isolde's heart on realizing the identity of Tristan; see Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, 176.

Why should I sin, or consider it, when one day sin will be visit calamity upon me?
On one hand, what will my people say? what will they call me when they find out?
On the other hand, when I come before God, what excuse shall I make?
What apologies could I bring?
. . . .
When I go to Hell because of Rāmin, to what avail will his love be then?”[195] (44.2–6, 10)

It is in these final waverings that Vis’s sense of vulnerability, though perceptible from the beginning of the story, rises most clearly to the surface. The thought of violating every principle she holds dear is so abhorrent that she appears ready to give up on the Nurse’s scheme then and there; and as the Narrator tells us, “because she feared both God and Hell, [her] wisdom choose shame over love” (*cho az yazdān o az dozakh betarsid · kherad mar sharm rā bar mehr bogzid*, 44.46). But at this critical juncture, a final betrayal takes place. We might have wondered from the beginning whether the Nurse’s appeal to fear and the dread of God was sincere or just the latest in her series of verbal stratagems; but now when she sees her charge reaffirm her vow not to look on Rāmin again, she issues her own ultimatum:

When the Nurse heard these words from that moon,
she took on the nature of a fox in cunning.
She said to her, “O delight of your Nurse! You have no substance but rash behavior!
Why don’t you ever commit to anything? You spin around like a windmill!
. . . .
How will you flee God’s decree? How will you contest the turning skies?
If you’re going to remain so intransigent, there’s no reason to live with you.
Let Marv and Mobad be yours; I’ll take Shahru and Media.
I have no one but you in Marv,
and you know well a devil couldn’t keep you company![196] (44.12–14, 17–20)

195. R124/T157/M105/D118:

چو پیشِ ویس او را دُژم دید   ز گریه در کنارش آبِ زم دید
دگر ره ویس با دایه برآشفت   ز شرم و بیمِ یزدان سخن گفت
که من خود چون بر اندیشم ز یزدان   نه رامین بایدم نه شرمِ گیهان
چرا زشتی کنم زشتی سگالم   که از زشتی بُوَد روزی وبالم
بدین سر چون کسانِ من بدانند   مرا زان پس چه گویند و چه خوانند
بدان سر چون شوم پیشِ خدایم   چه عذر آرم چه پوزش‌ها نمایم
چو در دوزخ شوم از بهرِ رامین   مرا کی سود دارد مهرِ رامین

196. R124/T158/M105/D119:

چو بشنید این سخن دایه از آن ماه   گرفت از چاره کردن طبعِ روباه
بدو گفت ای نیازِ جانِ دایه   بجز تندی نداری هیچ مایه
چرا بر یک سخن هرگز نپایی   به گردانی چو چرخِ آسیایی
تو از فرمانِ یزدان کی گریزی   و با گردونِ گردان که ستیزی
اگر تو این چنین بدخو بمانی   نشاید کرد با تو زندگانی

This perhaps is the one threat that Vis cannot withstand. When we think back to the peculiar circumstances of her childhood, separated from Shahru on the day of her birth and raised in a surrogate home by a surrogate mother, the Nurse is the closest thing to a mother she has, and the only one who is both willing and able to remain with her in exile.[197] As Vis is well aware, she is a stranger in a strange land, with no one from her family to support her: "I've been sundered from home, my mother, my worthy relatives, and my brother (*ham az khāna jodā am ham ze mādar · ham az pormāya khwishān o barādar* 44.29). The Nurse's threat to abandon Vis to the caprice of Rāmin and Mobad, then, is clearly a horrifying prospect for her; it is the Nurse's trump card, the closest thing to physical violence she can exercise over her surrogate daughter. In response to this threat, Vis cries out:

> How could you cut off your heart from me, and go live with someone else?
> How could I live here without you? You are the same as my mother![198] (44.26–27)

And thus Vis's resistance is finally cowed; although the Nurse attempts to encourage her in another well-known speech about the joy of sex, telling her how "if you sleep a man just once, by my soul, you'll never hold back from it again!" (*gar āmizesh koni bā mard yak bār · be jān-e man ke nashkibi az in kār*, 44.46), the battle has already been won. Miserable and defeated, Vis can only reply that she would have been fine if not for the Nurse's intervention:

> If you'd cut short your traps and tricks, I could happily abstain from men.
> You've hurt me tremendously, even though I have no desire in my heart.
> But even if had no fear of your torment, Rāmin would suffer very much.[199] (44.48–50)

زمـیـنِ مـرو بـا مـوبـد تـرا بـاد — زمـیـنِ مـاه بـا شـهـرو مـرا بـاد
مرا در مرو جز تو هیچ کس نیست — تو خود دانی که با تو دیو بس نیست

197. The text is explicit in the timing of Vis's separation from her mother: "That same hour that Vis came out of her mother, her mother gave her to the Nurse" (*hamān sāʿat ke az mādar foru zād · mar u rā mādar-ash bā dāyegān dād*, 11.17). Again, Vis's exile is an important thematic parallel with the story of Iseut; as Gottfried's Isolde sails off to Cornwall to be wedded to Mark, "she wept and lamented amid her tears that she was leaving her homeland, whose people she knew, and all her friends in this fashion, and was sailing away with strangers, she neither knew whither nor how" (Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, 193).

198. R125/T159/M106/D120:

ترا دل چون دهد از من بریدن — بـرفـتـن بـا دگـر کـس آرمـیـدن
ابی تـو چـون تـوانـم بـود ایـدر — که تو هستی مرا همتای مادر

199. R125/T160/M106/D121:

اگر تو کم کنی بند و فریبم — من از شادی و از مردان شکیبم
مـرا آزارِ تـو سـخـتـسـت بـر دل — وگرنه هیچ کامم نیست در دل
مـرا گـر بـیـمِ آزارت نـبـودی — بسا رنجا که رامین آزمودی

The portrait that emerges of our heroine in this moment is one that somewhat belies, yet profoundly enriches, the picture of proud and defiant princess whom we met at the beginning of the story. With every test of her will and every attempt to sway her, Vis's deepest fears have been gradually laid bare; behind her many defenses stands a lonely woman, snatched from a home she never really had and terrified of losing the only mother she ever knew. To realize that the Nurse has manipulated these deepest fears of hers to unite her with her milk-brother is to apprehend the almost brutal violence of the circumstances that led to Vis's affair with Rāmin. Set up as a bargaining chip between two royals before she was even born, the constant object of scrutiny, plots, and counter-plots, abducted by a jealous king, and now subject to the threats of her Nurse (who is herself subject to the threats of Rāmin), Vis has shown herself capable of fierce and determined resistance against every new obstacle that has been thrown in her path; but ultimately she cannot counter the sheer weight of the narrative forces massed against her. In terms of narratological function, the end result of these episodes is something akin to the love potion in the cycle of *Tristan & Iseut*, which places two people into the unworkable situation of loving each other despite their own wills. But in contrast to *T&I*, Vis's seduction is a unilateral and man-made affair, the magic potion replaced by a combination of cunning words, psychological pressure, and physical force, drawing out the violence inherent in the act of seduction and presenting the love of Vis and Rāmin not as the expression of an intuitive attachment, but as the product of a series of unjust transgressions. This point must be emphasized especially in light of the chapters to come; the violence and injustice of the processes that have forced Vis to surrender her body to Rāmin—and with it, her dreams, hopes, and ideals—will become the central thematic of her later laments, letters, and attempts to reassert herself.

Although she has been defeated, pushed into a relationship she had never desired, Vis is nonetheless very careful to negotiate the subsequent tryst with Rāmin on her own terms. She begins by warning the Nurse that all news of the affair must be kept hidden (*konun kushesh bedān kon tā tavāni · ke in rāz az jahān bāshad nehāni*, 44.52), and then empties her quarters of all strangers and grants Rāmin access through the roof. When he beholds his beloved seated regally on her throne, the happy lover springs into an impromptu encomium of her beauty, until Vis cuts him off with words that leave no guessing as to the seriousness of the situation.

She said to him, "O youth in body and fortune! I've seen so much sorrow in this cruel world;
But none such that disgrace became a light thing in my eyes.
I've sullied my pure body, I've annihilated loyalty and shame.
Two have led me to this evil state: evil fortune and my Nurse.
My nurse has flung me into this scandal, by tricks and oaths and deceptions.
She begged and wept as much as she was able.
Speak! What are your intentions towards me, a friend's or an enemy's?
In love you are like a bloom that fades in a single day, not like agate and turquoise.
Months and years turn and you turn with them; you'll regret what you've done.
Why all this misery, if your promises will be like this?
Why suffer eternal shame for a fleeting desire?[200] (45.44, 46–48, 50–54)

After these sobering words, the two lovers agree to a oath of fidelity (*bebastand az vafā paymān-e moḥkam*, 45.70).[201] Rāmin begins, swearing by moon and sun, Jupiter and Venus, bread and salt, the religion of God, by fire and by spirit, that he will never break his faith with her, nor turn his love towards another (*na kas rā dust girad na pasandad*, 45.78). His oath completed, Vis hands him a nosegay of violets as a token of their pledge. Their illicit bond is now official, made licit through these solemn oaths and promises. Through these mechanisms, Vis can try to recover the implicit promises of romantic love that were lost with Viru and rebuild them in her new relationship with Rāmin, despite the many flaws she sees both in him and their arrangement.

The story has come full circle: in the place of the failed pact between Shahru and Mobad, a new pledge of fidelity has been forged between Vis and Rāmin. By following this process of oath-breaking and remaking, we can identify the method by which Vis has claimed ownership over an unwanted union that

200. R127/T163/M109/D126:

بدو گفت ای جوانمردِ جوانبخت   بسی تیمار دیدم در جهانِ سخت
ندیدم یهچ تیماری بدین‌سان   که شد بر چشمِ من رسوایی آسان
تنِ پاکیزه را آلوده کردم   وفا و شرم را نابوده کردم
ز دو کس یافتم این زشت مایه   یکی از بختِ بد دیگر ز دایه
مرا دایه درین رسوایی افگند   به نیرنگ و به دستان و به سوگند
بکرد او هرچه بتوانست کردن   ز خواهش کردن و تیمار خوردن
بگو تا تو چه خواهی کرد با من   ز کامِ دوستان وز کامِ دشمن
به مهر اندر چو گل یک‌روزه باشی   نه چون یاقوت و چون فیروزه باشی
بگردد سال و ماه و تو بگردی   پشیمانیت باشد زین که کردی
اگر پیمان چنین خواهدت بودن   چه باید این همه زاری نمودن
به یکروزه مرادی کِش برانی   چه باید بُرد ننگِ جاودانی

201. Michael Muchow discusses how the swearing of oaths, not as a social contract but as a private and personal agreement, is a cornerstone feature in the Greek novels and a mechanism that enforces the themes of parity and reciprocal responsibility between the two lovers; see "Passionate Love and Respectable Society in Three Greek Novels," 16–20, 140–51.

was foisted upon her by her story: by making sure that Rāmin has made a solemn vow of fidelity, she can ensure that the relationship is still intrinsically good, however transgressive it may appear on the outside. Yet this decision comes at a great personal cost: for the sake of this union, Vis has declared herself willing to accept the shame, sin, and disgrace that will soon be her lot. When the inevitable happens and Mobad discovers their secret, his fury knows no bounds, and he begins to curse Vis with the litany of insults with which we began this chapter; but supported by the oath of fidelity between her and Rāmin, Vis seems to have recovered some of her old fire, and answers Mobad with her head held aloft and proud:

> Behold how Vis of jasmine breast and rosy face gave a spirited reply to the king!
> Although there was no limit to her modesty, destiny stole shame from her eyes.
> She lept from the king's throne like a tall boxwood, crossed her crystal arms,
> And said, "O mighty king! Why do you threaten us with retribution?
> All you have said is true; you've done well not to hide our faults.
> Now, if you wish to kill me, drive me away, tear out my eyes,
> Keep me forever in bonds, strip me naked and parade me in the market—
> Over both worlds, I choose Rāmin, the soul of my body, the spirit of my life,
> The light of my eyes, the ease of my heart, my lord, lover, friend, and darling.
> So what if I give up my life for his love? I keep my life for love's sake!
> I shall never cut off love and loyalty from Rāmin until they are cut off by death.
> . . . .
> I've said the secret plainly before you; get angry if you want, or make your peace!
> Kill me! Hang me! But I never have and never will renounce Rāmin;
> . . . .
> And if your sword takes my life from my soul, this name of mine will remain forever:
> 'Vis gave up her life for the sake of Rāmin!'
> I'd give up a hundred lives for such a name!"[202] (47.42–52, 56–57, 60–61)

202. R132/T170/M113/D133:

نگه کن تا سمن‌بر ویس گل‌رخ   به تندی شاه را چون داد پاسخ
اگرچه شرمِ بی‌اندازه بودش   قضا شرم را دو دیده بر ربودش
ز تختِ شاه چون شمشاد بر جَست   به کش کرده بلورین بازو و دست
مرو را گفت شاها کامگارا   چه ترسانی به پادافراه ما را
سخن‌ها راست گفتی هرچه گفتی   نکو کردی که آهو نانهفتی
کنون خواهی بکش خواهی برانم   وگر خواهی برآور دیدگانم
وگر خواهی به بندِ جاودان دار   وگر خواهی برهنه کن به بازار
که رامینم گزینِ دو جهانست   تنم را جان و جانم را روانست
چراغِ چشم و آرامِ دلم اوست   خداوندست و یار و دلبر و دوست
چه باشد گر به مهرش جان سپارم   که من خود جان برای مهر دارم
من از رامین وفا و مهربانی   نبرّم تا نبرّد زندگانی
بگفتم راز پیشت آشکارا   تو خواهی خشم کن خواهی مدارا
اگر خواهی بکش خواهی برآویز   نه کردم نه کنم از رام پرهیز
وگر تیغِ تو از من جان ستاند   مرا این نام جاویدان بماند

Her bold words cannot entirely hide the fragility of her position. Even before the relationship has commenced, she seems to already know that just as she has compromised her own values to be with Rāmin, he too may not be capable of upholding the high expectations she has of him. It is an uneasy arrangement, structurally faulty, stretched to the limit, and prone to collapse; and to her dismay, the worst of her premonitions will prove to come true. With this as the romance's foundation, it is no wonder that she is unconvinced that this is or will be the right choice for her, and as a result, she will be beset with episodes of self-doubt, anxiety, and self-remonstration throughout the romance; it is not even a page later in the story that we can see her stare down at the three polo players striving for the ball and her love, lament the grief that all three have caused her, and sadly say to herself: *Had my fortune come to my aid, I'd have no lover save Viru.*

It is on these feelings of doubt and ambivalence that the core of my argument lies. Vis is cast into a relationship that she does not in any way desire, even if the rules of her story demand it, and as a consequence, the very foundation of her love with Rāmin is similarly cast into question. That is not to say that the ingredients of mutual attraction are not present at all, for we encounter many signals that present this love as the real deal: when they grew up as children, when Rāmin fainted upon seeing the grown-up Vis in all her beauty, when Vis "beheld her own sweet soul" in Rāmin, and of course the title of the work. But these cues are complicated by the introduction of a second and seemingly more perfect match, Viru, whom Vis will lose and never regain, twisting the instinctual and mutually consensual love that makes up the bread and butter of the romance genre into a love that was foisted upon its unwilling heroine. It is very rare indeed to find a love-story whose titular heroes are caught in an irreciprocal, one-sided affair, and the lack of any normative ground to stand on lends further psychological intensity to Vis's experiences of loss, abandonment, and exile; yet the depth of her character and the strength of her will are made manifest as we watch her find it within herself to recalibrate her understanding of what romantic love is supposed to look like in such a way that she can find the good in an affair that she once would have considered sordid and illegitimate. Having been driven off the path she sought to walk, Vis must strike out into uncharted territory and forge a path of her own.

که جان بسپرد ویس از بهرِ رامین   به صد جان می‌خرم من نام چنین

The story of Vis can be understood from a variety of angles. On the basic level, it is the story of a girl's marriage, rape, and seduction, setting her up as a kind of anti-heroine to the more typical romance narrative of a girl's marriage, rape, and steadfast fidelity to her old husband, until the happy day of reunion comes at last. On a socio-political level, it is the story of a girl whose newly emerged sexuality, and the misogynistic discourses around her as a sexual being, unleash a bitter power-struggle between two aristocratic families, with her as the prize; whoever wins her, wins Iran. On the symbolic level, it is the story of a girl moving from one family network to another, of the trauma of losing her husband-brother and mother at home and of her discovery of a foster husband-brother and foster mother in exile. On the psychological level, it is the story of a girl coming to terms with an absent mother and manipulative foster-mother, one whose poor decisions landed her into an inescapable moral quandary, the other who knew exactly how to force her into doing what she wanted. But perhaps the underlying narrative that can be traced within in all of these is the story of a girl growing up into a young woman, an account of her search for herself and her struggle for autonomy in the complex interplay of ideals and realpolitik. It is clear that she knows what she wants from the beginning; but when that possibility is taken away from her, she is left on her own to figure out what to do, with nobody's terms but her own to guide her. To make this possible, she must complicate the ideals she once pursued with such naïve zeal, repeating commonplace tropes about women's weakness and imitating archetypes of lovers without question; she now has the strength to stand on ground of her own choosing, shaky and uncertain though it may be. Although this portion of her story is filled with moments of trauma, violence, and cruelty, she nonetheless manages to turn it into a victory, or at least the closest thing to a victory that her circumstances could allow; for in the face of an unsolvable dilemma (from a generic point of view), she has discovered a course of action that is meaningful to her, even if it exposes her to a lifetime of censure and reproach. This means that she must navigate a litany of heartbreaking choices that are never easy nor cut-and-dry, and the fact that we can see her (and the other women of the story) confronting these difficult positions head-on provides a subtle rejoinder to the misogynist rhetoric that dominates the logic of their literary world. Thus we are left with the paradox of Vis: the moral adulteress, a woman who is roundly condemned as a creature of loose morals and unbridled passion by her own observers and readers, yet whose actions,

when we look closely, are motivated above all by an unflinching commitment to moral principles and the courage to question her pursuit of them. She has made herself the owner of her story, and as we will see, will remain determined to fight for it when things go wrong.

Bringing these insights back to our understanding of *Vis & Rāmin* as a literary work, it seems Vis's choices, in a way, reflect those of Gorgāni as the author of her story. Like Vis, he does not seek to completely overturn the conventions and ethos of the romance tradition he has inherited, but he uses the fact of Vis's adultery to push for new possibilities and understandings of love within the genre itself. Rather than having his lovers immediately fall for each other, as the motif goes, Gorgāni takes a whole third of the text to explore how and why Vis and Rāmin came to be together in the first place, allowing his characters to discover hidden and deeper principles at work as the superficial codes of conduct are violated. Despite her official status as a sinner and an outcast, Vis remains the heroine of the story, for she has figured out the paradoxical lesson that sometimes rules must be broken in order to uphold them. Vis's self-damning choice complicates and critiques the ideal of romantic love and the ethical codes that it mandates.

Chapter 4

Impotent

Look! Have you ever seen, or heard from any wise man, such deeds
As Rāmin has done to me time and again? He's wearied my heart of its sweet soul!
From the deeds of Vis, her Nurse, and my brother, I forever burn in fire,
Confounded by their spells, in such pain as no salve can cure.
Indifferent to chains and the brig, neither God nor Hell intimidate them;
What can I do with three demons with no fear of shame or retribution?
Heedless of their own disgrace, they brashly do whatever they want;
Though king of world-kings am I, there is no one more unfortunate.
What use this sovereignty and this crown, while my days are black as pitch?
I dispense justice to all, but I've a hundred plaints against my own lot:
Men who've broken ranks have known my wrath, but now I am oppressed by a woman.
My loving heart has wronged me, become my foe's accomplice, and now
The world wants my blood in a goblet for that scoundrel's sake!
My illustrious face is black with a shame that a hundred seas cannot scour.
Here, my wife has joined my enemy and stolen the sun of my name;
There, my brother lies in ambush, a dagger drawn to take my life.[1] (60.31–46)

1. R177/T235/M158/D199:

نگر تا تو چنین کردار دیدی   و یا از هیچ دانَنده شنیدی
که چندین بار با من کرد رامین   دلم را سیر کرد از جانِ شیرین
همه‌ساله همی سوزم بر آذر   ز دستِ دایه و ویس و برادر
بماندستم به دستِ این سه جادو   برین دردم نیفتد هیچ دارو
نه از بند و نه از زندان بترسند   نه از دوزخ نه از یزدان بترسند
چه شاید کرد با سه دیوِ دُژخیم   که نز شرم آگهی دارند و نز بیم
کند بی‌شرم هرکاری که خواهد   نترسد زانکه آبِ او بکاهد
اگرچه شاهِ شاهان جهانم   ز خود بیچاره‌تر کس را ندانم
چه سودست این خداوندی و شاهی   که روزم همچو قیرست از سیاهی
همه کس را به گیتی من دهم داد   مرا از بختِ خود صدگونه فریاد
ستم‌دیده ز من مردانِ صف‌در   کنون گشته زنی بر من ستمگر
همه بیدادِ من هست از دلِ من   که گشت از عاشقی همدستِ دشمن

These are the words of Mobad, one of the most enigmatic characters in the romance of *Vis & Rāmin*. As the paradigmatic rival who separates the heroine from the hero and stands between their union, he easily falls into the functional role of the "obstacle," the villain who prevents the story from ending.[2] This is not an unfamiliar figure in the romance tradition; versions of his character can be found in *V&R*'s predecessor, the romance of *Varqa & Golshāh*, where the lovers' joy is shattered when the bride, on the eve of her wedding, is captured in a night-raid by a rival tribe led by Rabiʿ b. ʿAdnān, provoking numerous battles and adventures in which the hero tries to recover her. With the defeat of Rabiʿ and his sons, it would seem that the story is ready to come to a close, until the unexpected arrival of another villain, the king of Syria, who uses his wealth to bribe Golshāh's mother into marrying her daughter to him.[3] Another variation on this theme is found in *Callirhoe*: abducted by tomb-robbers, Callirhoe eventually winds up at the court of Great King of Persia, who is so smitten by her beauty that he delays her return to Chaireas, provoking an armed struggle between the two men. Eventually, the lovers reunite and manage to escape the King (taking his treasure with them), settling in their native Syracuse to end their days in "true love and lawful marriage."[4]

Although the obstacle-figure is a generic role to play, it nevertheless bears curious implications for those who play it, generating a character who is both necessary for the story to take place and, at the same time, necessarily tangential to it. Just like the abductions, pirates, overprotective parents, storms, shipwrecks, and all the other motival hurdles of this genre, Mobad's principle function is to activate a

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جهان از بهرِ آن بدنام خواهد — که خونِ من همی در جام خواهد
سیه شد روی نامِ من به یک ننگ — نشوید آبِ صد دریا ازو زنگ
ز یک سو زن مرا دشمن گرفته — وزو خورشیدِ نامِ من گرفته
ز دیگر سو کمین کرده برارد — ز کین بر جانِ من آهخته خنجر

2. Many studies of *V&R* have already come to this conclusion; Hedāyat calls Mobad the "great obstacle" of the story (*māneʿ-e bozorg shāh Mobad ast*), while Gabrieli regards the entire poem as a series of episodes that boil down to the same basic story about the futile efforts of the married king to separate the lovers. See Hidāyat, "Chand nuktah," 382 and Gabrieli, "Note sul *Vīs u Rāmīn*," 175. A discussion of this *dramatis persona* can be found in Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 2nd ed., trans. Laurence Scott, with an introduction by Alan Dundes (University of Texas Press, 1968), 30–35.

3. Mobad subverts Vis's mother Shahru using the same stratagem, as we saw in section 3.4; for more on obstacles and abduction in these two works, see Davis, *Panthea's Children*, 50–51, 72–75.

4. Chariton and Xenophon of Ephesus, *Two Novels from Ancient Greece*, 111. For a summary and discussion of the story, see Bryan P. Reardon, "Chariton," in *The Novel in the Ancient World*, ed. Gareth Schmeling (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 309–335. This scene too has its analogue in *Vis & Rāmin*, which ends with the lovers revolting against Mobad and seizing his treasury; a similar scene takes place in *The Book of the Acts of Ardašir son of Pābag:* kārnāmag ī ardašīr ī pāpagān*: Text, Transcription and Translation* (Paris: Ermān; Institute of Eric Studies, 1999), 3.13, pp. 20–21.

story about the separation of two lovers; the plot cannot be set into motion until he acts, and it will not end until he has been disposed of. In other words, he is important only insofar as he allows us to hear the story of those who beat him; his own narrative is ultimately contingent on and superfluous to theirs. To draw from Derrida, we might consider Mobad as the narratological *supplement* to the story, the figure that "dislocates the subject that it constructs," its place "assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness."[5] What is fascinating about Mobad is that he expresses an awareness of this "emptiness," probing and questioning the constraints that his role as a stock figure has placed upon his political autonomy. I do not mean, of course, that he has realized that he is nothing more than a figment of our imagination, but that he rather seems to understand that the obstacles to his own happiness are, unlike those faced by the lovers, necessarily insurmountable for reasons intrinsic to his own person and yet outside of his ability to control. Mobad's greatest enemy, in other words, is himself, thwarted at every turn by his own obstacle-ness and in spite of the fact that he is outwardly and formally the most powerful man in the story. As he marches helplessly into oblivion, Mobad sees past the illusion of having it all and recognizes his essential poverty, prompting his lament, "Though king of world-kings am I, there is no one more unfortunate"; a melodramatic claim, perhaps, but not in the least bit untrue.

Mobad's complaint brings further aspects of his stymied kingship into focus. What vexes him most in this speech is not the fact that he has been wronged, but that his attempts to discipline the wrongdoers have been ineffectual: "Indifferent to chains and the brig, neither God nor Hell intimidate them; what can I do with three demons with no fear of shame or retribution?" For a man whose authority entirely stems from his connection to the law—the right to command, and the power to punish those who disobey—it is no wonder that he sees the disobedience of Vis, Rāmin, and the Nurse as a "demonic" action, for their utter disregard for the law calls the entire foundation of his authority into question: what is left of kingship when its subjects fail to heed orders? His very claim to Vis is founded on the inviolate nature of the law and the sacred contract; as we saw in section 3.4, it is the king's ability to call upon these institutions that force Shahru into giving up her daughter. Not so Vis and Rāmin; faced with a pair of lovers who not only violate the law but laugh in the face of its adjudicator, Mobad stands not only to

5. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 141, 145.

lose his bride, but to lose the right and authority to claim her. Thus, he is caught in a double-bind: to maintain his kingship, he must have Vis, but the only way to her is through Rāmin, a point she makes explicitly clear: "I've stayed with you for the sake of Rāmin" (*torā az bahr-e Rāmin miparastam* 48.27). The affair is simultaneously the engine that upholds and undermines his rule; the only way he can make his authority known is to have it flouted by his wife and brother.[6]

This bittersweet mixture of power and poverty runs deep in Mobad's character and expresses itself on a number of levels. Just as Mobad is unable to act due to the constraints placed on him by the narrative, so does his sexual impotency bear deep ramifications on his political status as a man. Political autonomy is inextricably tied to the concept and practice of manliness and masculinity, which are rendered as *mardi* or *mardomi* in Persian, literally the *practice of being a man*, not unlike the relationship between *vir* and *virtus* in Latin. The link between power and manhood is quite explicit in the text; the ultimate sign of his impotence, as he complained, is that he who could once punish disobedient soldiers is now under the thumb of a woman. He bemoans his sensation of emasculation again in another passage:

> The generals and common soldiers of my army all call me a "non-man" (*nā-mard*);
> And if they do, I deserve it! What man am I, who cannot rule a woman?[7] (68.26–27)

The easy conclusion to draw from such laments is that Mobad has failed in some way at being a man; what is not so simple, however, is to reverse-engineer this statement: what would a *successful* practice of *mardomi* look like? There are many kinds of men that might stake a claim in this discourse; in addition to king, we might consider the testosterone-soaked warriors of the *Shāhnāma*, the networks of urban youth called *futūwa* or *javānmardi* (literally, "young-manhood") groups, or even those mystical orders that would recognize manhood in anyone who achieved a high level of spiritual success, regardless of their biological sex.[8] *Vis & Rāmin*, of course, does not offer a formal definition of masculinity or manhood

6. This situation resonates with the position of cuckolded kings in medieval French romances, as Peggy McCracken observes: "The precarious and constantly negotiated status of the king's power in his kingdom is mediated and maintained by the open secret of adultery." See *The Romance of Adultery*, 101.

7. R214/T290/M196/D255:

سپاهم گر کهان و گر مهان اند همه یکسر مرا نامرد خوانند
اگر نامرد خوانندم سزایم چه مردم من که با زن بر نیایم

8. Dick Davis, "Rustam-i Dastan," *Iranian Studies* 32, no. 2 (1999): 231–241; Robert Irwin, "Futuwwa: Chivalry and Gangsterism in Medieval Cairo," *Muqarnas* 21 (2004): 161–170; Julian Baldick, "The Iranian Origin of the *futuwwa*," *Annali* (*Istituto*

for us to jot down; but it does provide many hints, situated in the context of particular moments in Mobad's story, that allow us to probe the text's take on the question. The answer, we will learn, is rather grim: there is no right practice to adopt, at least not for Mobad; indeed, the pressures and conflicting norms of masculinity, a concept that promises dominion and autonomy to those who possess it, play an active role in setting up the structures that curtail his ability to act. It is a dilemma strikingly similar to that of Vis, who was also forced into acting out a role that was anathema to her, and it is perhaps no coincidence that Mobad echoes her words in this scene when he too cries out, *I forever burn in fire.*[9]

We are thus confronted by a peculiar meeting of symbolic and physical forms of failure in the figure of Mobad. As king, he is the embodiment of masculine power and authority; yet at every turn, it is precisely this body of his that gets in the way, preventing him from enacting the agency he supposedly has and driving him to the margins of the story. With these destructive mechanisms embedded within his person, it could be said that it is nothing less than his very being that is the source of his impotence, the fact that he is Mobad that ensures his failure: as Gorgāni puts it, "You'd say his skin was a prison on his body" (*cho zendān bud gofti bar tan-ash pust*, 38.60). Such is the interest and pathos of Mobad's tale: confronted by the helplessness of his position, trapped in a role that both promises him autonomy and blocks him from attaining it, Mobad is thrust into a terrifying form of self-awareness that no other character in the story experiences: forced to gaze into the void of his own irrelevance, he must confront the fundamental contingencies of his being that unmake his person even as they construct it. These are the considerations that lead me to describe Mobad as an "enigmatic" figure, not only to emphasize some of the ironies and paradoxes within his character, but also to stress a genuine murkiness and confusion

Universitario Orientale (*Naples, Italy*)) 50, no. 4 (1990): 347–56; Margaret Malamud, "Gender and Spiritual Self-Fashioning: The Master-Disciple Relationship in Classical Sufism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64, no. 1 (1996): 89–117; Franklin D. Lewis, "Sexual Occidentation: The Politics of Conversion, Christian-love and Boy-love in 'Aṭṭār," *Iranian Studies* 42, no. 5 (2009): 694–95. Of course, these various groups need not even be treated as independent categories; just as various discourses about manhood and masculinity can be seen at work in the figure of Mobad, so too would common and competing principles flow among numerous social organizations. See Lloyd Ridgeon, *Morals and Mysticism in Persian Sufism: A History of Sufi-Futuwwat in Iran* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2010); Muḥammad Ja'far Maḥjūb, "Chivalry and Early Persian Sufism," in *Classical Persian Sufism: From its Origins to Rumi*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (London: Khaqani Nimatullahi Publications, 1993), 549–581.

9. This shared line between Vis and Mobad, *hami suzam bar āẕar*, is found in lines 47.141 and 60.33 respectively; see page 146 for Vis's lament. Davis, too, sees a kind of affinity between the two characters: "Vis's husband, Mobad, is given an almost equally complex and volatile inner life, and although he is in some sense Vis's enemy, and he certainly acts in ways that Gorgani condemns, as will any reader, it is impossible not to feel some sympathy for his wretchedly evolving situation." Davis, "Introduction," xxx.

that surrounds the question of who he is and what he is supposed to be.

This sense of general bemusement about his character is evident in much of the critical scholarship on *V&R*. Some of the first studies of the poem in European languages, such as those of Graf and von Stackleberg, were inclined to view Mobad as the tragic hero of the story, and were quite bothered by his humiliating and ignominious demise.[10] Other critics agreed with Mobad's statements that his success as a king could not but reflect his success as a man, and vice versa; armed with this circular definition, they arrived at the inevitable conclusion that he is a failure on both accounts, equally incompetent in bed and on the battlefield. Minorsky deems him "brutal and weak," and Rypka writes, "the old man is a ridiculous, pitiful figure in the hands of the two lovers."[11] A generation later, we hear echoes of this reading in Minoo Southgate's analysis:

> Mūbad, the King of Kings, is often pitiful in his rage and despair. To each instance of Vīs's infidelity he responds with a new outburst but then accepts Vīs's protestations of innocence. The character of Mūbad suffers from an inconsistency towards the end of the romance, where Gurgānī turns the benevolent King into a tyrant to justify Rāmin's insurrection against him."[12]

While Southgate's analysis reiterates the trope of Mobad's weakness and incapacity, her observation that he seems to undergo a transformation as the story progresses (which she chalks up to his "inconsistency") was an important step towards thinking of him as something more than a lifeless archetype. Meanwhile, other studies began to question the simple correlation of kingship with manhood, bringing other factors into play: J. Christoph Bürgel writes that unlike the "true lovers" Vis and Rāmin, Mobad is "a cold moralist, always presuming upon his seemingly legal claim, based on Shahru's concession. . . . In his behavior toward Vis he reveals over and over again, by heartless remarks, remonstrances, and brutal punishments followed by conciliatory gestures, fresh demands, and new self-deceptions, that he is completely incapable of loving her."[13] This characterization too repeats the general consensus that Mobad is a failure

10. See page 49 in section 1.5. Much of the early *V&R* scholarship was more interested in the historical provenance of the poem than in its literary analysis and deigned to offer any reading of Mobad's character whatsoever. Even Molé, who devotes a good deal of his article to the concept of kingship in *V&R*, is not interested in Mobad's actual experiences in the text, except as they might pertain to Gorgāni's patron, the sultan Toghrul Bey; see Molé, "«Vīs u Rāmīn» et l'histoire seldjoukide," 1–8.

11. Minorsky, *Iranica*, 166, 187; Rypka, *HIL*, 178.

12. Southgate, "Anomaly," 46–47.

13. Bürgel, "The Romance," 165.

in some way or another, but it suggests the novel idea that Mobad's deficiency may not stem from his inability to rule properly, but to love properly.

Bürgel's comments about love in *Vis & Rāmin* came right on the heels of one of the most engaged studies of the text to date, which finally bucked the legacy of writing Mobad off as a capricious Nero or a reptilian Cromwell to consider the ethical and philosophical struggles of his character. Meisami is chiefly interested in *V&R*'s production and reception within a court environment, in which the presence of a royal patron should never be forgotten, and the poet's relationship to that patron never underestimated. In this context, the themes and concerns of the romance overlap to a considerable extent with other forms of panegyric poetry, particularly the qasida. Just as the lyrical and panegyric interplay in the qasida can collapse the poet's beloved and patron into the same figure, so too does the romance explore the qualities of a good ruler through the figure of a good lover. Having established the "broader implications" of the courtly milieu, that is, the crucial relationship between the poet and patron, the Neoplatonic ideas that undergird medieval Islamicate education, and an analogical poetics of reading at work, Meisami argues that one should consider the romance as a vehicle of ethical and political wisdom:

> The protagonist's conduct as lover reveals his fitness, or unfitness, for kingship; this aspect of his qualitative, or ethical, identity depends directly on his capacity to be guided by love and to understand its nature correctly as encompassing, not merely private passion, but public order.[14]

Mobad's relationship with Vis, then, is no longer just the story of a jealous and impotent husband who can never bring his household under control; he becomes a case study of how the failure to properly understand love will lead to trouble at large. Meisami's hermeneutics lead her to draw perfect parallels between the private and public lives of the male characters in the Persian romance: a bad lover will be a bad king, while a man who learns to love properly will also rule properly. This is most thoroughly explored in her discussion of Bahrām Gur's transition from "kingship by will" to "kingship by law" in Neẓāmi's *Haft Paykar*, which concludes with the following analysis:

> Bahrām's status as Perfect Man suggests that, for the poet, the sense in which the ruler embodies the experience of his people is not merely political but ethical: the king is Everyman,

14. Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 182.

> and the moral conflicts that exist within his soul exemplify those of mankind as a whole. By mastering his nature, he achieves a state of harmony with the cosmic order and thus is able to fulfill his mediatory role between macrocosm and microcosm: to become the 'monarch as the many in the one,' uniting nature and mankind. Niẓāmī demonstrates that neither heroic valor nor clever statecraft is sufficient to make the perfect ruler, who, as the embodiment of all virtue, cannot display valor or dispense justice without the informing power of love; his poem thus stands as a commentary on, and corrective to, both the heroic ethos of epic and the pragmatic values of mirror literature.[15]

In emphasizing the symbolic implications of the king-as-microcosm within a Neoplatonic universe, Meisami opens up new ways for getting at the significance of Mobad's character: the one-to-one correspondence between masculinity and kingship, generally assumed to be a given, is complicated by another correspondence between the roles of king and lover. It is not surprising, she argues, that Neẓāmi's Khosrow, a selfish man and vindictive lover, will ultimately fail in his kingly duties, nor that Mobad's public disgrace must reflect his unworthiness as a lover, made manifest in his bodily emasculation: "Mowbad's physical impotence with Vis (magically induced by a talisman) figures his moral incapacity, as it identifies his confusion of love, and of the lover's goal, with concupiscence."[16] This perspective allows us to look at Mobad's story not just as an angst-ridden journey between the pressures of kingship and manhood, but as the product of a triangular negotiation between what it means to be a king, a lover, and a man, all separate concepts but tightly interwoven and integrated with one another; our cardboard villain has entered the third dimension.

Meisami's reading of Mobad as a failed lover-king is robust and insightful; the point is well-taken that Mobad's impotence and cuckoldry is symptomatic of a far more fundamental failing within the king's position at the head of a social and political hierarchy.[17] However, the drawback of this analysis is that it continues the legacy of seeing the king as a static figure whose only significance lies in his

15. Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 236.

16. Meisami, "Kings and Lovers," 5; cf. Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 139. On Khosrow's failure as both a lover and a king, Meisami writes: "His injustice, as lover, to Shīrīn, manifested by his infidelities and his suspicions, is paralleled by his injustice as king to Farhād, for whose death he is responsible. The two identities merge to constitute his true, qualitative identity: he is neither a worthy lover nor a just king. . . . Khusraw's failure as a lover figures his failure as a king; the qualities that mar his courtship of Shīrīn—willfulness, self-interest, and a mistaken and delusive self-image—ensure that he will sow the seeds of his own downfall." ibid., 156, 197.

17. This perhaps explains why Vis, as a potential symbol of Iran, remains barren (despite a decade-long affair) until after the struggle between Mobad and Rāmin to see who is her legitimate lover/ruler comes to an end. See McCracken, *The Romance of Adultery*, 26–27, 119–43 for a discussion of the same phenomenon in medieval French romances.

place within a clearly defined symbolic order. I would suggest that when we read his story through the medium of his own speech, consider the specific circumstances surrounding his actions, and trace the processes that eventually lead to his demise, his character loses such categorical stability; this is not to say that the character of Mobad does not invoke this imagined and ideal equivalence between King, Lover, and (Perfect) Man, for that he certainly does, but that the difficulties he faces in attempting to embody all three figures at the same time render this equation far more confusing and problematic than the math would suggest. The triad of King = Lover = Man cannot exist in a closed circle, because each one of these ideals "equals" hundreds of other qualities in their turn; eventually, the playing field becomes so overcrowded with equals-signs that any course of action cannot but negate or contradict the same ideal it was supposed to enact. Had he read Meisami's analysis of his character, Mobad might have been tempted to ask her what he could have done that would restore his authority and win Vis's love; how could he have walked the path of Bahrām Gur and transitioned from "kingship by will" to "kingship by law"? Unfortunately, Meisami does not see a way out for him, for, as she writes, the rotten core of his story is ultimately based not in his behavior, which can be adjusted through education and refinement, but in his person as "an inappropriate (not to say unnatural) partner for Vis."[18] His political body, invested with all the symbols of divine kingship and masculinity, is structurally positioned to be blocked at every turn, thwarted by the *unnaturalness* of his physical body. On a fundamental level, he is "bound" (*basta*), to use the Persian word for his impotence; his only way out, it seems, is to give up Vis, but this is the one thing he cannot do, no more than he can transform his body into that of a young man or alter the role he was written to play.

Thus we are brought back to the underlying predicament of our powerless monarch, "whose hopeless psychological situation," Davis writes, "flickers wearily from patience to self-assertion to fury and back again."[19] Henri Massé, the translator of *V&R* into French, was also struck by the underlying pathos of this character, stuck in a love that is "physically impossible and morally reprehensible":

> The poet has well noted the tragic nature of the love that has enslaved this old man to a woman too young [for him], as we read in his desperate speeches, his bitter reproaches to

18. Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 138.
19. Davis, "Vis o Rāmin."

> Vis, and his admonishments enlivened by a tender sadness; at the piteous cries of the Vis's mother, believing that her daughter is dead, Mobad responds with a certainty that is as dejected as it is passionate, a dialogue that counts among the best parts of the work.[20]

Through this character, Gorgāni presents us with the portrait of a man whose selfhood is entirely invested in the trappings and promise of his political position—perhaps not so far from what would be considered in modern novelistic standards a compelling character—and is subsequently horrified at the intrinsic contingency, irrelevance, and helplessness that this position entails.

4.1 Portraits of ideal kingship

Before we embark on our discussion of Mobad's journey, I would to provide a little grounding in some of the major themes found in the portrayal of kings and kingship in Iranian thought and literature. Needless to say, this is a massive topic, and my intent here is not to furnish a comprehensive account, but to give some examples of the many discourses of power and authority to which kings have historically made a claim, and the corresponding pressures and expectations to which they submit themselves in the same motion.

The first and indispensable image of the king is that of the divinely-appointed world sovereign, which reflects a political concept whose impact on the literature, political thought, and philosophy of the medieval Iranian world cannot be overstated.[21] Examples of this ideal in Iran date back at least as far as

20. Massé, "Introduction," 12, 16. It is worth adding that Massé locates the moment of Mobad's fall in the opening scene, when he unwittingly sets up the conditions for disaster in the single, thoughtless (*irréfléchi*) act of requesting the hand of an unborn girl, a reading that corresponds closely with some of the views expressed by other critics like Graf and Stackleberg (see page 49).

> Il import de noter à son avantage qu'aux yeux de ce potentat [Mobad], qui pourrait entretenir un gynécée fort peuplé, une seule femme compte au monde et que, tout en s'obstinant dans son amour physiquement impossible, moralement condamné, il conçoit clairement les scrupules et les remords des deux amants . . . Le poète a bien marqué le tragique de l'amour qui asservit cet homme âgé à une femme trop jeune : qu'on lise ses propos désespérés, ses amers reproches adressés à Wîs, son exhortation tout animée de tendre tristesse ; aux accent pathétiques de la mère de Wîs croyant morte sa fille, Maubad répond par une confidence aussi douloureuse que passionnée—dialogue qui compte parmi les meilleures parties de l'œuvre.

21. For extended surveys of this topic, see: Richard N. Frye, "The Charisma of Kingship in Ancient Iran," *Iranica Antiqua* 4 (1964): 36–54; Jamsheed K. Choksy, "Sacral Kingship in Sasanian Iran," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 2 (1988): 35–52; Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 210–254; Abolala Soudavar, *The Aura of Kings: Legitimacy and Divine Sanction in Iranian Kingship* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2003); and Touraj Daryaee, "Kingship in Early Sasanian Iran," in *The Sasanian Era*, ed. Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis and Sarah Stewart (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), 60–70, which offers a substantial bibliography of additional studies.

the Achaemenid kings in the sixth century BCE, who drew from earlier conceptions of kingship found in Babylonian, Elamite, and Urartian traditions to establish themselves as the *cosmocrator* of their state and society, the mediator between the natural and the supernatural worlds.[22] As their title of "king of kings" (*xshāyaϑiya xshāyaϑiyānām*, which was later employed by later dynasties as *basileus basileōn* and *shāhān shāh*) suggests, the Achaemenids presented themselves as the most select of mortals, the men above men, divinely appointed for their qualities to adjudicate among all others.[23] Pierre Briant explains further:

> Contrary to the opinion of some Greek authors, the king himself was never considered a god; but neither was he an ordinary man. By virtue of the specific at tributes he received from the gods, he was a man above men. Royal protocol served in perpetuity as a reminder of this. He was situated at the intersection between the world below and the divine world, which communicated through his intercession.[24]

At times, the gap between God and king grew much narrower; in his monumental inscriptions and coinage, Ardashir I (r. 224–240 CE), the founder of the Sasanian dynasty, proclaimed himself as "the divine Ardashir, follower of Ahura-Mazda, King of Kings of Iran, whose seed is from the gods."[25] The proximity of god and monarch, and the parallel nature of their roles on heaven and on earth, is on clear display in the reliefs of Naqsh-e Rostam, near modern-day Shiraz and across from the ruins of the ancient Achaemenid capitol Persepolis. We see Ardashir and Ohrmazd (Av. Ahura-Mazda) presented as two equestrian figures of equal height and stature, facing one another on a level plane of vision, and the god hands Ardashir a ring of investiture, a symbol of the royal charisma or *farr* (Mid. Pers. *xwarrah*, Av. *xvarənah*) that renders his divine authority to rule manifest before all.[26] Their enemies, the evil god Ahriman (Av. Angra-Mainyu) and the Parthian king Ardavān (Artanabus V), lie trampled before the hooves of their opponents both earthly and celestial. The same king appears as the avatar of Ohrmazd in the

22. See Gábor Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses: Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe*, trans. Éva Pálmai (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 20–27; Margaret Cool Root, "Defining the Divine in Achaemenid Persian Kingship: The View from Bisitun," in *Every Inch a King: Comparative Studies on Kings and Kingship in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*, ed. Lynette Mitchell and Charles Melville (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 23–65.

23. Frye, "The Charisma of Kingship in Ancient Iran," 44; Daryaee, "Kingship in Early Sasanian Iran," 61.

24. Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 241.

25. *"Mazdēsn bay ardašir šāhān šāh ērān kē čihr az yazdān."* See Michael Alram, "Early Sasanian Coinage," in *The Sasanian Era*, ed. Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis and Sarah Stewart (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), 20 and Daryaee, "Kingship in Early Sasanian Iran," 61; the latter article offers a close and extended reading of this title.

26. For more on the *farr*, see Ehsan Yarshater, "Iranian Common Beliefs and World-View," in *The Cambridge History of Iran, Volume 3(1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 345.

Figure 6: The investiture of Ardashir, Naqsh-e Rostam. Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Naqsh_i_Rustam._Investiture_d%27Ardashir_1.jpg; accessed 11 June 2015. The image has been croppped and modified.

Deeds of Ardashir, battling the forces of idol-worship and the Great Worm of Haftān-bōxt in his struggle to restore the teachings of the true faith and establish them throughout the land.[27]

Regardless of whether the monarchy was sacred or sacerdotal, the connection between rule and religion remained vital throughout the Sasanian era: "Because the Sasanian monarch was also expected to serve as the protector and propagator of Zoroastrianism, he was required to have received training as a magus (OP: *magu-*, **magupati-*, Phl: *mowbed*, NP: *mobad*) during his youth."[28] It is a telling sign that the name of our king is also the name of this sacerdotal function: "He was both a mobad and a wise sage" (*ke ham mobad bod o ham bekhrad-e rad*, 8.16).[29] As Daryaee reminds us, Iranian theories of kingship

27. *Kārnāmag ī Ardašīr*, 7.1–9.13, pp. 30–43; cf. Askari, "The Medieval Reception of Firdausī's *Shāhnāma*," 156–65.

28. See Choksy, "Sacral Kingship in Sasanian Iran," 38; also Aḥmad Tafaẕẕulī, "Kartīr va siyāsat-i ittiḥād-i dīn va dawlat dar dawrah-yi sāsānī," in *Yikī qaṭrah bārān: jashn nāmah-i 'Abbās Zaryāb Khu'ī*, ed. Aḥmad Tafaẕẕulī (1991), 721–37.

29. See page 204. Minorksy, via a suggestion by H. W. Bailey, has an alternative etymology for Mobad's name: he suspects that it may be a abbreviated form of the eastern Iranian word **marghu-pat-sh*, "ruler of Marv," which then became *maghu-pat* and thence *mawbad* > *mōbad*. See Minorsky, *Iranica*, 184–85. Hedāyat too did not see any special significance in the name "Mobad," which he believes was only chosen out of poetic necessity; I find this explanation unconvincing, as there are many ways Gorgāni could have met whatever requirements of rhyme or meter he had without resorting to this very distinctive and peculiar name. See Hidāyat, "Chand nuktah," 383.

were not static or uniform, and we must be cautious of lifting up a model that seems to have been at work in one context and applying it wholesale onto another topic; it is extremely unlikely, for example, that Gorgāni knew of the Achaemenids or had visited the reliefs of Naqsh-e Rostam. These examples are rather meant to show that there were a certain established ways of displaying royal legitimacy through religious symbols that filtered into medieval Islamic society.[30] It was the Sasanians' codification and transcription of the deeds and wisdom of their great kings, usually translated into Arabic and then into Persian, that provided an important source through which Iranian authors in the tenth and eleventh centuries CE could encounter and reconstruct their pre-Islamic past.

Another and more direct route by which these concepts entered New Persian was through panegyric literature, especially the qasida. This poetic form is not indigenous to Iranian tradition; canonized as the supreme literary achievement of the Arabs before Islam, it was for many centuries considered the only "true" (*qaṣīd*) poetry in Arabic, and was therefore the medium *par excellence* for those subject matters that deserved the highest level of rhetorical treatment: praise, elegy, invective, and vaunting. However, with the Arab conquest of the Sasanian state and the rise of a new Islamic court culture in its place, the qasida underwent a substantial transformation, as Stefan Sperl describes: "From being the ritualistic medium of *murūwa*, pre-Islamic *virtus*, it became the hieratic expression of the relationship between ruler and ruled in the Islamic kingdom."[31] First deployed by the Umayyads as a means of developing an ideological rhetoric for Arabo-Islamic legitimacy, the qasida was soon enshrined as the preeminent vehicle for celebrating kingship in both Arabic and Persian courtly literatures.[32] Many Iranian concepts about kingship found new expression in the qasidas dedicated to the Abbasid rulers, who readily adopted these ideas to justify and elevate their own legitimacy; the caliph appears as the divinely chosen source of earthly prosperity, the bringer of life and fertility, and the guarantor of divine order over the chaotic ravages of time.[33] The poems of Abu Tammām (d. ca. 232/845), Buḥturī (d. 284/897), Mutanabbī (d. 354/965), and other pioneers of the courtly Arabic qasida provided in turn the model for the panegyric

30. Daryaee, "Kingship in Early Sasanian Iran," 67–68.

31. Stefan Sperl, *Mannerism in Arabic Poetry: A Structural Analysis of Selected Texts* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 14.

32. Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy: Myth, Gender, and Ceremony in the Classical Arabic Ode* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002), 81; see the third, fifth, and sixth chapters of this important study for detailed discussions of the qasida and its manifold relations to power and legitimacy.

33. Cf. Sperl, *Mannerism in Arabic Poetry*, 13–27; Stetkevych, *The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy*, 91–93, 101–7, 195–96.

poetry cultivated by the Samanid and Ghaznavid dynasties in Khorasan and Transoxiana.[34] While the qasida is distinct literary form with its own requirements, conventions, and historical trajectory, it held such prominence as the prevailing vehicle of panegyric discourse that its discursive horizons can be seen to overflow into other forms when they take up the topic of kings and kingship.[35]

This final note brings us back to our poem and one of the more novel studies written about it in the last century, an essay by Marijan Molé entitled "*Vis & Rāmin* and Seljuk History." Challenging the established view that the poem was more or less a direct descendant of some now-lost Pahlavi text, Molé sought to read *V&R* as a largely original composition that was directly inspired by the political milieu in which Gorgāni was writing.[36] He detected certain parallels between the events of Mobad's military career and the campaigns of the Seljuk king, Toghrul Bey: just as Mobad conducts raids against the Romans, wars against his vassal Viru, and struggles to maintain power against his brother Rāmin, so too did Toghrul raid the Byzantines, suppress an insurrection in Hamadan, and quell a revolt led by his half-brother Ebrāhim Ïnal.[37] The story, then, must be a biting satire of the Seljuk court, where no one less than the king himself is disgraced and humiliated by the adulterous affairs of his wife. This thesis was rejected by Minorsky, who denied any value in reading the story proper against its exordium; ever since this rebuttal, Molé's ideas have not been taken up in subsequent scholarship.[38] Although I too doubt Molé's neat correspondence between Mobad and Toghrul, Minorsky's argument that the poem's prologue has nothing to do with the main story seems like a good opportunity wasted, for even though it is topically separate and chronologically distant from the ancient Parthian tale, it may still be used to bring further context to our analysis, an "in-house" discussion of kingship as it were. The prologue of *V&R* features four panegyrics directed to the prophet Muḥammad, the sultan Toghrul Bey, the vizier Abu Naṣr Manṣur, and the governor Abu l-Fatḥ Moẓaffar. These passages provide us with a wealth of material about the practice of kingship that tie *Vis & Rāmin* into long-established notions about sacred

34. Clinton, *The Divan of Manūchihrī Dāmghānī*, 18; Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 40–76; Bruijn, "Arabic Influences on Persian Literature," 372. See also section 1.1 and section 2.1.

35. See Meisami, "Genres of Court Literature," 243 for a discussion of panegyric themes in the ghazal; also Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 273–77; Lewis, "Reading, Writing, and Recitation," 155–171.

36. Hedāyat offers a similar view in "Chand nuktah," 382–86.

37. Molé, "«Vīs u Rāmīn» et l'histoire seldjoukide."

38. Minorsky, "Vīs-u Rāmīn (IV)," 283: "Hardly any Persian epic or romantic poem does not begin with praises to God, to the reigning prince or king, and to the patron, but a line should be drawn between such introductions and the real stories."

kingship, universal sovereignty, and perfect virtue that have a special mode of expression in the qasida tradition. This provides an essential backdrop to reading the character of Mobad; it is through these portraits that we can build a library of *exempla* that will establish the kinds of behavior we might expect from our fictional king.

The first figure to be mentioned in *Vis & Rāmin*, after God, is quite expectedly the Prophet. This conforms with the usual sequence in the doxologies of Persian masnavis, and it is perhaps for this reason that Minorsky disregards this material, standard and formulaic as it is, as having any relevance to the study of the main poem; but when we look more closely, there are some features in Gorgāni's account of the Prophet's life that establish the union of religion and sovereignty in a single figure as an essential aspect of secular rule. The account begins with a description of the lamentable state of the world at the time of the Prophet's mission:

> I shall now speak praise of the Prophet, who is our guide to God.
> The entire world had gone astray, the night of ignorance had cast its shadow;
> The devil had come and set the snare of disbelief, and the whole world was trapped;
> Benighted, everyone was like the ass and cow; all ears were deaf and all eyes were blind.
> One wielded cross and bell in hand, another revered fire and the Zend Avesta,
> One called an idol "My Lord," another bowed to the sun and moon;
> All had taken the upside-down road to perdition.[39] (2.1–7)

This scenario has every feature of a salvation narrative, starting in a world where all humanity had gone astray; Gorgāni uses the term *gomrāhi* ("losing one's way"), clearly a calque off the qur'anic term *ḍalāl*.[40] In his mercy, God responds to this crisis by sending down the revelation to Muḥamamd, that he may serve as a "guide to those who sought guidance" (*rahnamā-ye rāhjuyān*, 2.9). Though the Prophet's qualities are numerous, it is significant that they are all human and terrestrial attributes; God chooses Muḥam-

39. R22/T7/M4:

کنون گویم ثناهای پیمبر	که ما را سوی یزدانست رهبر
چو گمراهی ز گیتی سربرآورد	شبِ بی‌دانش سایه بگسترد
بیامد دیو و دامِ کفر بنهاد	همه گیتی بدان دام اندر افتاد
ز غُمری هر کسی چون گاو و خر بود	همه چشمی و گوشی کور و کر بود
یکی ناقوس در دست و چلیپا	یکی آتش پرست و زند و استا
یکی بت را خدای خویش کرده	یکی خورشید و مه را سجده برده
گرفته هر یکی راهِ نگونسار	که آن ره را به دوزخ بوده هنجار

40. See, for example, Q4:116: "He who associates [other beings] with God has gone very far astray" (*wa-man yushrik bil-lāhi fa-qad ḍālla ḍālālan baʿīdan*).

mad because he is the purest of the pure, the most worthy among worthies (*ze pākān o gozidān bar gozid-ash*, 2.12), and not because of some otherworldly attribute that none other than he may possess. In recognition of his purity of character, Muḥammad receives two proofs (*borhān*) of his prophethood: the Qur'an (*furqān*) and the sword (*tigh-e borān*)—both epithets that describe the ability to "cut" or "separate" truth from falsehood. Armed with the twin weapons of rhetoric and valor, Muḥammad unites his followers and leads them to victory: "Idolatry left, religion came; the sword of faith seized the land of unbelief" (*beshod kish-e bot āmad din-e yazdān · zamin-e kofr bestad tigh-e imān*, 2.24). It is a brief narrative, far shorter than later doxologies of the Prophet would offer, and it is striking in its harmonization of prophetic and kingly duties via the dual emblems of the book and the sword.[41] While Gorgāni's account of Muḥammad's life does not diminish his special status as a prophet, this aspect of his character is realized through a worldly and political narrative; perhaps the greatest proof of the Prophet's credentials lies in the simple fact that he was victorious over his enemies, allowing him to establish the true religion across the land. This perspective is not unique to *V&R*; other early romances and epics, such as the *Shāhnāma*, the *Garshāspnāma*, and *Varqa & Golshāh* feature biographies of the Prophet that reflect a similar understanding of his mission.[42] The latter text has this to say, in a succinct account that almost perfectly parallels that of Gorgāni:

> When the Prophet Abṭaḥi left Mecca for Yathrib, and the affairs of religion grew strong,[43]
> He spread the Pure Religion among the Arabs, and rebellious heads fell to the dust.
> With the sword and proof of prophethood, he polished impiety's rust from the hearts of the impious,
> And all the Arab tribes turned their faces towards justice and religion.[44] (5/7–10)

Through their unification of political and religious leadership within a single figure, the early romances of *V&R* and *V&G* affirm an interest in the idea of a secular authority selected and supported by

41. These emblems are a key fixture of the caliphs' later claim to rule; in one qasida, the Abbasid poet Buḥturī eulogized the caliph Muʿtazz as "the heir of the Mantle and the Staff [of Muḥammad] and the authority of God" (*wārithu l-burdi wa-l-qaḍībi wa-ḥukmi llāh*). See Stefan Sperl, "Islamic Kingship and Arabic Panegyric Poetry in the Early 9th Century," *JAL* 9 (1977): 21.

42. Firdawsī, *Shāhnāmah*, 1:9–11, vv. 90–107; Asadī Ṭusi, *Garshāsbnāmah*, 2–3.

43. "Abṭaḥi" is an epithet of Muḥammad; Yathrib is the old name of the city of Medina.

44. ʿAyyūqī, *Varqa va Gulshāh*, 5; cf. Melikian-Chirvani, "Varqe et Golšâh," 103:

چو از مکّه پیغنبرِ ابطحی　　به یثرب شذ و کارِ دین شذ قوی
بُگسترد او در عرب دینِ پاک　　سرِ سرکشان اندر آمذ به خاک
زدوذ از دلِ کافران کافری　　به شمشیر و برهانِ پیغانبری
همه حیّهای عرب سر به سر　　سوی داذ و دین آوریذند سر

divine favor. Once the prophets are gone, it is the role of kings to uphold their legacy, stewards, in effect, of the great union of religion and political authority that was established through God's chosen, as Neẓām al-Molk writes: "In every age and time God (be He exalted) chooses one member of the human race and, having adorned and endowed him with kingly virtues, entrusts him with the interests of the world and the well-being of His servants; He charges that person to close the doors of corruption, confusion and discord, and He imparts to him such dignity and majesty in the eyes and hearts of men, that under his just rule they may live their lives in constant security and ever wish for his reign to continue."[45] Let us keep this precept in mind as we turn to our next encomium, dedicated to the Seljuk sultan Toghrul Bey:

> Three are the commands that the wise must obey, for all three are linked together,
> Granting joy to the heart and renown to the soul.
> Turn not your heart from their command, if you would gain both worlds;
> Here, a life of honor; there, eternal paradise.
> One: the command of the Creator, who grants the soul eternal salvation;
> Two: the command of the Prophet, whom the faithless infidel rejects;
> Three: the command of the all-powerful Sultan, the splendor of God's religion in the realm:
> Abu Ṭāleb, glorious king, lord of lords in the world!
> King Toghrul, that sun of aspiration, from whom grace and glory arrive to all!
> Victory his guide, largesse his treasurer, loyalty his chamberlain, reason his counsel.[46]
> He also bears the name "Muḥammad," as he was divinely aided to victory.
> Just like the sun, he came out of the East; just like Jamshid, he came to the fortune of King of Kings.[47] (3.1–12)

Gorgāni's enumeration of the "three commands" to which all rational creatures (*dāneshmand*) must sub-

45. Niẓām al-Mulk, *The Book of Government, or, Rules for Kings*, trans. Hubert Darke (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), 9.

46. For more on the titles of *V&R*, see Minorsky, *Iranica*, 177.

47. R25/M6/T11:

سه طاعت واجب آمد بر خردمند	که آن هر سه به هم دارند پیوند
ازیشانست دل را شادکامی	وزیشانست جان را نیکنامی
دل از فرمانِ این هر سه مگردان	اگر خواهی که یابی هر دو گیهان
بدین گیتی ستوده زندگانی	بدان گیتی بهشت جاودانی
یکی فرمانِ دادارِ جهانست	که جان را زو نجاتِ جاودانست
دوم فرمانِ پیغمبر محمّد	که آن را کافرِ بی‌دین کند رد
سیم فرمانِ سلطانِ جهاندار	به مُلک اندر بهای دینِ دادار
ابوطالب شهنشاهِ معظّم	خداوندِ خداوندانِ عالم
ملک طغرل‌بک آن خورشیدْ همت	به هرکس زو رسیده عزّ و نعمت
ظفر وی را دلیل و جود گنجور	وفا وی را امین و عقل دستور
مر آن را کاوست هم نامِ محمّد	چو او منصور شد چون او مؤیّد
پدید آمد ز مشرق همچو خورشید	به دولت شاهِ شاهان شد چو جمشید

mit situates his panegyric within a familiar rhetorical context in which the king figures at the head of a sacred hierarchy that brings political power, religious law, and the will of providence together into a unitary and divinely-sanctioned system. He establishes an explicit connection between Toghrul and the Prophet, pointing to their shared name of "Muḥammad"; in the line after, a second link is forged with Jamshid, the greatest world-king in Iranian mythology, who so cowed the forces of evil that even death and disease were banished from the earth. The two "Muḥammads," furthermore, fulfill similar teleological functions: Toghrul is shown as the culmination and perfection of kingship, abrogating the works of his predecessors just as Islam was the culmination and abrogation of the previous prophetic traditions.

This concept received extensive elaboration in the rhetorical world of the qasida. Farrokhi Sistāni (d. ca. 429/1038), one of the chief panegyrists at the court of Maḥmud of Ghazna (d. 421/1030), makes a similar move as he explains to his audience why his patron has put to rest the deeds of Alexander, once and for all. The difference, he says, lies in their commitments: while the ancient king was motivated by his selfish desire for glory, Maḥmud fulfills the blessed role of restoring the true religion to the world.

> The deeds of Alexander have become an old wives' tale—
> tell us something new, for that has special sweetness!
> Old fables and fantastic stories will do you no good;
> don't put any effort into deceits!
> The people have heard so much of Alexander, where he went
> and what he did, they've learned it by heart.
> I've heard that when a tale is overtold, it becomes bitter
> as patience, however sugar-sweet it once was.
> If you want a sweet and pleasing tale, then pick up the book
> of the King of the World; don't miss it!
> . . . .
> If you just read two stories from his book of deeds,
> you'd laugh at the thought of Alexander's feats.
> True, he crossed the world from end to end,
> treading barrow, plain, and peak;
> But he sought the Water of Life,
> while our King seeks to please God and his Prophet!
> It would be just to say that there is a sign (*āyat*) in his affairs;
> I am not such a naysayer as to doubt it.
> For all the time that Sekandar ruled,
> he didn't have the lock of prophecy upon his door.[48]

48. Farrukhī Sīstānī, *Dīvān*, ed. Muḥammad Dabīr Siyāqī (Tehran: Zavvār, 1335 [1956]), 66–67, vv. 1264–68, 1272–76. Meter:

The concept of abrogation is a central theme in this passage. The tales of Alexander are now little more than fairy-tales that weave together fantastic and deceitful yarns; in their stead, we now have the deeds of Maḥmud of Ghazna, in whose story numerous signs of the truth may be found. This concept of "sign" (*āyat*) bears a deep and immediate resonance with the Qur'an, which makes frequent references to the importance and omnipresence of signs in the created world that guide those who consider them to the recognition of God.[49] Through such teleological signals, the king emerges as the inaugurator of a new era, the agent through whom the old order is brought to an end and replaced by a new and more perfect manifestation of kingship and righteousness. Thus Farrokhi calls for the establishment of a new mythos, free of deceit and filled with truth, wherein all exemplary behavior can be found in the figure of a unitary king, chosen by destiny to bring justice to the world.

Gorgāni's panegyric to Toghrul Bey positions the rise of the Seljuk monarch in a similar eschatological framework, presenting his audience with a king who not only overthrows the old world order, but renders it irrelevant:

> Why read the tales of the Sasanians, or the records of the Samanids?
> Read the account of the Sultan just once, and all will seem as nothing before your eyes;
> For you'll find all that you desire there: astonishing tales of victory and kingship,
> Rare deeds, turning fortunes, marvels, and the will of God.[50] (3.15–18)

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mojtaṡṡ makhbun maḥzuf [⏑ – ⏑ – | ⏖ – – | ⏑ – ⏑ – | ⏖ –].

فسانه گشت و کهن شد حدیثِ اسکندر / سَخُنِ نو آر که نو را حلاوتیست دگر
فسانهٔ کهن و کارنامهٔ به دروغ / به کار نیاد رو در دروغ رنج مبر
حدیثِ آنکه سکندر کجا رسید و چه کرد / ز بس شنیدن گشته‌ست خلق را از بر
شنیده‌ام که حدیثی که آن دوباره شود / چو صبر گردد تلخ ار چه خوش بود چو شکر
اگر حدیثِ خوش و دلپذیر خواهی کرد / حدیثِ شاهِ جهان پیش گیر و زین مگذر
ز کارنامهٔ او گر دو داستان خوانی / بخنده یاد کندی کارهای اسکندر
بلی سکندر سر تا سرِ جهان را گشت / سفر گزید و بیابان برید و کوه و کمر
ولیکن او ز سفر آبِ زندگانی جُست / ملک رضای خدا و رضای پیغمبر
وگر تو گویی در شأنش آیتست رواست / نیم من این را منکِر که باشد آن منگَر
به وقتِ آنکه سکندر همی امارت کرد / نبد نبوّت را بر نهاده قفل به در

49. For example, Q3:190: "In the creation of the heavens and earth and the difference between day and night lie signs for those who perceive" (*inna fī khalqi l-samāwāti wa-l-arḍi w-ikhtilāfi l-layli wa-l-nahāri li-āyātin li-ulī l-albāb*). There are literally hundreds of other references, too many to be named here; see Hanna E. Kassis, *A Concordance of the Qur'an* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 203–10.

50. R25/T10/M6:

چه خوانی قصّهٔ ساسانیان را / همیدون دفترِ سامانیان را
بخوان اخبارِ سلطان را یکی بار / که گردد آن همه بر چشمِ تو خوار
بیابی اندرو چندان که خواهی / شگفتی‌های پیروزی و شاهی
نوادرها و دولت‌های دوران / عجایب‌ها و قدرت‌های یزدان

By drawing from the qasida's encomiastic vocabulary, Gorgāni casts Toghrul as the end and embodiment of sacred kingship, a figure who both epitomizes and abrogates the legendary kings of the past. The significance of this concept is especially palpable in the description of Toghrul's victory over Masʿud of Ghazna at the battle of Dandānqān in 431/1040. The Seljuks had suffered terribly at the hands of Masʿud's father Maḥmud, who had twice broken the Seljuks' power and captured Toghrul's uncle Arslān Esrā'il.[51] As we saw above in Farrokhi's poem, Maḥmud had zealously cultivated his image as the archetypal King of Kings only a few decades prior; now, with the defeat of his son Masʿud at the hands of Toghrul, the following verses by Gorgāni would have been especially sweet for the sultan to savor:

> Once beyond the Amu river, he drove two hundred rivers of his enemies' blood.
> A storm arose from his sword which brought the days of every king to an end!
> In the other world, Masʿud's soul was shamed before Maḥmud's,
> Who rebuked him roundly for foolishly giving up Khorasan.
> But now, with so many kings having joined the wind of souls,
> And personally tasted Toghrul's sword, surrendering to him both crown and realm,
> Masʿud's soul has been freed of shame, for there are many like him thus bested in war.
> His father has forgiven him, for he saw so many better kings also crushed.[52] (3.30–37)

The most outstanding feature of Toghrul's kingship, however, is his rugged masculinity. We recall that kingship, in this context, is generally made manifest not through supernatural or superhuman abilities, but through a perfection and abundance of human virtues; in Gorgāni's account, all of the characteristics that demonstrate and define Toghrul's right to rule—heroism, generosity, and piety—are couched in the reaffirmation of his personal masculine prowess, his *mardomi*, summarized in one of the passage's concluding lines: "He desires nothing of this world save *mardomi*; his fear is of God, not men" (*morād-ash z-in jahān joz mardomi na · ze yazdān tarsad o az ādam-i na*, 3.91). This is a point of emphasis throughout the narrative, one that distinguishes Toghrul from other figures further down the food chain; while the

51. Zaporozhets, *The Seljuks*, 118.

52. R26/M7/T11:

همی تا آبِ جیحون را ز پس ماند   دو صد جیحون ز خونِ دشمنان راند
یکی طوفان ز شمشیرش برآمد   کزو روز همه شاهان سرآمد
بدان گیتی روانِ شاهِ مسعود   خجل بود از روانِ شاهِ محمود
کجا او سرزنش کردی فراوان   که بسپردی به نادانی خراسان
کنون از بس روانِ شهریاران   که با بادِ روان گشتند یاران
همه از دستِ او شمشیر خوردند   همه شاهی و مُلکِ او را سپردند
روانِ او برَست از شرمساری   که بسیارند همچون او به زاری
بنزدیکِ پدر گشته‌ست معذور   که بهتر زو بسی شه دید مقهور

poet's panegyric to the vizier Abu Naṣr Manṣur revolves around his knowledge, sagacity, and refinement (all suitable characteristics for a man of the pen), the story of Toghrul's kingship is peppered with tough marches through difficult terrain, tenacious battles against ferocious enemies, and effusive generosity when rewarding his friends, an ongoing testament to his personal bravery and indomitable spirit. It is this "work ethic" that distinguishes him from his predecessors, a fact Gorgāni is keen to emphasize when he prepares to relate the story of his crossing the Oxus river and entry into Khorasan:

> Behold how sure he was of his pure heart, to cross such a river without fear!
> When he feared not the Oxus, how could he fear anything else,
> Unfazed by heat or cold, by sand and wasteland, by mountain peaks or sea?
> The plains of Khorasan and Khwarazm are like gardens in his eyes;
> The mountain-tops of Qaren no more than the thorns on a rose-bush.
> He is not like other kings, always in their cups;
> he seeks his name in toil and struggle![53] (3.24–29)

Having leveled (*ṣāfi kard*) Khwarazm and Khorasan, the Sultan makes for the city of Rayy, driving through the mountainous provinces of Gorgan, Tabarestan, and Daylam. Of his homeland, Gorgāni says, "there is not a land in the wide world more strange and benighted" (*zamini nist dar ʿālam sarāsar · az-u pazh-mordatar az vay ʿajibtar*, 3.52), and it is remarkable how much emphasis he places on the physical labor required to traverse this alien landscape, taking several lines to describe the region's rocky terrain, dense jungles, bogs, ravines, and waterways. Its inhabitants are no less fierce: "The warlike men of Gilan and Daylam are brave, the best in the world at fighting. They are professional soldiers, skilled in the arts of raid and plunder, which they have perfected in the seas and forests" (*dar-u mardān-e jangi gil o daylam · delirān va honarjuyān-e ʿālam / honar-shān ghārat ast o jang pisha · biāmokhta dar ān daryā vo bisha*, 3.56–57).[54] Nevertheless, Toghrul quells their "demonic" resistance and doggedly presses on, battle after

53. R25/T11/M7:

نگر تا چون یقینِ دلْش بُد پاک	که بر رودی چنان بذگشت بی‌باک
چو نشکوهید او را دل ز جیحون	چرا بشکوهد از حالِ دگردون
نه از گرما شکوهد نه از سرما	نه از ریگ و کویر و کوه و دریا
بیابان‌های خوارزم و خراسان	به چشمش همچنان آید که بستان
همیدون شخّ‌های کوهِ قارن	به چشمش همچنان آید که گلشن
نه چون شاهانِ دیگر جامْ‌جویست	که از رنج آزمودن نامْ‌جویست

54. This is not all hyperbole; as Bosworth notes, "The damp and malarial climate of the region and its dense vegetation and forest are singled out for mention by many of the Islamic geographers, and one writer [Thaʿālibī] calls Gurgān 'the graveyard of the people of Khurasan'." See Bosworth, "Political and Dynastic History," 27.

Figure 7: Tribute to the King, Apadana stairs, Persepolis. Source: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Persepolis_stairs_of_the_Apadana_relief.jpg; accessed 11 June 2015. The image has been cropped.

battle, fight after fight, until "the kings of the age, from China to Egypt and Barbary, became as one his servants" (*be yak ruya ze chin tā meṣr o barbar · shodand u rā moluk-e dahr chākar*, 3.71). Their acknowledgement of his suzerainty is expressed through the act of giving tribute, which is rewarded in turn by the king's generosity.[55] The ritual exchange of gifts, immortalized in stone on the walls of Persepolis (Figure 7), was a cornerstone practice of the Achaemenid kings as a way to demonstrate their legitimacy and authority; as Xenophon writes, "Every nation thought they got less if they did not send to Cyrus whatever fine thing either naturally grew in their land, was raised there, or was made by art . . . for Cyrus, taking from each whatever the givers had in abundance, gave in return what he perceived them to be lacking."[56] The practice of summoning the noble families to a great feast, where tribute and gifts were exchanged between the king and his vassals, did not end with the fall of the Sasanian state to the Arabs in the seventh century CE; writers like Jāḥiẓ, Masʿūdī, Tanūkhī, Yāqūt, Muqaddasī, and Bayhaqi all attest to its adoption and continuation by the Abbasids, the Buyids, the Samanids, and the Ghaznavids as a venue to assert their royal power and prestige.[57]

55. See section 1.2 for a detailed discussion of this passage.

56. Xenophon, *The Education of Cyrus*, trans. Wayne Ambler (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), VIII.6.23, p. 268.

57. See A. Shapur Shahbazi, "Nowruz ii. In the Islamic Period," in *EIr*, online edition (2009), accessed June 11, 2015, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/nowruz-ii for a thorough review of this topic and an excellent bibliography.

The encomium ends with a rhetorical gift of its own, employing a closing flourish that was well-established in the qasida tradition. Having praised the king and proven his glory, it is now the poet's job to wish him eternal felicity and blessings; he does this in a ritualized and somewhat formulaic series of supplications (*doʿā*) to God. Few courtly qasida conclude without such an invocation, and in both its formal and rhetorical features—the double-rhyme of the verses and the ceremonial diction—Gorgāni's language invokes this literary convention, drawing from a prestigious vocabulary of images and tropes that establish Toghrul as the inheritor to the tradition of universal and God-given kingship, made evident by his unbroken line of conquests, divine charisma (*farr*), and personal virtue (*mardomi*). The passage below is virtually indistinguishable from the kind of *doʿā* one finds in the panegyrics of Farrokhi or ʿOnṣori:

> May thousands of blessings be upon his soul; may the heavens turn on his command!
> May the stars guide him to happiness; may destiny favor his name!
> May his name and sovereignty be eternal, content in body and joyous in soul!
> May he conquer, wherever he fights; may his rank and charisma be exalted, wherever he feasts!
> May joy accompany his every desire; may God support his every endeavor![58] (3.100–4)

We will revisit some specific incidents in Toghrul's career down the road, but for now it is time to take stock of the material we have covered. The most important theme we have seen is that of sacred kingship: the idea that the king, as the best and most select among all men, is chosen by God to dispense justice, drive out oppression and bad religion, and institute a universal and divinely approved law across the entire realm. It is an ancient concept that goes back at least to the Achaemenids and can be seen resurfacing, with various changes and permutations, in later Iranian society and then the hybrid court culture of the Abbasids. The premier literary genre for conveying and expressing this concept by this time was the qasida, which established a particular assortment of rhetorical devices, metaphors, and images that came to define the language of panegyric in general; thus, when Gorgāni takes pen to paper to

58. R28/T15/M10:

هزاران آفرین بر جانِ او باد　　مدارِ چرخ بر فرمانِ او باد
ستاره رهنمای کامِ او باد　　زمانه نیکخواهِ نامِ او باد
شهنشاهی و نامش جاودان باد　　تنش آسوده و دل شادمان باد
کجا رزمش بُوَد پیروزگر باد　　کجا بزمش بُوَد با جاه و فر باد
به هر کامی نشاط او را قرین باد　　به هر کاری خدا او را مُعین باد

compose a panegyric to Toghrul Bey, he draws from and invokes these conventions even when employing a different poetic form. In this case, the most active feature of Toghrul's personality is his hyperdeveloped masculinity; it is through this quality that Toghrul proves his worthiness as the inheritor and culmination of this tradition of kingship. We are thus left with both an ideological and a literary legacy, already in the air by the mere topic but given local prominence and signification through the panegyrics in the prologue, that undergird and inform Mobad's character, investing him with a certain set of expectations, prerogatives, and duties that he will either perform or fail to perform in the course of the story.

4.2 The garden despoiled

> I have found, written among the evening-tales and from the chronicles told by raconteurs,[59]
> That there was once a king, blessed and successful in kingship:
> All kings were his slaves, they lived in the world for his sake.[60] (8.1–3)

In these, the opening lines of *V&R*, Mobad is established as the universal sovereign of the story. In this capacity, he has put together a great celebration, with all the lords and ladies of his realm assembled before him in his palatial garden. Such a grand occasion taps into a number of literary and social practices; as was noted in Chapter 3, many of the Greek novels begin with a celebration of some sort, such as a wedding or the feast day of a goddess, which provides an appropriate setting in which the two protagonists (or sometimes their parents) will first encounter each other. *Vis & Rāmin* adheres to this pattern, but with a distinctly Iranian twist: the opening celebration is now the ancient festival of *Nowruz* ("New Day") that marks the beginning of spring and the dawn of a new year.[61] In addition to the springtime's connection with the amorous and erotic valences of the love-story genre (cf. section 3.2), the celebration of Nowruz also plays an important role in the Persian qasida, a genre that often begins in the royal garden, whose opulence, plenitude, and beauty is a manifest sign and microcosm of the king's power throughout

59. For more on the sources of the poem, see section 1.3 and section 2.5.
60. R41/T31/M19/D1:

نوشته یافتم اندر سمرها　　ز گفتِ راویان اندر خبرها
که بود اندر زمانه شهریاری　　به شاهی کامگاری بختیاری
همه شاهان مرو را بنده بودند　　ز بهرِ او به گیتی زنده بودند

61. See Arthur Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides*, 2nd ed. (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1944), 172–73.

Table 7: Part III: The fall of Mobad (46–69)

A. Vis's affair with Rāmin is discovered, and Mobad exiles Vis.	Mobad summons Rāmin and Vis to his court in Media (46). There, he learns of their secret and tells Viru to "discipline" his sister; the three men play a game of polo, while Vis looks on and laments her situation (47). Upon his return to Marv, Mobad tries to woo Vis, but she swears she will never be faithful to him; furious, he banishes her to Media (48).
B. Rāmin joins Vis in Media, and Mobad seeks revenge on both Rāmin and Viru.	Anxious to rejoin Vis, Rāmin asks permission to hunt in Media; Mobad sees through the ploy, but lets him go anyway with a warning that no betrayal will go unpunished (49). Vis welcomes Rāmin into her castle, where they they spend seven months together (50). Mobad swears he will kill Rāmin, but his mother convinces him that the real traitors are Vis and Viru; Mobad prepares for war and writes a threatening letter to Viru (51), who is astonished and denounces Mobad's allegations; Mobad is ashamed and calls off the war (52).
C. Mobad charges Vis to an ordeal by fire, and loses his mind when she escapes.	Now reunited with his wife, Mobad asks Vis to prove her chastity by undergoing a trial by fire (54); he goes to the fire temple to make the preparations, while the Nurse, Vis, and Rāmin (disguised as a woman) flee the city and take refuge with their friend Behruz in Rayy (55). In a frenzy of grief, Mobad abandons his kingdom and wanders the world for six months searching for Vis, before he finally comes to his senses and returns to Marv (56).
D. The Queen Mother restores the peace, but Vis fools Mobad with a bed-trick.	Rāmin informs his mother that he will remain in hiding until Mobad has died (57), but she reveals his whereabouts to Mobad on the condition that he not harm either Vis or Rāmin; Mobad agrees to this, and the lovers return to Marv (58). After a riotous banquet, Mobad goes to bed drunk, taking Vis with him; Vis convinces her Nurse to take her place in bed while she steals off to sleep with Rāmin in the garden; when Mobad awakens, he realizes something is amiss and begins to shout, but Vis returns in time to resume her place in the bed before Mobad is altogether cogent (59).
E. Mobad imprisons Vis in "Devils' Cavern," but Rāmin manages to join her anyway; Mobad's dishonor is made public.	Mobad is forced into a war against Rome (60) and locks Vis in the fortress of Ishkaft, with Zard as her jailor; broken-hearted, Rāmin falls ill and is allowed to remain behind (61). Vis laments her separation from Rāmin (62). Rāmin arrives at the fortress and shoots an arrow to the roof to signal his presence, then scales the walls and spend nine months with Vis (63). Mobad returns victorious from the war, but the sorceress Zarringis reveals Rāmin's treachery to him; furious, Mobad presses on to Ishkaft and gives Zard hell, while Vis and her Nurse lower Rāmin down the wall; Mobad bursts in, sees the rope, and savagely beats Vis and the Nurse (64). When Shahru learns that Vis might be dead, she threatens to destroy Mobad's kingdom in revenge (65). Mobad reassures Shahru that Vis is alive and has her returned to his court in Marv (66).
F. Mobad is cuckolded again and his authority collapses.	Before embarking on another campaign, Mobad bars all the entrances to his palace and charges the Nurse to guard Vis; that night, Rāmin deserts the King but cannot gain access to the palace, instead falling asleep in the gardens; Vis uses her own clothes to rappel down the wall; her clothes tear and she is left naked, but she manages to get to the garden and finds Rāmin (67). Mobad realizes Rāmin has deserted him, deliberates for a while, then finally turns the army around to march on Marv, only to find himself locked out of his own castle; Rāmin escapes by scaling the garden wall, and Mobad bursts in only to find Vis naked and alone in the garden; although he is ready to kill her, Vis persuades him she had been sleep-walking (68). The next day, Mobad holds a banquet, and a minstrel lampoons him as a cuckold; humiliated, Mobad tries to kill Rāmin himself, but he is too drunk and Rāmin throws him off his throne and onto the floor (69).

his realm.[62] Such connections are already established in Gorgāni's panegyrics to Toghrul Bey in the exordium of *V&R*, illustrated by verses like "The plains of Khorasan and Khwarazm are like gardens in his eyes" (*biābān-hā-ye khwārazm o khorāsān · be chashm-ash hamchonān āyad ke bostān*, 3.27), and later, "There is a world between the Tigris and the Oxus, but it is like a garden to the King" (*miān-e dejla vo jayḥun jahān-i-st · valikan shāh rā chun bustān-i-st*, 3.82). Now, as we follow Mobad's description in the Nowruz feast, we find that the garden continues to play a crucial role in both affirming his claim to universal kingship and, further along, questioning it.

> What a joyous springtime feast! All the great and famous had come to celebrate,
> A king and commander from every city, a fairy-faced moon from every borderland.
> The cream of Iran's nobility, from Azerbaijan, Rayy, and Gorgan,
> From Khorasan, Kuhestan, Shiraz, Isfahan, and Dehestan;
> Like Bahrām and Rohhām of Ardebil, Goshasp the Daylami, Shāpur of Gilan;
> Like Keshmir the hero, Āẕin the renowned, brave Viru, heroic Rāmin;
> Like Zard, the king's confidant, both his brother and vizier.
> The king was seated amidst the nobles, just as the moon resides among the stars,
> Lord of kings in the world, King Mobad, Mobad the moon, to whom kings are like stars.
> With the crown of world-conquerors upon his head, the accoutrements of princely lords upon his body,
> Light shone from his visage, the divine *farr* like the world-illuminating sun.[63] (8.22–32)

As mentioned before, the pomp and circumstance of these ritual celebrations was one of the chief ways through which the ancient Iranian kings affirmed their power and prosperity. Taking its Parthian origins into account, this scene in *V&R* is actually the oldest literary reference to the practice, and in-

62. For a discussion of the arrangement of the royal garden, its poetic and symbolic valences, and its use as a performance space, see Dominic P. Brookshaw, "Palaces, Pavilions and Pleasure-gardens: The context and setting of the medieval *majlis*," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 6, no. 2 (2003): 202–205; for more on the session (*majlis*) and its etiquette, see Sawa, *Music Performance Practice*, 118–44.

63. R42/T34/M19/D1:

چه خرّم جشن بود اندر بهاران   به جشن اندر سراسر نامداران
ز هر شهری سپهداریّ و شاهی   ز هر مرزی پری‌روییّ و ماهی
گزیده هرچه در ایران بزرگان   از آذربایگان وز ری و گرگان
همیدون از خراسان و کهستان   ز شیراز و صفاهان و دهستان
چو بهرام و رُهّامِ اردبیلی   گشسبپِ دیلمی شاپرِ گیلی
چو کشمیرِ یل و چون نامی آذین   چو ویروی دلیر و گردِ رامین
چو زرد آن رازدارِ شاهِ کشور   مرو را هم وزیر و هم برادر
نشسته در میانِ مهتران شاه   چنان کاندر میانِ اختران ماه
سرِ شاهانِ گیتی شاهِ موبد   که شاهان چون ستاره ماهِ موبد
به سر بر افسرِکشورْگشایان   به تن بر زیورِ مهتر خدایان
ز دیدارشدمنده روشنایی   چو خورشیدِ جهان فرِّ خدایی

terestingly, some manuscripts of the poem attribute the establishment of this festival to Mobad himself, saying that he has begun "a new rite worthy of that diadem and rank" (*yak-i jashn-e naw-āʾin karda bud shāh · ke bod dar khward-e ān dayhim o ān gāh*, 8.20).[64] It is thus, as Meisami writes, that the festival of Nowruz, and the garden in which it takes place, are intimately tied to the person of the king and the status of his kingship: "In proportion as its design and constituent elements are seen as reflecting principles of cosmic order and beauty, the garden itself becomes an ideal place wherein such principles may be observed."[65] To observe how the relationship between the garden and royal sovereignty can be utilized in the qasida, let us consider the following example by Abu l-Qāsem ʿOnṣori, a near contemporary of Gorgāni's and also the author of some of the first Persian romances. This poem was composed in honor of the famous sultan Maḥmud of Ghazna (d. 421/1030):

> The Nowruz breeze brings rains of pearl, carving idols,
> and through its craft, transforming every tree into a doll.
> Brocade fills the garden as though it were the draper's shop;
> the wind brings ambergris just like the druggist's tray.
> The garden's shining silver grains forever bloom
> and the ground turns green again, like the downy cheeks of comely youths.
> The whole earth's veil is a Chinese robe;
> the earrings that adorn each tree are like a string of jewels.
> Behold the sun!—coquettish like enveloped belles,
> it sometimes peeks from out its cloud, then ducks inside again.
> The heavens bind the deeds of night within the book of New Year's Day,
> upon the pages of that book the spheres are held and recollected.
> The silver crown atop the mountain's head is cast below,
> and once again, the mountain is blue-eyed, silken-cheeked, and musky-haired!
> And every day, the days extend, just like the kingly might;
> and all the while, the nights grow short, just like lifespan of his foes.
> Caesar of the East, the Persian king, the right hand man of Providence;
> his praise the crown that bedecks the brow of Fortune.[66]

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64. R42/T33. This line does not occur in all the manuscripts and is absent from the English translations. The *Shāhnāma*, for its part, attributes the founding of Nowruz to the mythical king Jamshid; see Firdawsī, *Shāhnāmah*, 1:44, vv. 52–55 and *Shahnameh* (*tr. Davis*), 7. For more on pre-Islamic representations of Nowruz, see Mary Boyce, "Nowruz i. In the Pre-Islamic Period," in *EIr*, online edition (2009), accessed June 11, 2015, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/nowruz-i.

65. Julie Scott Meisami, "Allegorical Gardens in the Persian Poetic Tradition: Nezami, Rumi, Hafez," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 17, no. 2 (1985): 229–30; see also Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 201–2.

66. Abū al-Qāsim Ḥasan ʿUnṣurī, *Dīvān*, ed. Yaḥyā Qarīb (Tehran: Ibn-i Sīnā, 1341 [1962]), 45, vv. 1–9. Meter: *ramal mos̊amman maḥẕuf* [– ⏑ – – | – ⏑ – – | – ⏑ – – | – ⏑ –]. For a translation and discussion of the entire poem, see Julie Scott Meisami, "Ghaznavid Panegyrics: Some Political Implications," *Iran* 28 (1990): 33–34.

بادِ نوروزی همی دُر بارد و بتگر شود　　　تا ز صنعش هر درختی لُعتبی دیگر شود

The most striking feature of these opening lines is their stability. There is no action to speak of in this scene, no sudden arrivals or dramatic shifts; the narrative eye instead traps the garden in a state of forever-becoming, constantly blossoming into the paradise it is destined to be. The poet emphasizes this ongoing transformation through the predicate refrain "it becomes" (*shavad*) that punctuates the end of every line with regal composure. Not only is this opulence inevitable, it is eternal; the astonishing metamorphosis of old into young, the hoary mountain blooming into a raven-haired youth, is forever participating in its own renewal through the repetition of words like "ever" (*hami*), "every" (*har*), and "again" (*bāz*). And then, after a half-dozen lines of this still-life ekphrasis, we arrive at the poem's purpose (*gharaż*, as the medieval rhetoricians would say). Through a rhetorical gesture called the *takhalloṣ* or the *gorizgāh* (literally, "the moment of escape"), the poet links the tableau he has created to the object of his praise: just as the light grows with each passing day, so does the sultan's power, and the dwindling darkness mirrors the lifespan of his enemies. Although the change of topic necessitates a shift from lyric to panegyric moods, the structural stability and equilibrium of the poem continues unaltered, reinforcing the underlying equivalence between the sultan's authority with the bounty of spring. Most of the poetic work that goes into making this argument relies on the same aesthetic of balance and symmetry that we saw in the lyrical opening, now employed in a slightly different way: the technical mastery of artifice that accompanies natural change is replaced by the political mastery of the sultan, whose fiat effects a total transformation of the landscape:

> His nature in demon-binding turns demons into men;
>   his name in thorn-keeping turns thorns into water lilies.
> His seal on a stone turns it to wax;
>   his praise turns dust into the spring of Kawthar.[67]
> His generosity turns the desert into the sea;

باغ همچون کُلبهٔ بزّار پر دیبا شود   باد همچون طَبلهٔ عطّار پر عنبر شود
سونِشِ سیمِ سپید از باغ بر دارد همی   باز همچون عارضِ خوبان زمین اخضر شود
روی بندِ هر زمینی حُلّهٔ چینی شود   گوشوارِ هر درختی رشتهٔ گوهر شود
چون حجابی لُعبتان خورشید را بینی ز ناز   گه برون آید ز میغ و گه به میغ اندر شود
دفترِ نوروز بندد آسمان کردارِ شب   تا کواکب نقطهٔ اوراقِ آن دفتر شود
افسرِ سیمین فرو گیرد ز سر کوهِ بلند   باز میناچشم و دیباروی و مُشکین سر شود
روز هر روزی بیفزاید چو قدرِ شهریار   شب چو عُمرِ دشمنانِ او همی کمتر شود
خسروِ مشرق یمینِ دولت آن شاهِ عجم   کافرینش بر سرِ دولت همه افسر شود

67. A fountain in Paradise whose name means "abundance"; cf. Q108.

his wrath turns the land into embers.[68]

The opening lines of *Vis & Rāmin* employ the same motival topology, in which lyrical, pastoral, and erotic themes are redeployed into an aesthetic appreciation of royal splendor. However, this presentation of this landscape is a little more ambiguous: the king, who looms so large at the outset, is soon outshone by the brilliance of the garden itself.[69] The narrator's gaze pulls back to take in the wider scene, turning to increasingly sensuous and amatory matters. In a kind of reversal of the *gorizgāh* transition, the standard images of the garden's topography, employed in ʿOnṣori's qasida to represent royal prosperity and power, are now soused with erotic energy: though surrounded by an entourage of doughty warriors and beautiful women, "nobles like hunting lions, and idols like gazelles in the field" (*bozorgān meśl-e shirān-e shekāri · botān chun āhovān-e marghzāri*, 8.34), Mobad's followers seem more interested in each other than in him.[70] As the narrator continues in this vein, the figure of the king gradually diminishes into the horizon; the splendor of his court is subsumed into the wider world of natural beauty where all are equal participants in love. "Although the king's feast was splendid, feasts other than his were not few" (*agar che bud bazm-e shāh khorram · degar bazmān nabud az u kam*, 8.42), claims the narrator, who begins to describe how "everyone" (*hama kas*, *har kas-i*) has gone out to celebrate the spring, crowned with garlands of tulips, goblet in hand and voices raised in song (8.44–47). Gorgāni's anaphoric phrasing recalls the symmetrical structure of ʿOnṣori's qasida, but this time, the repetition of the word *goruh-i*, "a group," emphasizes the decentralized and universal form that the merry-making has assumed:

> Some engaged in the pleasure of horse-racing, some in music and dance;
> Some drinking wine in the gardens, some picking roses in the rose-beds;
> Some sitting by the river-side, some amidst the tulip-fields.[71] (8.47–50)

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68. ʿUnṣurī, *Dīvān*, 47, vv. 28–30:

خلق او بر دیوبندی دیو را مردم کند　　اسم او بر خارداری خار نیلوفر شود
مهر او بر سنگ‌بندی موم گردد ساعتی　　مدح او بر خاک‌خوانی چشمهٔ کوثر شود
جود او گر بر بیابان اوفتاد دریا شود　　خشم او گر بر زمین افتاد زمین شخگر شود

69. This reading is predicated on certain editorial choices; some manuscripts include an additional sixty-five lines that elaborate Mobad's life and career to the last detail; cf. *Vis & Rāmin* (*eds. T'odua and Gvaxaria*), 31–33. Rowshan includes the first eighteen lines of this in his edition, which mostly describe Mobad in relation to the various celestial bodies. However, if we ignore all sixty-five of these lines and stick with T'odua and Gvaxaria's edition, the poem begins by introducing Mobad (8.1–3, cited on page 260), followed by a description of his court (cited as 8.22–32 on page 262).

70. See page 177 for a citation and discussion of this passage.

71. R43/T35/M20/D2:

This shift in perspective effects a flattening of the political hierarchy on display in ʿOnṣori's poem, in which the garden is ultimately revealed to be subordinate to the throne. While Mobad remains at the head of the host and is without doubt the leader of this occasion (8.53–64), the universal celebration of springtime and love has rendered the king only one out of many other revelers: "All had gone out to enjoy themselves, weaving the land's greenery into a brocade; the King, too, had gone for this purpose, arrayed in regal regalia" (*bedānjā rafta har kas khorrami rā · cho dibā karda kimokht zami rā / shahanshah niz ham rafta bedin kār · be zinat-hā vo zivar-hā-ye shahvār*, 8.51–52). From a structural standpoint, the romance has long parted ways from the qasida; although they began at the same literary topos, *V&R* reappropriates the language of garden-as-kingdom to fill the space with erotic energy and tension, producing a landscape in which the king may not be as much in control as his surroundings may have us believe. In this arrangement, beauty is more powerful than secular authority, and love may defy royal decree.

It is from this point that Mobad's problems begin. Perhaps caught up in the spirit of the occasion, the king is struck by Shahru's beauty and propositions her on the spot; the queen demurely refuses, offering him instead her unborn daughter Vis, and the two exchange oaths to that effect.[72] While the casual tone and easy smiles of this conversation give it the appearance of a relatively low-risk transaction, the final agreement does place a certain pressure on the king, one that he cannot afford to ignore; for regardless of whatever emotional investment (or lack thereof) we might ascribe to him, he has entered a contract, and as king and guarantor of the law, it is now expected that he both uphold it and see it upheld. A dozen or so years later, when his brother Zard returns from Media bearing the news that Vis has publicly rejected his claim to her, the implications that this has on his authority are immediately visible on his countenance: "So much sweat poured from his face, you'd say his body had melted in the heat of his fury" (*ze bas khuy k-az sar o ruy-ash hami tākht · tan-ash gofti ze tāb-e khashm begodākht*, 18.3). The personal insult is bad enough, but there looms a larger danger, which Zard conveys in his report to the king:

گروهی در نشاط و اسپ‌بازی   گروهی در سماع و پای‌بازی
گروهی می‌خوران در بوستانی   گروهی گل‌چنان در گلستانی
گروهی بر کنارِ رودباری   گروهی در میانِ لاله‌زاری

72. See section 3.2 for a detailed discussion of this scene.

Viru has crowned himself *ruḥā* and surrendered his heart to Ahriman along the way.
All say "king" (*shāh*) before his name and know no other king save him.
They do not count you among the kings—some don't consider you a man!
Some call you "priest" (*mōbad*) and "minister" (*dastur*),
while others call you "Mobad the incapable."[73] (17.45–48)

It is noteworthy that this is not at all the scene that we were witness to. Prince Viru was either absent or silent during the confrontation between Zard and Vis, and it was for very different reasons than politics that Vis turned down Mobad's summons. Yet this affront to Mobad's personal honor feeds effortlessly into a general concern about his ability to rule; as Hodgson writes, "the feud [between two rivals] was not based on demand for recognition of fixed hierarchical status as a knight, say, or a peer, but on demand for acknowledgement of one's personal worth as a man and of the immediate power of the group of men whose solidarity one was able to command."[74] Thus Vis's rejection has become Viru's rebellion; in feeding this narrative to Mobad, Zard has effectively displaced the responsibility of Vis's actions onto her brother, recasting the event as the revolt of a vassal prince against his overlord. Mobad's political authority and his personal honor are both now compromised, and regardless of however he might wish to act, he is institutionally obliged to respond to the crisis; ironically, it is his very position as king, and the prerequisite of masculine prowess ("some don't consider you a man!") that comes with it, that limits his options to this one and only choice. His lack of autonomy is made explicit when Zard conveys the news to the nobles at Mobad's court; in their eyes, this is no longer a private issue, but a matter that concerns the kingdom at large.

73. R60/T61/M38/D28. These verses have been carefully scrutinized in an effort to determine the meaning and significance of these titles and epithets. Minorksy believes that *ruḥā* is a corruption of *rujā*, ("serenissimus"), while W. B. Henning suggests *wrjā*, "powerful" (see Minorsky, *Iranica*, 176; Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī, *Vis & Rāmin* (*tr. Morrison*), 38). However, Mary Boyce brings our attention to the Mandaean *Book of John*, which names the "Ruḥā" as a local despot; see Boyce, "The Parthian *Gōsān*," 17; Mark Lidzbarski, *Das Johannesbuch der Mandäer: Zweiter Teil* (Geissen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1915), 166. The *rūḥā ḏ-qūḏšā*, (cf. Ar. *al-rūḥ al-quds*), known as the "holy spirit" in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, is considered by the Mandaeans to be an evil being, the "way of the devil." Minorsky tells us that *dastur*, "minister," also carries a religious connotation in *V&R* (as it does today, being the word for "priest" in contemporary Zoroastrianism); see Minorsky, *Iranica*, 177, and *V&R* 17.48 cited above. There are also multiple versions of Mobad's denigrating epithet in the manuscript tradition, which has been interpreted as *Mobad-e zur* ("Mobad the powerful"), *Mobad-e zōr* ("Mobad the false"), or *Mobad-e dur* ("Mobad the distant"); cf. ibid., 184. I opted for the latter: Mobad is too far-off and remote to exercise his authority in Media.

لقب کردست روحا خویشتن را   بـه دل در راه داده اهـرمـن را
به نامِ او را همه کس شاه خوانند   جـز او شـاهِ دگـر بـاشـد نـدانـنـد
تـرا نـز شـهـریـاران مـی‌شـمـارنـد   گروهی خود به مردت می‌ندارند
گروهی موبدت خوانند و دستور   چو خوانندت گروهی موبدِ دور

74. See Hodgson, *Venture*, 2:141.

In the king's presence, the nobles gnashed their teeth and said,
"Why would Shahru, our ally, give the king's wife to another man?
How could Viru have dared to court a woman betrothed to our king?"
And then they said, "Now our king will wreak vengeance upon the land of Media,
Now the evil eye will realize the enemy's desire upon the house of Qāren and Viru!
. . . .
A thundering cloud will rain for a month's time over Media, bringing a flood of death,
Fate has sounded the death-knell for all who live there,
now that she who was one's is now another's!"[75] (18.22–26, 30–31)

They continue in this vein for a while, discussing in gory detail the retribution the king is certain to wreak upon the Medes. It is striking that, like Zard, they do not consider Vis's agency in rejecting Mobad, but rather heap their ire upon the king, queen, and crown prince of the land, who have, in their view, stolen from the king that which is rightfully his. It is also striking that it is they and not Mobad who express the outrage of the situation—while the nobles rant and shake their fists, the king remains silent, "bent and burning in the fires of anxious thought" (*shāhanshah zamān-i bud pichān · del andar ātash-e andisha suzān*, 18.32). At the risk of lingering too long on what may seem an obvious point, it is worth reflecting on the choices available to the king at this juncture. Within this context of sedition and personal affront, one is hard pressed to imagine any other response from Mobad that could both save face and preserve his authority; indeed, now that his vassals are clamoring for Viru's blood, he has little choice: were he to simply relinquish his claim on Vis at this point, he would lose both Media and his credibility at home in a single stroke. However, this puts him in a quandary as Vis's suitor, for if he can only possess his bride by violence, he ensures that he will never win her affections. No matter how he acts, he loses what he most desires. It is perhaps for this reason that he, at first, is unable to respond, and can only ask his brother to confirm this damning news, perhaps hoping against hope that it was just a rumor: "Did you see this with your own eyes, or did you hear it somewhere?" (*beporsid az barādar*

75. R61/T63/M39/D29:

بزرگان که پیشِ شاه بودند　　همه دندان به دندان بر بسودند
که شهرو این چرا یارست کردن　　زنِ شه را به دیگر کس سپردند
چه زَهره بود ویرو را که می‌خواست　　زنی را کاو زنِ شاهنشهِ ماست
همی گفتند ازین پس کامِ بدخواه　　برآرد شاهِ ما از کشورِ ماه
کنون در خانهٔ ویروی و قارن　　ز چشمِ بد برآید کامِ دشمن
دمانِ ابری که سیلِ مرگ آرد　　به بومِ ماه تا ماهی ببارد
منادی زد قضا بر هرچه آنجاست　　که چیزِ آن فلان اکنون فلان راست

k-in to didi · be chashm-e khwish yā jā-i shenidi, 18.5). Zard reaffirms his tale, ending his account with a conspicuous request for orders: "I've told you what I saw, and now you know best—give me your orders, and I'll obey" (*man ān goftam ke didam pas to beh dān · ke to farmān dehi man banda farmān*, 18.19). But Mobad remains paralyzed, "writhing like a wounded snake" (*chun mār-e sarkhasta bepichid*, 18.21), and in the end, it is only his nobles' cries for revenge that finally goad him into action; it is political necessity, not personal conviction, that drive him forward.[76]

These indications that the situation is spinning out of Mobad's control are soon confirmed when the two armies meet on the plains of Dinavar.[77] Gorgāni portrays the battle as a catastrophic breakdown of the natural hierarchies of order, in which the bonds of loyalty, honor, and even kinship dissolve into irrelevance:

> Fathers showed no respect for their sons, nor did warriors honor their kin and liegemen.
> Brother turned upon brother in such a rage that friends were worse than enemies.
> Darkness suddenly rose from the earth, such that night arrived before its time.
> At that moment, men became night-blind; the eyes of the sun were stuffed with dust.
> With vision blocked inside that dust, brother wounded brother,
> Father could no longer recognize his own son, and struck his head from his body.[78]
> (20.77–82)

The collapse of cosmic, civil, and familial order is further developed by the reintroduction of garden imagery and tropes. As Meisami notes in a brilliant discussion of this scene, "the early stages of the battle

76. Mobad's response to this news is very similar to that of King Marc in the *Tristan & Iseut* cycle; I am reminded of the scene in Béroul's *Tristan*, when Marc's barons accuse his wife of adultery: "The king heard them, sighed, and bowed his head. He paced back and forth, not knowing what to say" (*Li rois l'entent, fist un sospir, / Son chief abesse vers la terre, / Ne set qu'il die, sovent erre*, 610–12); Béroul, *Tristran*, 30–31.

77. The location of this battle is given in *V&R* 21.3: "He [Mobad] turned the reigns from the way to Khorasan, and withdrew from Dinavar towards Isfahan" (*'anān bar tāft az rāh-e khorāsān · keshid az dinavar su-ye sepāhān*). Minorsky is very interested in the regional composition of these two armies and suggests that this scene might bear the memory of a great power-struggle between the eastern and western branches of the Parthian empire that took place in 50 CE, when the governor of Mesopotamia, Carenes (Kārēn > Qāren), supported by Rome and the regional lords of Edessa and Assyria, rose in revolt against his eastern overlord Gōtarzēs (Pers. Gōdarz, whom Minorsky links with the line of Mobad). See Minorsky, *Iranica*, 156, 168, 172–73, 176, 184, 187; see also page 145 in this dissertation.

78. R66/T71/M44/D35:

نکرد از بُن پدر آزَرم فرزند	نه مردِ جنگ روی خویش و پیوند
برادر با برادر کینه‌ور بود	ز کینه دوست از دشمن بتر بود
یکی تاریکی از گیتی برآمد	که پیش از شب رسیدن شب درآمد
در آن دم گشت مردم پاک شبکور	به گرد انباشته شد چشمهٔ هور
چو اندر گرد شد دیدار بسته	برادر را برادر کرد خسته
پدر فرزندِ خود را بازنشناخت	به تیغش سر همی از تن بینداخت

are described in a hyperbolic style, which gradually appears increasingly incongruous to its subject"—the same mounting incongruity that we observed in the scene of the Nowruz banquet.[79] Gorgāni sows the seeds of this image in the opening lines of the battle, conveyed through the motif of a blinding, ear-shattering noise that causes men to forget themselves and lose their reason.[80]

> Two furious drums thundered from two camps; two armies met for battle before two kings.
> That was no war-drum, but a furious demon, enraging all who heard his cry!
> The blowing fifes became the Trumpet of Judgement Day, the timpani revived the dead!
> Just as the roar of springtime thunder casts blossoms from the trees,
> So too when the angry drums sounded, the spring of war emerged from the camps.
> In the center, a drum shrieked, "Forwards! On, O snatchers of life!"
> The cymbal accompanied him in this noise as singers match words and melody.
> So too the fife, wailing in a hundred ways, resembled the nightingale in the garden,[81]
> And the trumpet that blasted in counterpoint was like two singers in duet.[82] (20.2–10)

In terms of content, this scene is probably the closest we get to the epic register of the *Shāhnāma*. However, Gorgāni's style is very unlike the dramatic narratives characteristic of Ferdowsi; rather than laying out the two armies before us and recounting the back-and-forth struggle of its champions, he draws from a reservoir of still-life imagery that, as Meisami observes, "is much closer to the celebrational

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79. Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 97.

80. Cf. El-Kholy, *The Function of Music*, 128–29; Parvīz Nātil Khānlarī, "Shahr-i Samak," in *Samak-i ʿAyyār*, ed. Parvīz Nātil Khānlarī, vol. 6 (Tehran: Āgāh, 1363–64 [1984–85]), 22, 36–37; and the following anecdote from Plutarch, *Fall of the Roman Republic*, 140:

> The Parthians, instead of having horns or trumpets to sound the attack, make use of hollow drums of stretched hide to which bronze bells are attached. They beat on these drums all at once in many different parts of the field and the sound produced is most eerie and terrifying, like the roaring of wild animals with something of the sharpness of a peal of thunder. They have, it seems, correctly observed that the sense of hearing has the most disturbing effect on us of all our senses, most quickly arouses our emotions and most effectively overpowers our judgement.

81. The Paris manuscript has the *santur*, a large dulcimer, instead of the *shaypur*, a small fife, but the latter sounds like the more likely instrument; cf. Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī, *Vis & Rāmin* (*eds. T'odua and Gvaxaria*), 67, n. 12.

82. R63/T67/M41/D32:

دو کوسِ کین بغرید از دو درگاه
به جنگ آمد دو لشکر پیشِ دو شاه
نه کوسِ جنگ بود آن دیوِ کین بود
که پرکین گشت هرک آن بانگ بشنود
عدیلِ صور شد نایِ دمنده
تبیره مرده را می‌کرد زنده
چنان کز بانگِ رعدِ نوبهاران
برون آید بهار از شاخساران
به بانگِ کوس کین آمد همیدون
ز لشکرگه بهارِ جنگ بیرون
به قلب اندر دُهُل فریادخوانان
که بشتابید هین ای جان‌ستانان
در آن فریاد صَنج او را عدیلی
چو قوّالان سرایان با سَپیلی
هم آن شیپور بر صد راه نالان
بسان بلبل اندر آبسالان
خروشان گاوْدُم با او به یک جا
چو با هم دو سراینده به همتا

diction of victory *qaṣīdah*s that extoll the ruler's martial prowess, such as those composed by the panegyrists of the Ghaznavids, or by such Arabic poets as Abu Tammām and al-Mutanabbī, in which (in further contrast to epic) the devices of *badīʿ* [mannerism] figure prominently."[83] And like the qasida, the initial description of the unholy noise that announces the battle is only the first in a series of rhetorical set-pieces that display Gorgāni's skill at metaphor and simile; he goes on to compare the warriors to a menagerie of savage animals, then personifies the spears, swords, arrows, and javelins that sever them from their lives.[84] But what strikes my attention most is the war's setting, for the contest seems not to take place on a battlefield, but in a corrupted garden. The language teems with references to the Nowruz banquet: the thundering rainclouds announce the "spring of war"; the same minstrels and nightingales who sang joyful tunes at the vernal feast now lament the chaos in disharmony with the fifes and trumpets; the musky incense that filled the air is now ash and smoke; the season is no longer the time of love and rebirth, but the age of war and destruction. The gruesome metamorphosis continues as the passage winds to its climax and men die in the embrace of the ruined and defiled land:

> Four-feathered arrows of white poplar sprouted like trees out of luckless eyes;
> The tree of life grew from the body, cloaked by helmet and mail;
> When the dagger rent the cloak from the body, it felled the tree of life.
> The air became a reed-bed of spears; the earth became a wine-cellar of men's blood.
> From so many blood-shedding swords and maces,
> the world was filled with eternal smoke and fire.[85] (20.84–88)

This masterful inversion of the imagery of the garden is not without precedent; the scene of a once-placid garden turned stormy and violent is similarly deployed to great effect in the prolegomenon to the story of Rostam and Esfandyār in the *Shāhnāma*, a tale in which the themes of injustice and the "dark

83. Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 98–99.

84. Davis, "Introduction," xxiii–xxviii, has a very nice discussion of Gorgāni's imagery, which he compares to the "jeweled style" of late antiquity; a scene from this passage is included. See also Morrison, "Flowers and Witchcraft in the 'Vīs o Rāmīn' of Fakhr ud-Dīn Gurgānī," 251–52 and 254 for a discussion of this passage and other moments when the garden is transformed into a wasteland by human depravity, and for a discussion of the "jeweled style," see Roberts, *The Jeweled Style: Poetry and Poetics in Late Antiquity*.

85. R66/T71/M45/D35:

خَدنگِ چارپر همچون درختان   برُسته از دو چشمِ شوربختان
درختِ زنگانی رُسته از تن   به پیشش پرده گشته خُود و جوشن
چو خنجر پرده را برتن بدرّید   درختِ زندگانی را ببرّید
هوا از نیزه گشته چون نیستان   زمین از خونِ مردم چون میستان
ز بس گرز و ز بس شمشیر خونبار   جهان پر دود و آتش بود هموار

and shadowy side" of monarchy, as Clinton puts it, are at the fore:

> The cloud roars like a lion, as though he were
> The lover, not the rose. Winds tear his robe
> To shreds. Fires flash within the thunderhead,
> Fierce proofs of heaven's passion for the earth—
> A love it offers here before the sun.
> Who understands the nightingale's complaint?
> Beneath the rose, what is it he laments?[86]

These same themes are make explicit in the closing lines of the battle scene in *Vis & Rāmin*, with the fading sunlight reflecting the diminished aura of divine favor that once shone so bright from Mobad's visage: "When the sun lowered in the western skies, it became pale as lovers' faces; you'd have said the sun was Mobad's fortune; the world lost hope of his royal splendor" (*cho khwarshid-e falak dar bākhtar shod · cho ru-ye ʿāsheqān hamrang-e zar shod / to gofti bakht-e Mobad bud khwarshid · jahān az farr-e u bobrid ommid*, 20.92–93). It is no surprise that Meisami reads this image as a as a naturalistic response to the king's injustice and tyranny; but what is harder to decipher is the process that lead to this state of affairs.[87] The text has gone to great lengths to show how Mobad is only doing what any king would: from his perspective and those who support him, this is a just war against an illegitimate usurper. But in the act of going to war in defense of his kingship, Mobad has paradoxically lost his legitimacy. It doesn't add up; one has a sense that the king is a patsy somehow, that the text has pushed him forward and declared him guilty for his crimes, without offering any viable alternatives he could have pursued. It might not be the case, then, that Mobad has brought strife and ruin to the garden; the blight might have been there all along.

4.3 Violence and vacillation

The use of war of violence as a legitimizing tool can be further explored through a curious moment in Gorgāni's encomium to Toghrul Bey, back in the prologue of *V&R*. We have seen how the image of the king as the harbinger of a new age of justice and prosperity is a vital motif in the panegyric tradition; the

86. Firdawsī, *In the Dragon's Claws*, 23, 29–30; cf. Firdawsī, *Shāhnāmah*, 5:292, vv. 10–13.
87. Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 100–1.

exploits of Maḥmud of Ghazna abrogate the deeds of Alexander, the life of Toghrul overwrites the story of Maḥmud, and so on. In the section following Toghrul's triumphant coronation as King of Kings, Gorgāni recounts a specific episode about how his sovereign took the city of Isfahan from its Buyid overlords. This passage reinforces the image of the king as the pillar of manhood (*mardomi*), who uses this practice to usher in a new and more perfect form of justice:

> When the great King of Kings came to Isfahan with auspicious portent,
> He found, to his joy, a city like spring, girded by shining walls,
> But ruined by the King's enemy, a tempestuous foe.
> Were the King not supremely just, so kind and merciful,
> Isfahan would have not a brick to its name, and none would have tilled
>   its fields for a hundred years.
> But he took the way of men (*mardomi*) and forgave both townsman and soldier,
> He crushed their crimes below his heel, so that no one voiced his discontent.
> Unlike other kings, he did not pursue old grudges, but polished the enemy in his eyes:
> Just as God reminds us in the Qur'an, when he told us the tale of Solomon and Bilqis,
> "When kings enter a new city, they commit destructive and horrible deeds,
> Casting those of name and station into the clutches of hardship and lowliness."[88]
> The lord of the world, the valiant king, has introduced a better rule.[89] (5.1–12)

But how, one might ask, did he do it? What does this new world order look like in practice? For one thing, we are told that he lavishly rewards his soldiers with fiefs and noble estates (5.14); for another, we can glean from his advice to his governor that public security must be so strictly enforced that "a woman may adorn her head with gold and walk about the districts, day and night, and no one would dare look

88. This is a paraphrase of Q27.33, where Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba, says, "When kings enter a land, they despoil it and render the noblest of its people its most degraded. This is how they behave" (*qālat inna l-mulūka idhā dakhalū qaryatan afsadūhā wa-jaʿalū aʿizzata ahlihā adhillatan wa-kadhālika yafʿalūn*).

89. R30/T18/M12:

چو سلطانِ معظّم شاهِ شاهان   به فالِ نیک آمد در صفاهان
به شادی دید شهری چون بهاری   چو گوهر گردِ شهر اندر حصاری
خلافِ شاه او را کرده ویران   کجا مانَد خلافِ شاه به طوفان
اگر نه شاه بودی سخت عادل   به گاهِ مهر و بخشایش نکو دل
صفاهان را نماندی خشت بر خشت   نکردی کس به صدسال اندرو کشت
ولیکن مردمی را کار فرمود   به شهری و سپاهی بر ببخشود
گنهشان زیرِ پا اندر بمالید   چنان کز خشمِ او یک تن ننالید
نه چون دیگر شهان کینِ کهن خواست   به چشمِ خویش دشمن را بپیراست
چنان چون یاد کرد ایزد به فرقان   چو گفتش حالِ بلقیس و سلیمان
که شاهان چون به شهرِ نو درآیند   تباهی‌ها و زشتی‌ها نمایند
گروهی را که عزّ و جاه دارند   به دستِ خواری و سختی سپارند
خداوندِ جهان شاهِ دلاور   پدید آورد رسمی زین نکوتر

upon that gold, lest he lose his head for its sake" (*chonān bāyad ke zar bar sar nehad zan · be ruz o shab begardad gerd-e barzan / nayārad kas negah kardan dar ān zar · v-agar na bar sar-e ān zar nehad sar*, 5.44–45). But at the same time, he makes sure to "crush" the crimes of the city's residents, such that none would dare to challenge his edict. The capacity to enforce one's own word through violence seems to be a cornerstone of *mardomi*; immediately after this passage, we get a demonstration of Toghrul's justice, how he "cleansed the city" of its malicious folk (*hama shahr az bad-andishān bepālud*, 5.17):

> There was a group treading over the people, libeling the populace in the tax records;
> On his order, their tongues were cut out and their eyes pierced with red-hot needles.[90]
> (5.18–19)

It is clear that our model king has no qualms about violent retaliation. The political manuals of Gorgāni's day agree that such brutality is in fact commendable in a monarch, for it is the instrument of control; peace and justice are not realized through an absence of violence, but through their monopolization in the hands of a single man.[91] Thus is the paradox of royal order: however "kind" and "merciful" it may be, it must at its root be cruel and merciless if it is to take hold. This leads us back to Mobad's dilemma: as we saw in his war with Viru, the exigencies of his role compelled him to punish transgression with violence, even when he himself wished to avoid it. How, then, should he behave with Vis, the woman whose love becomes his one and only desire in life? How can he be kind when his only weapon is cruelty? Mobad's attempt to solve this question brings him face-to-face with a host of issues that Toghrul was lucky to avoid: while the latter king's enemies were easily identified as outside and external threats, all of the challenges to Mobad's power are autochthonic, arising out of his desire to be loved. Thus, his problems are inseparable from himself, and knowing what to do becomes very hard: even before the affair between Vis and Rāmin has started, it is clear that *something* is amiss and that *something* needs to be done about it, but Mobad is never able to locate the concrete source of his problems and bring it into line. Confusion and apprehension pervade the air, long after the fog of war has dissipated.

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90. *V&R* R31/T19/M12; see also page 25.

گروهی را که مردم می‌سپردند　　رعیّت را به دیوان غَمز کردند
به فرمانش زبان‌هاشان بریدند　　به دیده میلِ سوزان در کشیدند

91. Neẓām al-Molk writes, for example: "Everyone fears the wrath and chastisement of the king, and when the king is angry with anyone it is the commander of the guard whom the king orders to cut off his head, to chop off his hands and feet, to hang him on a gibbet, to give him the bastinado, to put him in prison, or to throw him into a pit." Niẓām al-Mulk, *The Book of Government*, 135; see also pp. 242–43 for the brutal execution of Bābak.

We begin to see how this works after Vis has openly declared her love for Ramin (see page 233), upon which Mobad banishes her to Media. Yet he is still suspicious of Rāmin; although Vis is now far away, he still suspects that his brother will not give her up. Thus, when Rāmin comes to him requesting a leave of absence, claiming he is bored and needs to go hunting, the king is sure that Rāmin's "heart longed for Vis and not for game" (*del-ash rā Vis bāyesti na nakhchir*, 49.74). Nonetheless, he is still relatively confident of his ability to govern; he agrees to Rāmin's request, but only after laying down the threat of harsh reprisal if he gets word of any disobedience. He advises his brother:

> Go find a wife in Kuhestan (Media), of good name and lineage.
> Join with her under auspicious portents, and in that bond
> you'll know both joy and contentment.
> And from now on, stay away from Vis, or you'll be slain in her skirts!
> I'll brandish fire from the blade of my sword, and burn with it both wife and brother,
> For when my brother brings me dishonor, the best place for him is under the earth![92]
> (49.83–87)

Rāmin may be the hero of *V&R*, but the text is not shy about pointing out his knack at barefaced perfidy. We watch him swear an oath by sun and moon, by the king's soul and his own, that he will never again lay eyes on Vis; "but even as he made these sugared promises," the narrator remarks, "something else was in his heart," (*hami dād in payām-e shekar-ālud · valikan dar del-ash chiz-i degar bud*, 49.98). Rāmin's faithlessness is soon proved; the moment he is out of the city, he makes a beeline to Vis. When news of this latest betrayal gets back to Mobad, the king hardens his resolve: Rāmin is an existential threat to him; he has no choice but to kill his brother. Knowing that fratricide is an odious crime, he summons his mother to explain his reasons for this, as if keen to show that he is in the right and that Rāmin deserves to die.

> He said to her, "Can this be right? What sensible man could allow
> Rāmin to court destruction with my wife and dishonor my royal position?
> How can two brothers share one woman? What shame could be worse?

92. R142/T184/M123/D147:

به کوهستان زنی نامی بجویی　　مرو را هم بزرگی هم نکویی
کنی با او به فالِ نیک پیوند　　ردان پیوند باشی شاد و خرسند
نگردی بیش ازین پیرامنِ ویس　　که پس کُشته شَوی در دامنِ ویس
برافروزم ز روی خنجر آذر　　برو هم زن بسوزم هم برادر
برادر چون مرا زو ننگ باشد　　همان بهتر که زیرِ سنگ باشد

. . . .
I must kill him in disgrace; your eyes must weep like a springtime cloud.[93] (51.7–12, 13)

Although he invokes the moral outrage of being cuckolded by his own brother, Mobad is careful to present this decision as a product of reason, not anger; he does not *want* to kill his brother, but he *must*; the threat his brother poses to his authority is so great that it is the only reasonable thing to do. His hand is forced, as it were, by his "royal position." His mother, however, raises an equally convincing argument why he should not act: Mobad has no children, and only Rāmin is there to carry on the line; "no sensible man would cut off his own two hands!" (*hargez · do dast-e khwad naborrad hich gorbez*, 51.16), she retorts. Mobad is thus left with two clear routes that a "sensible man" would take that are in perfect opposition to each other, leaving him in the unenviable position that no matter what choice he makes, he will commit a senseless deed that harms himself and his family interests. The only escape from this quandary lies in the chance that perhaps someone other than Rāmin is the real culprit here, a possibility that Mobad's mother is quick to seize upon. It is Vis and Viru of Media, she says, who are to blame; in her eyes, both of her children have fallen into the same trap: "What do you want from poor Rāmin? It is always from Viru that your disaster comes. If Rāmin is in Hamadan (Media), it is only because he, like you, is in love with Vis" (*to az Rāmin-e bichāra che khwāhi · k-at az viru hami āyad tabāhi / agar Rāmin be hamdān ast az ān ast · ke Visa mehr-e u az del berānda-st*, 51.39–40). Her advice for her son, then, is to renounce Vis (*zan rā gosi kon*, 51.27), reconcile with Rāmin, and punish Viru for his treachery. Convinced of his mother's plan, Mobad composes a letter full of spite and vitriol to Viru, in which he derides his lineage, sneers at his prowess in combat, accuses him of raping his wife, and promises imminent and merciless retribution. In this wise, he seems ready to do as Toghrul did, to return to the site of injustice and stamp it into oblivion:

I'll make a field of the bodies of your dead, and drive a Tigris of blood through it!
I'll bring out Vis without shoes or veil and parade her before the army like a dog.
I'll so humiliate her that none will ever again oppose the noble![94] (51.85–87)

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93. R145/T189/M126/D151. King Marc could not agree more: "For a King to be partnered in love with open eyes is beneath contempt!" See Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, 259.

مرو را گفت نیکو باشد این کار　　نگه کن تا پسنند هیچ هشیار
که رامین با زنم جوید تباهی　　کنند بدنام بر من گاهِ شاهی
یکی زن چون بُوَد با دو برادر　　چه باشد در جهان زین ننگ بدتر
که من زان سان کُشم او را به زاری　　که گردد چشمِ تو ابرِ بهاری

94. R148/T193/M128/D156:

These blustering words cannot hide the systemic failure of Mobad's attempt to salvage his authority; though he is willing to redirect his righteous anger from Rāmin to Viru, he cannot, or will not, accept his mother's advice and give up Vis, nor acknowledge the fact that she herself—or more specifically, his need to possess her—is the source of the transgression. We miss the point if we read his threats as a reflection of a cruel or violent personality; what we have before us is an illustration of how Mobad must call upon violence as a function of his role. With his sovereignty under attack, the king must act; the appearance of justice must be maintained. Thus, he fills the air with threats of violence to come and promises of retribution against criminals he cannot identify, a pantomime of authority that arises from and attempts to hide the anxiety of not knowing what to do. His ongoing uncertainty is apparent in the letter's opening, which seems desperate to locate a concrete enemy against whom he may unleash his righteous anger: "Will you not say who commanded you to commit this crime and seek to overthrow me? Behind your high and self-serving ambitions, who gives you refuge? Who's your support?" (*bedu goft in ke farmud-at nagu'i · ke bar man bishi vo bidād ju'i / panāh-at ki-st yā posht-at kodām ast · ke rāy-at bas boland o khwishkām ast*, 51.48). Such paranoid accusations only contribute to the growing sense of senselessness that pervades the atmosphere. Viru has no idea what crime it is that Mobad could be talking about, and wonders aloud, who is doing wrong to whom?

> He said, "What strange words are these? Against whom is his anger directed?
> He sat my sister within his harem, then kicked her out in the middle of winter.
> It was he who struck, then he who cried foul: injustice has been done on two accounts.
> . . . .
> He's the one who sinned, and now he wants to punish us; such is one
> who has retreated from justice.[95] (52.9–11, 14)

Confusion has run amok. Neither side can make sense of what is going on: Mobad and his allies are convinced that Media has staged a full rebellion, while from the Medes' perspective, the king seems to

کنم از کشتگانِ کشورت هامون   به هامون بر برانم دجلهٔ خون
بیارم ویس را بی‌کفش و چادر   پیاده چون سگان در پیشِ لشکر
چنان رسوا کنم وی را کزین پس   نجوید دشمنی با مهتران کس

95. R148/T194/M129/D157:

همی گفت ای عجب چندین سخن چیشت   مرو را این همه پرخاش با کیست
نشانده خواهرم را در شبستان   برون کرده به دی ماهِ زمستان
هم او زد پس همو برداشت فریاد   بدان تا باشد از دو گونه بیداد
گناه او کرد و بر ما کینه‌ور گشت   چنین باشد کسی کز داد برگشت

have lost his marbles. Either way, Mobad's right to rule is in serious jeopardy; ironically, his fears that a revolt is brewing in the west may in fact engender one. Viru insinuates as much in his response to Mobad's letter, challenging him to demonstrate his manhood (*mardi*) on the battlefield, if he is so sure of the accusations he has leveled against his vassals.

> What kind of tyranny has come over you, save despair and disgrace?
> You are king, lord, and ruler; you give orders in your own desire.
> You should therefore be careful, and know every deed you do.
> You are greater than us—you should not say anything inappropriate or outside custom.
> . . . .
> If I come out to the plain of battle, you'll see for yourself how I'll deal with you.
> I'll wash your noble line with the quicksilver of my sword; I'll be a man in deeds, not words.
> Neither lineage nor eloquence bear any value in the battlefield,
> where heroes show their fury!
> Bring your courage (*mardi*), not words, for today courage is my ally![96] (53.3–6, 37–40)

This threat is enough to literally stop the king in his tracks: "When the king read out this heart-wrenching reply, he halted his endeavors" (*cho shāh ān pāsokh-e delgir bar khwānd · az ān pāsokh be kār-e khwish dar mānd*, 53.44). By calling his bluff, Viru has cut off his only other outlet for retribution and the restitution of his honor; now, regardless of whether he treats Rāmin or Viru as his enemy, it will paradoxically be he who is committing the injustice, thus undermining his kingship even more. Somehow, Mobad has been left with no one but himself to blame for his shame and humiliation, the consequence of occupying a position where all reasonable action necessarily becomes unreasonable.

As an aside, the structural and political motives for Mobad's confusion resonate beautifully with those of his famous literary counterpart, King Marc.[97] Both kings possess legal dominion over their

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96. R149/T195/M130/D158:

چه پیش آمد ترا از خویش کامی	بجز اندهگنی و زشت‌نامی
تو شاه و شهریار و پادشایی	به کامِ خویشتن فرمان روایی
چنان باید که تو آهسته باشی	همه کاری نکو دانسته باشی
تو از ما مهتری باید که گفتار	نگویی جز به آیین و سزاوار
اگر پیش آییم بر دشتِ پیگار	تو خود بینی که با تو چون کنم کار
به آبِ تیغ گوهر را بشویم	کنم مردی به کردار و نگویم
چه گوهر چه سخن‌دانگی نیرزند	در آن میدان که گردان کینه ورزند
به یک سو نه سخن مردی بیاور	که ما را مردی است امروز یاور

97. The connection between these two works has been the topic of many studies and the subject of a somewhat heated debate; for a summary of the literature, see page 60.

queens Vis and Iseut, while at the same time their rivals Rāmin and Tristan are their closest blood relatives and the scions of their line. They are both heads of feudal aristocracies, and while they like to portray themselves as absolute sovereigns, they cannot afford to antagonize the noble families who support them; as Marc's barons tell him, "If you do not banish your nephew from court so that he never returns, you will never have our allegiance, and we will never leave you in peace."[98] Similarly, Shahru threatens Mobad with utter ruin if he has harmed her daughter: "Men from east and west will gird themselves to avenge Vis's blood. When mounted warriors come from across the world, they'll crush you below their chargers' hooves" (*kamar bandad be khun-e Vis-e delbar · ze bum-e bākhtar tā bum-e khāvar / cho āyand az hama giti sovārān · besāyand-at be somm-e rāhvārān*, 65.62–63). Thus, when their wives' adultery comes to light, the kings must either punish their brother/nephew and doom their family line to oblivion, or fail to punish him and cast doubt upon their own right and ability to rule, a paradox neatly summarized by Marc, who says of his barons, "Unless I drive them out of my land, the villains will no longer fear my power"; in other words, he must destroy his power to prove that he had it.[99] In a similar way, Mobad effects a sheepish apology to Viru, pinning the blame on his nobles for goading him on—"They told me evil things about you, and I didn't know that they were being unjust" (*torā zi man be zeshti yād kardand · nadānestam ke bar bidād kardand*, 53.48)—but this only makes him look sillier and more incompetent.[100] Meanwhile, the underlying question of Viru's letter remains unanswered: clearly, something has gone awry, evidenced by the fact that the two kingdoms are on the verge of a second war; but what is the crime, and who is responsible for it? As these threats and counter-threats pile on top of one another, the question of agency and responsibility grows ever more opaque.

From this point onwards, we will see a curious unwillingness from Mobad to know the truth; even when seemingly incontrovertible proof of its existence is held before him, he will talk himself into disbelieving his own senses. Again, the comparison with Marc, who "saw full well that his wife Isolde was

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98. Béroul, *Tristran*, 30–31: "*Se ton nevo n'osted de cort, / Si que jamais il ne retort, Ne nos tenron a vos jamez, / Si ne vos tendron nule pez*" (619–22).

99. ibid., 150–51: "*Que nes enchaz fors de ma terre, / Li fel ne criement mais ma gerre*" (3189–90).

100. An alternative reading in some manuscripts is the inversion of *nadānestam* ("I didn't know") to *bedānestam* ("I did know"), but as Gvaxaria notes, the first reading is, given the context and the Georgian translation, the preferable one. See Gvaxaria, "Notes on the Persian Text of Gorgani's Vis o Ramin," 59–60. Cf. Marc, who attempts to exonerate himself in front of Arthur by saying that he had been set up by his jealous barons: "I believed them in spite of myself" (*Ges ai creüz outre mon gré*, 4173); Béroul, *Tristran*, 196–97.

utterly absorbed in her passion for Tristan, heart and soul, yet he did not wish to know it," is fruitful.[101] The king's willful misidentification of Viru instead of Rāmin as his rival suggests the same reluctance to face the horrible impasse in which he is trapped: despite the fact that Vis explicitly names Rāmin as her lover, Mobad's mother has heard (*shendida-stam*, 51.36) rumors to the contrary, giving Mobad enough cause to convince himself that it was really Viru who has been cuckolding him all along. Vis later uses this confusion to her advantage, splitting the identity of her lover into two interchangeable simulacra; she tells Mobad that her former husband and her lover are "like brothers to each other, sitting together day and night with goblet and lute" (*be ham budand har do chun barādar · neshasta ruz o shab bā rud o sāghar*, 54.14), and challenges him to identify which one of these men is responsible for Mobad's woes.

> The sun of jasmine breast replied, "Don't bear me such evil doubts!
> Sometimes you say, 'Viru was with you,' and fault me for having seen him;
> Sometimes you say, 'Rāmin was with you'; why do you blame me so?
> . . . .
> Not every heart is impure like yours; not every man is shameless as you."[102] (54.6–8, 22)

Despite these games, it does not seem likely that Vis has truly hoodwinked her husband; he is rather forced to buy into them as the only means of preserving his position. Like a bank gone in the red, Mobad's kingship is just too big to fail, and to extend its life as long as he can, he must pursue a double path of knowing and not knowing, seeing the evidence but unable to acknowledge it, lest he confirm its damning implications. This brings him against the limits of his power; unlike Toghrul, who would have seized the adulterers, cut out their tongues, and transfixed their eyes with red-hot needles without a second thought, the king can only mime the violence, to show how he *would* be a king if only he *could*. When he

101. Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, 275. See also ibid., 242:

> He believed one thing, he believed another. He did not know what he wanted or what he should believe. He had just found Love's guilty traces in his bed, though not before it, and was thus told the truth and denied it. With these two, truth and untruth, he was deceived. He suspected both alternatives, yet both eluded him. He neither wished the two of them guilty, nor wished them free of guilt.

102. R151/T199/M132/D161. For a discussion on how Iseut similarly exploits doubled signs to confound Marc, see Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, *Shaping Romance: Interpretation, Truth, and Closure in Twelfth-Century French Fictions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 16–17.

جوابش داد خورشیدِ سمنْبر　　مبر چندین گمانِ بد به منِ بر
گهی گویی که با تو بود ویرو　　کنی دیدارِ ویرو بر من آهو
گهی گویی که با تو بود رامین　　چرا بر من زنی بیغاره چندین
نه هر دل چون دلت ناپاک باشد　　نه هر مردی چون تو بی‌باک باشد

first learns of Vis's adultery, Mobad does not punish her himself; he rather summons Viru, her brother, to discipline (*befarhang*) her for him, claiming that his justice, were he to mete it, would be too terrible for them to bear: "If I had to do it, I would torment them beyond measure; I would burn Vis's eyes with fire, then crucify the Nurse" (*agar farhang-ashān man kard bāyam · gazand afzun ze andāza nemāyam / do chashm-e Vis bā ātash besuzam · v-az ān pas Dāya rā bar dār duzam*, 47.38–39).[103] When he wakes up and immediately perceives the Nurse in his bed instead of Vis, he allows his wife to convince him he was too drunk to tell the difference. When he discovers her again lying naked in his garden, he allows his brother Zard to convince him that he does not have enough evidence to condemn her: "Although you've seen her sin in the past, you know that she's not done anything wrong today!" (*agar didi gonāh-i z-u yak-i ruz · to dāni k-ash gonāh-i nist emruz*, 68.131).[104] He knows too much to act, and can only spin his wheels in interminable frustration as events run their course.

As the story progresses, the systemic weakness of Mobad's position begins to show itself bit by bit as his authority crumbles around him. At first, the reasons for the conflict are kept under wraps, and the conflict is largely restricted to the king's attempts to control his fire-brand of a brother. It is ironic that in his first attempt to exonerate Vis of her crime, which he purports to do through a public ordeal, none of the audience assembled is aware that a crime has been committed in the first place: "no man or woman in the world knew why the King of Kings had made that fire" (*nabud āgāh dar giti zan o mard · ke shāhanshāh ān ātash cherā kard*, 55.11). His dishonor is only made public when the lovers flee the scene and take refuge in Rayy, where Rāmin writes a letter to his mother laying out his plans for the future:

> I shall roam the world until that time that the place of the king is empty of the king.
> When Mobad's throne becomes vacant, Fate shall place me upon it.
> His soul is not tied to a mountain, nor has he bathed in the Water of Life.
> And by my life, if he remains for a while yet, I'll gather up an army,
> And cast him from his throne, seating myself upon it with my beloved.
> Mark my words: This isn't far off—it will be soon![105] (57.30–35)

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103. For more on this use of *farhang*, see Maḥjūb, "Muqaddamah," 38.

104. Similarly, Marc's barons accuse their king of consenting to Tristan's affair with his wife (*"tu consenz lor cruauté"*), and in the *Prose Tristan*, Marc refuses to condemn her—even after her infidelity has been proven by the magic drinking horn—"unless he could see her guilt demonstrated more clearly" (*s'il ne veïst plus apertement son mesfet*, 616). See Béroul, *Tristran*, 30–31; cf. McCracken, *The Romance of Adultery*, 67, also 96–97.

105. R161/T212/M142/D175:

همی گردم به گیهان تا بدان گاه · که گردد جایگاهِ شاه بی‌شاه

Though his mother manages to dissuade him from this purpose, Rāmin's recklessness flares up again in the subsequent episode when he and Vis meet on the rooftop while the Nurse occupies Vis's place in Mobad's bed. When the king discovers that he has been tricked and begins to shout, Rāmin announces his intention to kill his brother there and then: "By my life, the blood of this brother of mine means less to me than a cat's!" (*be jān-e man ke khun-e in barādar · ze khun-e gorba-i bar man saboktar*, 59.244). It does not take long after that for the family feud to spill over and into the general public, amplifying the stakes of the conflict and actualizing the breakdown of Mobad's power.

This happens, fittingly enough, with another assault on Mobad's kingdom; when he learns that the Byzantine emperor has penetrated the western borders of Iran, Mobad summons his army to repel the invader. But just as he is about to leave, he remembers that he has to do something about Vis: "She foolishly fled from me once before, leaving me lovelorn, friendless, and anxious; were she to flee like that again, she'll spill my blood with the sword of separation" (*be nādāni ze man bogrikht yak bār · marā biṣabr o bidel kard o biyār / agar yak rah degar chunān gozirad · be tigh-e hejr khun-e man berizad*, 60.23–24). He therefore resolves to separate the lovers: Rāmin will come with him on the campaign, while Vis shall remain a prisoner in the castle of the "Devils' Cavern" (*dez-e eshkaft-e divān*, 60.55), guarded by his more reliable brother Zard.[106] The plan is initially a success; nine months later, the king triumphantly returns from the campaign, by all accounts his prestige and authority renewed: "He had brought the kings of the world into bondage, crying in triumph, *I am King of Kings!*" (*be band āvarda shāhān-e jahān rā · be piruzi ke man shāh-am shahān rā*, 64.8). But no sooner does he return to Marv than he learns that Rāmin had long ago deserted him and joined Vis in her prison; furious, he mobilizes his army to march on the fortress and put the traitor to death. As the marching-drums begin to sound, we see for the first time the army start to grouse under Mobad's erratic rule:

> Half of his army had not yet arrived from the march; they had labored for a year on that difficult road.

چو تختِ موبد او وی باز مانَد   مرا خود بخت بر تختش نشاند
نه او را جان به کوهی باز بستست   و یا در چشمهٔ حیوان بشستست
وگر زین پس بماند چند گاهی   به جانِ من که گرد آرم سپاهی
فرود آرم مرو را از سرِ تخت   نشینم با دلارامم برِ تخت
نباشد دیر باشد زود اَین کار   تو گفتارِ مرا در دل نگَه دار

106. For more on the name of this location, see Minorsky, *Iranica*, 168; *Vis & Rāmin* (*tr. Morrison*), 160.

The other half hadn't loosened their belts, their helmets still on their heads,
They left with him against their will, on the road to the Devils' Cavern.
One said, "Our journey isn't even finished, and now this road is entirely for Rāmin!"
One said, "We're always on the march, just to keep Rāmin away from Vis!"
One said, "Vis at home is worse for the king than a hundred Khans and Caesars."[107]
(64.18–23)

Mobad will not be deterred, however: roaring, growling, and bellowing in animal fury, he marches his exhausted soldiers straight to the castle (*khorush o bāng o gholghol dar dez oftād*, 64.28), where he finds Zard still guarding Vis's door, unaware that Rāmin had gotten in through the window and has been having a grand time within. Mobad bursts into Vis's chambers, where he beholds a scene that drives him out of his senses; though Ramin has just fled the coop, the evidence of his stay is everywhere:

When King Mobad entered the bedroom, he saw her, her face scored like a rose-garden,
Forty garments of silk brocade firmly tied together as a rope
Laid in front of Vis, their knots still unloosened.
. . . .
The king said, "Vis! Demon-spawn! May the curse of both worlds be upon you!
You fear neither men nor God, nor do you shrink from fetters and prison!
My advice and counsel are like spells to you, just as my chains and prisons are nothing in your eyes!
Tell me, what must I do with you? What should I do but kill you? Speak!"[108]
(64.128–30, 135–38)

Seeing Vis before him in this state, Mobad is forced to take in the full reality of his situation: his honor is ruined, his army mutinous, his wife and brothers faithless, and all the prestige he has won fighting the

107. R194/T260/M175/D224:

سپاهش نیمی از ره نارسیده   به سختی راهِ یکساله بریده
دگر نیمه کمرها ناگشاده   کلاهِ راه از سر نانهاده
به ناکامی همه با وی برفتند   رهِ اشکفتِ دیوان برگرفته
یکی گفتی که ره‌مان ناتمامست   کنون این ره تمامی راهِ رامست
یکی گفتی همیشه راهواریم   که رامین را ز ویسه باز داریم
یکی گفتی که شه را ویس بدتر   به خان اندر ز صد خاقان و قیصر

108. R198/T266/M179/D230:

چو آمد شاه موبد در شبستان   بدیدش کنده رویِ چون گلستان
چهل تا جامهٔ وشی و بیرم   بسان رشته در هم بسته محکم
به پیشِ ویس بانو اوفتاده   هنوز از وی گرّه‌ها ناگشاده
شهنه گفت ویسا دیوزادا   که نفرینِ دو گیتی بر تو بادا
نه از مردم بترسی نه ز یزدان   نه نیز از بند بشکوهی و زندان
فسوس آید ترا اندرز و پندم   چو خوار آید ترا زندان و بندم
نگویی تا چه باید کرد با تو   بجز کشتن چه شاید کرد بر تو

Byzantines has gone up in smoke. There is nothing in him that will make Vis heed his words; the office that gives him authority over his wife has crumbled every bit as much as his authority over his vassals outside. The King of Kings is utterly helpless, forced in a final irony to ask his adulterous wife what it is he should do. Brought to this state, the only recourse left to him is violence, no longer rationalized in the rhetoric of justice and order, but a raw unbridled anger at the futility of his attempts to govern his life. Blind with fury, he screams:

> I'll do to you what you've done to me; I'll break my oaths as you've broken yours.
> You'll be so sick of your sweet soul, you'll never again think of Rāmin.
> Never again will he delight in you, you'll never again hold him in your heart;
> Never again will he play the harp and tambour for you, you'll never again get drunk with him;
> Never again will he play the lute for you, you'll never again make eyes at him.
> I'll bring such ruin upon you two that it would make a granite boulder weep.
> As long as you are lovers, you are the worst of my enemies;
> And every time that you make love, you do naught but wreck my soul.
> Now I will turn this deed upon you, and rid my heart of this enemy once and for all.[109]
> (64.160–168)

What follows is without a doubt the most violent scene in the story. Mobad seizes Vis by the hair, drags her along the ground, binds her limbs, and whips her, "over and over, upon her back, her haunches, her breasts and thighs, until her frame split open like a pomegranate, and blood dripped from it like pomegranate seeds; her blood flowed from her silvery limbs like wine spilling from a crystal goblet" (64.175–77).[110] He then turns on Vis's Nurse with even more violence (*z-ān bishtar zad*, 64.181), thrashing

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109. R199/T268/M181/D232:

کنم کردار با تو چون تو کردی   خورم زنهار با تو چون تو خوردی
چنان سیرت کنم از جانِ شیرین   کجا هرگز نیندیشی ز رامین
نه رامین هرگز از تو شاد باشد   نه هرگز در دلت زو یاد باشد
نه او پیشِ تو گیرد چنگ و طنبور   نه تو با او نشینی مست و مخمور
نه او با تو نماید رود سازی   نه تو او را نمایی دل‌نوازی
به جان چندان نهیب آرم شما را   که بر هر دو بنالد سنگِ خارا
شما تا دوستی با هم نمایید   مرا دشمن‌ترین دشمن شمایید
هر آن گاهی که با هم عشق بازید   بجز تدبیر جانِ من نسازید
من اکنون بر شما گردانم این کار   دل از دشمن بپردازم به یک بار

110. R199/T269/M181/D233:

پس آنگه تازیانه زدش چندان   ابر پشت و سرین و سینه و ران
که اندامش چو ناری شد کفیده   وزو چو ناردانه خون چکیده
همی شد خونش از اندامِ سیمین   چو ریزان باده از جامِ بلورین

them both until they fall senseless, then slams the door of the room and leaves them for dead. Gottfried tells us that when King Marc beheld the horrible truth of his wife's infidelity, he was thrown out of the safe haven of doubt and ambivalence into a permanent state of "living death"; the brutality of the king's actions, so extreme that "he wounded the world's heart with the pain of those two" (*jehān-i del be dard-e har do khasta*, 64.187), similarly marks the death of Mobad as a sympathetic character.[111] Up to this point, his repeated efforts to maintain order and dignity are conveyed with a certain amount of pathos, given the inherent impossibility of his situation, and his many monologues where he wonders out loud what on earth he can do to deliver himself from his predicament are some of the most profound ruminations on choice and agency see in the story as a whole. But with his furious assault on Vis's body, spilling blood from her body as though acting out his forever unfulfilled desires to deflower her in the only way he can, he has stepped into the role for which he is ultimately remembered: the raging, impotent king who stands in the way of the love of Vis and Rāmin. As the narrator brings this explosive climax to a close, he steps back from Mobad to reflect on how his example should serve as a warning to all lovers.

> May no lover be rash and proud, for his fury will cast him into the fire.
> When a lover lacks patience, he will see no joy from his love.
> Why would a lover show anger, when he cannot bear a moment away from his beloved?
> He loves the faults of his beloved; through them, he can forgive her.[112] (64.198–201)

4.4 "He who is not a lover is not a man"

This aside from the narrator is a suitable moment to consider Mobad's status as a lover in the romance. No critic has seriously considered this possibility except for Meisami, who, in establishing an analogical equivalency between king and lover, comes to the common-sense conclusion that as he is a bad king, he must be a bad lover.[113] He is too concupiscent, she writes, too obsessed with acquiring his object of

111. Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, 281.

112. R200/T270/M182/D235:

مبادا هیچ عاشق تند و سرکش — که تندی افگند او را در آتش
چو عاشق را نباشد بردباری — نبیند خرمی از مهرکاری
چرا تندی نماید مهربانی — که از دلدار نشکیبد زمانی
گناهِ دوست عاشق دوست دارد — ز بهرِ آنکه تا وز درگذارد

113. See, in addition to the citations at the beginning of this chapter, Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 2: "With few exceptions, European romance deals with the tension which exists between the demands of love and chivalry; while in

desire to realize what is best for himself and for the kingdom.[114] There is plenty of precedent for this idea; philosophical, moral, and political writers as diverse as Avicenna (d. 428/1037), Kaykāvus b. Eskandar (d. ca. 480/1087), Niẓām al-Molk (d. 485/1092), Ghazāli (d. 505/1111), and Naṣiroddin Ṭusi (d. 672/1274) all agree on the general Neoplatonic division of the soul into a hierarchy of faculties with reason at the top; he who cannot rule his own passions, desires, and emotions is unfit to lord it over others.[115] Such ideas are expressed too by the narrator, who admonishes his readers (as in the above-cited passage) that patience and self-control are essential practices for any would-be lover. However, given the work we have done so far, I hesitate to conclude that Mobad is nothing more than a static metaphor that illustrates the tenets of the philosophers: even if he is not "consistent" according to the conventions of the modern novel, we have seen that there is a narrative trajectory in his story that is self-aware and self-referential. He is not already and always a bad monarch; indeed, on a number of occasions, Gorgāni cites him as a worthy model of emulation: "The king disposed, drank, and gave largesse; do you the same at such an occasion, that justice may prevail!" (*hami kard o hami khward o hami dād · bekon v-āngah khwar o deh tā bovad dād*, 33.21). Mobad also shows a kind of narrative memory; though the plot is episodic, he, like Vis, consistently refers to his previous experiences when contemplating the choices now before him. This is evident, for example, when he agrees to release Vis from the Devils' Cavern, a poignant expression of that weary self-knowledge Massé alludes to in his analysis.

> I'll send for Vis and bring her out of the fortress, for I cannot bear her pain.
> I don't know what my soul will see from her—what am I saying? I know very well!
> How much bitterness shall I taste! How much hardship will I endure!
> As long as Vis is with me, I shall see nothing from her save tricks and deceits.
> As long as Vis is my mate and beloved, my only business will be suffering.
> I shall suffer every pain for her because of this wounded heart,
> I have a heart that heeds not my command—you'd think it wasn't mine![116] (66.13–19)

Persian romances, in which the protagonist is most often seen in the role of lover, the two are viewed as complementary and analogous, assuming an ideal continuity of values between the private and public spheres."

114. Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 6–7.

115. See: Kaykāvūs ibn Iskandar ibn Qābūs, *Qābūs nāmah* (*tr. Levy*), 73–74 for the story of how Kaykāvus's grandfather sent away a beautiful slave-boy when he realized he was growing too attracted to him; Niẓām al-Mulk, *The Book of Government*, 125–26 for a number of edifying dicta and anecdotes on the virtues of self-control; Ghazzālī, *The Alchemy of Happiness*, trans. Claud Field, with annots. by Elton L. Daniel (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1991), 49, who writes, "In brief, man has a lower nature, and, till he can control his own lower nature, he had better not assume the responsibility of controlling another's"; al-Ṭūsī, *The Nasirean Ethics*, 43–51 and Fackenheim, "A Treatise on Love by Ibn Sina," 218–222 for discussions on the division of the soul into various faculties and the need for reason's guidance.

116. R206/T278/M188/D242:

For the sake of complicating *Vis & Rāmin*'s take on love, then, it is worth our while to mark those moments in which Mobad adopts the stance and language of a lover, and observe how these performances interact with his roles as man and king. In the passage above, he is torn between his two obligations; he cannot stand to see his wife suffer, yet he harbors no illusions of a joyful reunion. This is a recurring theme in his love-lorn monologues, and as we might guess from his concluding statement, the dominant motif of these performances is the loss of autonomy: his heart is no longer his to command. For a man whose identity rests on giving orders, this can be a scary prospect.

The connection between the roles of man, king, and lover is made explicit, furthermore, in a passage concerning Mobad, rather than Rāmin or Viru. This occurs when Rāmin, desiring Vis for himself, attempts to dissuade his brother from pursuing her. Though motivated by selfish reasons, his predictions on the effects love will have on Mobad's life were spot-on:

> And if you stay with her against her will? Dispel the notion that you'll be happy for it!
> You'll forever regret what you did, you'll find no cure to ease the pain.
> Being cut off from her will be like rending a veil; your heart will never withstand being separated from her.
> You'll never be free of watching her, nor will you find comfort in solitude.[117]
> The love of beauties is like the sea, for neither its shores nor its depths are obvious:
> It's easy to jump in, but when you want to get out, it's very hard.[118] (26.29–34)

These warnings prompt the narrator to embark on a discursus on the nature of love and the role that strife (*setiz*) and reprimand (*malāmat*) play in its genesis. The heroic disregard of both friends' advice

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فرستم ویس را از دز بیارم　　که با دردش همی طقات ندارم
ندانم زو چه خواهد دید جانم　　خطا گفتم ندانم نیک دانم
بسا تلخی که من خواهم چشیدن　　بسا سختی که من خواهم کشیدن
مرا تا ویس باشد در شبستان　　نبینم زو مگر نیرنگ و دستان
مرا تا ویس جفت و یار باشد　　همین اندوه‌خوردن کار باشد
هر آن رنجی که از ویس آیدم پیش　　همی بینم سراسر زین دلِ ریش
دلی دارم که در فرمانِ من نیست　　تو پنداری که این دل زانِ من نیست

117. A clever line; *timār-e u* could either mean "her grief," i.e., the grief that Mobad receives from her, or the care that he will suffer having to watch over her all the time (*timār dāshtan*).

118. R74/T82/M52/D46. See section 3.4 for the remainder of this passage.

وگر بی کامِ او با او نشینی　　ز دل در کن کزو شادی نبینی
همیشه باشی از کرده پشیمان　　نیابی دردِ خود را هیچ درمان
بریدن زو بُوَد پرده دریدن　　دلت هرگز نتابد زو بریدن
نه از تیمارِ او یابی رهایی　　نه نیز آرام یابی در جدایی
مثالِ عشقِ خوبان همچو دریاست　　کنار و قعرِ او هر دو نه پیداست
اگر خواهی درو آسان توان جَست　　ولیکن گر بخواهی بد توان رَست

and rivals' abuse is a nearly ubiquitous theme in Arabic and Persian love poetry; it signals, in fact, the purity of the lover's devotion and his manly fortitude in the face of adversity. It is curious, then, that this is applied to, or at least mentioned in the context of, Mobad's connection with Vis:

> Strife is the start of a man's love; it warms the coldest of hearts.
> And if a cloud rises up and rains stones instead of admonitions,
> The lover fears not this stony rain, even if the stones are javelins.
> All that breeds reprimand is a fault, save the practice of love, which is noble.
> No amount of remonstrance will not wash passion from the heart of a lover.
> What is a blaming scorpion to love? He who is not a lover is not a man.[119] (26.47–52)

Thus Mobad, in disregarding his brother's remonstrance, is playing the part of the lover. True to the old adage, love is depicted in the passage as a kind of warfare, where taunts and reprimands fall and wound like a shower of spears. To persevere in such adversity requires an array of masculine virtues; he who cannot bear the suffering he is sure to experience as a lover should not get involved, no more than a coward should engage in war, for failure on either front will reveal to the world his deficient masculinity. On the other hand, those with the courage to engage in these pursuits will be ennobled by their efforts; as Gorgāni puts it, the practice of love (*ʿeshq-varzidan*) is the only activity where blame is a badge of honor and success. This martial presentation of love ties the figure of the lover very closely to that of the king, for both types are engaged in a kind of war, and they both require an inexhaustible reserve of courage and fortitude to succeed in their respective struggles, or die with honor in the attempt. In theory, then, a man who is good at being a king should naturally be good at being a lover.[120]

Mobad breaks this syncretic analogy apart. Laying aside the unanswerable question of whether he "truly" loves Vis or not, his attempts to enact the role of her lover do not show any signs of ennobling his person. On the contrary, these expressions gradually pull him away from the exemplary king he is at

119. R74/T83/M53/D47:

ستیز آغازِ عشقِ مرد باشد	بتفسد زو دل ارچه سرد باشد
وگر میغی ز گیتی سربرآرد	به جای سرزنش زو سنگ بارد
نترسد عاشق از بارانِ سنگین	وگر باشد به جای سنگ ژوبین
هرآنچ از وی ملامت خیزد آهوست	مگر از عشق‌ورزیدن که نیکوست
به گفتاری که بدگویی بگوید	هوا را از دلِ عاشق نشوید
چه باشد عشق را بدگوی گژدم	هر آنک او نیست عاشق نیست مردم

120. Such a correlation has already been shown to be problematic in other works of Persian literature; see Amin Azad Sadr, "Love, Death, and Submission: The Role of the Reader in Rumi's *Masnavi*" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2014), 45–86.

the story's beginning and transform him into the weak and despised ruler we see at the story's end. At one point in the narrative, upon learning that Vis has fled the court with her lover, Mobad abandons his royal duties to wander the world in search of her, repeating her name over and over: "He searched for a sign of Vis everywhere he went, but found nor heard nothing . . . like a madman, he crossed mountains, forests, plains, and deserts for five months" (*neshān-e Vis har jā'i beporsid · na khwad did o na az kas niz beshnid . . . be kuh o bisha vo hāmun o daryā · hami shod panj mah chun mard-e shaydā*, 56.7, 10). This image calls to mind perhaps the greatest of all lovers in Islamicate tradition, the famous Majnun, who shuns all human company and roams the wilderness repeating Layli's name as though a sacred mantra. It seems that Mobad has given up his role as king and taken up the way of the lover; yet, as we can glean from his lament, he cannot quite divorce himself from his old persona.

> He cried out, "Alas, for my fate! My countless soldiers, treasures, and belongings
> Have been scattered to the winds for the sake of my heart, and now I am bereft of both lordship and love.
> . . . .
> Why must I love with such sorrow? It's better for an old man not to love.
> A child would age under such duress—look how wretched an old man has become!
> I chose a paradise from the world, and in her absence, I only see hell.
> Whenever I recall her cruel tyranny, my love and loyalty only increase.
> My state grows worse when I count her faults; you'd say I love her imperfections!
> My heart has grown blind in love, and sees no pleasure in this world.
> Before I became a lover, I was capable, wise, and perspicacious;
> Now I am helpless in this state: I see, but cannot comprehend.[121] (56.19–20, 27–34)

It is worth noting that Mobad here exhibits many of the characteristics the narrator had used in his description of the ideal lover: he loves his beloved's faults, his love grows all the more for his suffering, he has given up everything for her sake. Moreover, he shows himself willing on numerous occasions

121. R158/T209/M140/D172:

همی گفتی دریغا روزگارم — سپاه و گنج و رختِ بی‌شمارم
ز بهرِ دل سراسر برفشاندم — کنون بی‌شاهی و بی‌دل بماندم
به پیری گر نبودی عشق شایست — مرا این عشق با این غم چه بایست
بدین غم طفل گردد پیرِ دلگیر — نگر چون زار گردد مردم پیر
بهشتی را ز گیتی برگزیدم — که با هجرانِ او دوزخ بدیدم
چو یاد آرم به دل جور و جفایش — بیفزاید مرا مهر و وفایش
بتر گردم چو عیبش برشمارم — تو گویی عیبِ او را دوست دارم
دلِ من کور گشت از مهربانی — نبیند هیچ کامِ این جهانی
ز پیش ار عاشقی بودم توانا — به کارِ خویشتن بینا و دانا
کنون در عاشقی بس ناتوانم — چنان گشتم که گر بینم ندانم

to forgive both Vis and his brother for their transgressions: "I'll forgive her past sins, and never again mention them to her. For Rāmin, too, I have only goodwill; he's my brother, my support, my refuge" (*gonāh-e rafta rā andar goẕāram · degar hargez be ru-ye u nayāram / be Rāmin niz joz niki nakhwāham · barādar bāshad o posht o panāham*, 58.21–22).[122] None of these would be consistent with the image of a ruler who demonstrates his authority and right to rule through the application of force; in such a scenario, the adulterous Vis would have been imprisoned, exiled, or killed, with no lesser fate in store for the duplicitous and treasonous Rāmin. By abstaining from these actions, Mobad is portraying himself as one willing to do what lovers do, showing the fortitude and commitment the poet required for all lovers to show their manhood. Yet in so doing, Mobad's manhood as king has suffered beyond repair—he is now a gross parody of the universal monarch, allowing himself to be cuckolded, led around the world, unable to mete out justice, his orders bearing no more weight than the air that carries them. In this way, he is his own worst enemy: as much as he tries to embody both the figure of king and lover, as the text tells him he should be able to do, he fails at both and disgraces himself in the process. This is not because of any flaw in his ethics or moral character, but in those aspects that are intrinsically linked with his position as a literary figure who is plugged into multiple modalities of manhood. His story ruptures the fantasy of ennobling love, the promise that virtuous action in his personal life will automatically reflect upon his public status. As his brother Zard explains to him, these two sides of his personality are caught in a destructive cycle, in which any action he takes as king can only harm his status as lover, and vice versa; as a result, his heroic but futile efforts to reconcile the two roles have left him paralyzed and the kingdom battered.

> I saw what happened when Vis took her lovely face away from you:
> Sometimes you were with the gazelles in the desert,
> sometimes with the fish in the sea,
> Sometimes with the onagers in the plain,
> sometimes with the lions in the reedbeds.
> Have you forgotten that pain and torment that came to you—and us—from your love?
> You suffered from her, and we from you; what a disaster befell us!
> Remember your treaties and oaths you swore before the Creator!
> Don't break your oaths, O king, that would not become you,
> and one day it will sting your soul.

122. For other attempts at reconciliation, see *V&R* 48.12–19, 58.31–40, 71.

. . . .
If you plunge your dagger into lovely Vis,
your pain from that wound would only increase![123] (68.123–129, 139)

Zard's advice is very good, but it brings the king right back to the same quandary from which he cannot seem to free himself. He can't live with Vis, and he can't live without her; the only sensible action is to do nothing at all and wait for his doom. Mobad's inability to resolve his crisis regardless of what he tries reveals the underlying impotency of his person and position: these two idealized figures of lover and king, presented as an overlapping set of practices and performances grounded in a bedrock of timeless masculine virtues, end up collapsing under their own weight. Disentangling these ideals from one another reveals masculinity as a variable and at times self-defeating constellation of practices, which may generate different logical frameworks for action depending on the hero's self-image of man as lover or man as ruler. The rupture of this homogeneous ethical core into multiple and mutually negating practices constitutes a profound subjective crisis for a character invoked as an emblem of *all* of these practices wrapped inside an inflated and larger-than-life projection of masculinity, that elusive Perfect Man; Mobad's inability to support these pressures in the end is finally made manifest in the most simple and yet most existential threat to manhood itself: impotence, a state in which the mind wills something of its body and the body simply cannot rise to the task. As Mobad describes it, he is bound up in a perpetual state of war against his heart, lamenting, "O my heart, why have you become my enemy? By your own hand, you burn your own provisions" (*chera ay del shod-asti doshman-e khwish · be dast-e khwish suzi kharman-e khwish*, 64.195).[124] The sundering of Mobad's heart from his body is an apt metaphor for the loss of bodily integrity he has suffered in his ill-fated attempt to enact the elusive promises of manhood.

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123. R217/T296/M200/D261:

چو او از تو ببرد این خوب چهرش   ترا دیدم که چون بودی ز مهرش
گهی با آهوان بودی به صحرا   گهی با ماهیان بودی به دریا
گهی با گور بودی در بیابان   گهی با شیر بودی در نیستان
فرامش کردی آن درد و بلا را   که از مهرش ترا بودست و ما را
ترا زو بود و ما را از تو آزار   چه مایه ما و تو خوردیم تیمار
از آن پیمان و زان سوگند یاد آر   کجا کردی و خوردی پیشِ دادار
مخور زنهار شاها کِت نباید   یکی روز این خورش جان را گزاید
گر این خنجر زنی بر ویسِ دلبر   شود زان زخم دردِ تو فزون‌تر

124. Mobad repeats this topos numerous times, and one of these verses became proverbial for later readers of *V&R*, being cited in many of the works consulted in Appendix B: "I have a heart that heeds not my command—you'd think it wasn't mine!" (*del-i dāram ke dar farmān-e man nist · to pendāri ke in del z-ān-e man nist*, 66.19).

4.5 The man within the mountain

In this chapter, we have considered some of the structural obstacles that face the character of Mobad, doomed from the beginning as the story's villain, regardless of his attempts to control his destiny. Inhabiting a political position that historically assumed sacerdotal functions and cosmic significance, Mobad's kingship compels him to adopt certain behaviors that paradoxically block his own agenda, weakening his authority even as he attempts to shore it up. We have also considered the relation of this model of kingship to manhood and masculinity: stymied by his physical and symbolic bodies alike, Mobad can only mime the violence that he needs to maintain his claim to power, yet in hiding his victimhood (that is, his "unmanning"), this performance has the reverse effect of obfuscating the actual wrong that was done to him and forces him to transform into the cruel and vindictive monster that everyone wants him to be. Finally, we considered the implications this has for the concept of lover as the story presents it, learning that the work of being a lover, although presented as the kind of commitment that a king would excel at, turns out to be a surrender of autonomy, the antithesis of kingship. As we watch Mobad wrestle with the various roles he is forced to step into by his symbolically overdetermined body, his impotence takes on a level of significance that goes far beyond his physical condition. It is not just Mobad who is impotent, but the symbolic image of "man" in which his person is invested, that cannot make good on its promises, leaving the king with no option but to fill the void with empty threats and impossible vows that neither he nor anyone else can stand behind.

The poem summarizes this problem in a scene that takes us back to the *locus amoenus* where our discussion began. The setting is presented in such detail that it could be staged: it is springtime (the sixth day of Ordibehesht, to be precise), and, if we have forgotten, the narrator reminds us that this is a landscape steeped in allegorical significance: "The garden was the court, the blossoms its ornament, its nightingales striking the harp and its doves blowing the flute; the narcissus was like the cup-bearer, goblet in hand, while the violet's head drooped like one drunk" (*chaman majles bahārān majles-ārāy · zanān bolbol-sh chang o fākhta nāy / dar u narges cho sāqi jām bar dast · banafsha sar foru afganda chun mast*, 69.4–5).[125] All the major characters of the story are once again assembled before the king: Mobad

125. The full date, as the narrator provides it, is the day of *Khordād* (= the sixth day) of *Ordibehesht* (*mah-e ordibehesht o ruz-*

is positioned in the center, with Vis at his side; to his right is the noble Viru, while Queen Shahru sits to his left. Across from them is Rāmin, and before him stands a skillful minstrel (*gōsān-e navāgar*, 69.12). The narrator tells us that this clever man knew how to sing a song "in which he hid the tale of Vis and Rāmin" (*dar u pushid ḥāl-e Vis o Rāmin*, 69.15). The song goes as follows:

> I saw a grown tree at the top of a mountain,
> that scours the rust of worry off hearts.
> A tree whose head was raised to Saturn,
> who had taken into its shadow the whole of the world.
> In beauty, it resembled the sun,
> the world was hopeful of its leaves and fruit.
> Below it was a limpid spring,
> with nectar for water and pearls for sand.
> Tulips and roses were in flower by its side,
> and violets, mallow, and hyacinth had blossomed.
> A Gilani bull grazed by its bank;
> at times it drank the water, at times it champed the flowers.
> May the water of this spring be forever bright;
> may its tree ever bear fruit; may the bull be ever young![126] (69.17–23)

The song, of course, is a metaphor for the tale of Mobad: a great king of limitless power and boundless dominion, immobilized by his own bulk as Rāmin the bull munches contentedly in his garden. In many of the manuscripts, the tale goes on: Mobad congratulates the minstrel on his song, but suspects that he sings about "wicked" (*badsāz*) Rāmin and his secret love. Vis, hearing this, gives a handful of rings to the minstrel and bids him to sing another lay in the "right" mode about her and Rāmin, for if the king commands him to reveal the secret, then why should it be hidden from anyone else?[127] The minstrel performs his song again, but this time making his allegory clear: the tree is Mobad, the spring is Vis, and

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e khordād · jahān az khorrami chun karkh-e baghdād, 69.1). Ordibehesht is the second month in the Iranian calendar, which as a rule begins on the vernal equinox, and so it seems to be a good emblematic day for the springtime. However, lining this date up with an actual Zoroastrian calendar is much trickier in practice. See footnote 126 for a discussion of another specific date given in the text and some scholarly attempts to make sense of it.

126. R220/T300/M203/D265:

درختی رسته دیدم بر سرِ کوه — کـه از دل‌ها زدایـد زنـگِ انـدوه
درختی سرکشیده تا به کیوان — گـرفتـه زیـرِ سـایـه نیـمِ گـیـهـان
به زیبایی همی ماند به خورشید — جهان در برگ و بارش بسته امید
به زیرش سخت روشن چشمهٔ آب — که آبش نوش و ریگش درّ خوشاب
شکفته بر کنارش لاله و گل — بنفشه رُسته و خیری و سنبل
چرنده گاوِ گیلی بر کنارش — گهی آبش خورد گه نوبهارش
همیشه آبِ این چشمه روان‌باد — درختش بارور گاوش جوان باد

127. A wonderful pun; the mode *rāst* that Vis requests also carries the meaning of "right" and "true."

the bull Rāmin (69.32–37). The minstrel concludes with a similar set of invocations in a wry parody of the call for divine blessing (*doʿā*) that often occurs in the concluding lines of a qasida:

> May this wide, shady tree remain;
> may it have a shadow happier than heaven!
> May the water of this spring forever flow;
> may the Gilani bull forever graze![128] (69.38–39)

In this allegory within an allegory, the rise and fall of Mobad becomes clear: if the garden was once a site where Mobad's fall was preordained, and later where it was enacted, now it has become a carnival, where the all the conventions of courtly panegyric can be openly twisted to mock the king to his own face, in his own court, and by his own minstrels. This is the final straw: furious and humiliated, Mobad leaps to his feet, seizes Rāmin by the beard, draws his dagger, and demands that he forswear all further relations with Vis. It is a final test of his personal and kingly authority: no letters, no intermediaries, no room to wiggle or back down—just a direct order from king to subject, from man to man, with a dagger in hand to back up his threat of violence. Rāmin accepts the challenge, swearing that he will never relinquish Vis. Seeing red, Mobad curses his brother and throws him to the ground, prepared to cut off his head. But then:

> Nimble Rāmin seized the king's two hands; you'd have said a male lion had seized a fox!
> He gleefully threw him into the dust and snatched the Indian dagger from his hand.
> The king was drunk and senseless from wine, his reason broken, his power gone.
> He was not cognizant of what Rāmin had done, he had no memory of Rāmin's cruelty.
> Love and drunkenness bring forth all kinds of trouble and weakness to reason;
> If these two burdens had not been on Mobad, no sort of evil would have befallen him.[129]
> (69.51–56)

128. R221/T301/M203/D267:

بماند اینِ درختِ سایه‌گستر　　ز مینو باد وی را سایه خوش‌تر
همیشه آبِ این چشمه رونده　　همیشه گاوِ گیلی زو چرنده

129. R222/T302/M204/D267:

سبک رامین دو دستِ شاه بگرفت　　تو گفتی شیرِ نر روباه بگفرت
ز شادروان به خاک اندر فگندش　　ز دستش بستد آن هندی پرندش
شهنشه مست بود از باده بیهوش　　گسسته آگهی و رفته نیروش
نبودش آگهی از کارِ رامین　　نماند اندر دلش آزارِ رامین
خرد را چندگونه رنج و سستی　　پدید آید همی از عشق و مستی
گر این دو رنج بر موبد نبودی　　مرو را هیچ گونه بد نبودی

This scene prefigures the end of Mobad's story. Although he will play a small part in the scenes to come, he comes across entirely as the cardboard character the critics have made him out to be, either petty and cruel, delighting in Vis's suffering at the hands of Rāmin, or grim and ruthless, prepared to fight to the death when word reaches him of Rāmin's usurpation of his throne. But in truth, he has ceased to exist as a character at this point; like Gottfried's Marc, who fell at last into a "living death," he has very few speaking roles left in the story. It might be said that he has been killed off here, at this poignant moment: hurled to the ground in an angry, drunken stupor, debilitated by a pain whose source he cannot identity, still wondering where it all went wrong.

Chapter 5

The Minstrel in the Romance

We ended the previous chapter at a dramatic turn of events: a clever minstrel (*gōsān*) at Mobad's court has dared to satirize the king to his face, singing a lay about a great mountain standing tall and motionless as a bull drinks the clean water that flows below its shadow. When pressed to elucidate the meaning of the tale, the minstrel reveals that Mobad is the mountain, mighty but immobile, unable to act as Rāmin makes love to his wife. Enraged by his humiliation, the king turns on his brother in a final bid to restore his honor; but the younger man dodges the blow and casts him to the ground, effecting his ignominious fall in all but name. While this was an important moment in our discussion of Mobad's character, it also serves as an introduction to the curious figure of the minstrel, who appears without warning at this crux of the story. At first glance, it may appear that minstrels are incidental figures in the world of *Vis & Rāmin*: there is only one other occasion in which the court rhapsodists (*rāmeshgarān*) perform in the text, and that is at Rāmin's wedding with Gol (75.33–54). However, Rāmin too is a minstrel, with about thirty songs and lyrical performances to his name; rare is the scene when he does not burst into song, and indeed many chapters of *Vis & Rāmin* are little more than a stage on which he may show off his lyrical skills on a variety of popular topics.[1] Though *Vis & Rāmin* itself is a product of an ancient minstrel

1. See Table 8. Khaleghi-Motlagh cites the three songs that Rāmin performs at Mobad's banquet (59.9–15, 19–27, 55–65), along with two songs in the *haft khān* episodes of Rostam and Esfandyār and the introduction to the war of Mazandaran in the *Shāhnāma*, as examples of Parthian lyric poetry. He also notes the *gōsān*'s song satirizing Mobad, calling it a kind of "dramatic" (*tamṡili*) poetry. I am not sure how he would classify the many other sung performances in *V&R*, both by Rāmin and other characters, or why he left them out of his list. See Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Bīzhan va Manīzhah," 289.

tradition, Gorgāni updated the songs to fit the poetic conventions of his time, establishing Rāmin as a fictional analogue to the stage personae cultivated by the famous lyrical poets of the Arabic and New Persian tradition. Through Rāmin, the world of the lyric ghazal is woven into the narrative, establishing both the figure of the minstrel and the poetry he performs as a central interest of the text.[2] Rāmin's dominance of the spotlight is not uncontested, however: although lines from his songs were frequently cited in later anthologies, the jury's prize seems to have gone out to Vis, whose "Ten Letters" were often replicated in full or abridged form by many admiring readers. Furthermore, the "Letters" are framed as a response to Rāmin's poetic persona, suggesting the presence of an ongoing meta-textual dialogue that runs throughout and beyond the story. The poetic debate between Vis and Rāmin, and the questions it raises about gender, genre, and performance, is the subject of our conversation in this chapter.

A sensitivity to the shifting modalities of *Vis & Rāmin* also draws our attention to the text as a medium of narration—or, more appropriately, the multiple *media* embedded within that come together in producing a story. By shifting his tone to accommodate a variety of moods, registers, and voices, the poet-narrator declares himself an active player in the storytelling process, a technique that enables individual perspectives with distinctive worldviews and personalities to emerge and tackle a shared topic or problem from a variety of angles. We might consider this a kind of "mode-switching" (if the pun off "code-switching" may be forgiven) that capitalizes on the space between the poet, his audience, the in-text narrator, and the characters to produce affect through a multiplicity of discursive modes. This feature highlights the work's self-consciousness as a multiform performance in and of itself, a written text that nonetheless adopts the speaking voice of the oral storyteller, who conveys in turn the speech of many different figures: men and women, poets and kings, singers and writers.

In her studies of the Persian *dāstān*, prose works drawn from the oral storytelling tradition, Julia Rubanovich has commented on some of the fascinating effects that can arise when written stories clothe

2. I should add that I do not mean the "ghazal" in the technical sense of the word as it emerged in the twelfth century onwards, but rather the "proto-ghazal" that preceded it. As Moayyad and Lewis have shown, one can find short lyric poems from the tenth and eleventh centuries, which were usually just called *sheʿr*, "(a) poem," that more or less fulfill the requirements of the ghazal save the poet's "signature" (*takhalloṣ*). I therefore use "ghazal" in this study in the rather broad sense as "lyric poem," such as we encounter in the poems of *Varqa & Golshāh*. Cf. Moayyad, "Lyric Poetry," 124; Lewis, "Reading, Writing, and Recitation," 36–69 and "The Transformation of the Persian Ghazal"; J. T. P. de Bruijn, "Ḡazal i. History," in *EIr* (2000), online edition, accessed June 11, 2015, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/gazal-1-history.

themselves in the guise of the spoken word and drew their authors into the world of the story they tell. In the anonymous *Deeds of Alexander* (*Eskandarnāma*), Alexander is seen commanding the composition of his own story: "We have completed [our travels] in the West, and all the marvels were written down. Now, start a new volume, where the adventures and the marvels of the East will be registered." Reflecting on this passage, Rubanovich writes, "It is as if the book is being simultaneously composed on two levels—on the fictional level of the plot on Alexander's orders and in the meta-textual reality by the actual author of the *dāstān*. Self-reflexivity, *mise-en-abîme*, is thus created: the work reflects itself, possibility replicating in the plot the mode of its own production."[3] *Vis & Rāmin* is a valuable text to bring to this topic: as a work originally transmitted by minstrels, presenting its internal narrator as a minstrel, and featuring a minstrel as one of its main characters, the story presents a golden opportunity to study the dynamics of voice, mood, and polyphony in the creation of literary self-reflexivity and the formation of distinctive poetic personae and voices. We will begin our discussion on the historical background on the practice of minstrelsy, followed by a reading of *Varqa & Golshāh*, the first fully extant Persian romance, that also happens to feature a number of embedded songs. Following that, we will turn to *V&R* itself.

5.1 The minstrels of ancient Iran

Long before the advent of Islam, and for many centuries thereafter, minstrels played a prominent role in the literary activity of Iran and its neighboring lands.[4] We learn from Xenophon of Athens (d. 354 BCE) that the Medes and Persians had bards who would compose and perform lays in memory of their heroes and praise of their gods.[5] Chares of Myltilene, who traveled in the retinue of Alexander the Great soon after Xenophon's death, compares the songs of the Persians to those of the Greeks, quoting from a passage in the *Odyssey* where Penelope addresses the bard:

3. Rubanovich, "Orality in Medieval Persian Literature," 662.

4. The following discussion would not have been possible if not for the pioneering efforts of Mary Boyce, who sifted through wide array of Greek, Armenian, Georgian, Parthian, Middle Persian, Arabic, and New Persian sources to produce a diachronic portrait of minstrelsy in Mesopotamia and the Iranian highlands: see the now-classic article "The Parthian *Gōsān*." Boyce recapitulates and expands on this research in "Gōsān." I am indebted to her work throughout this section.

5. Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, I.2.i; cf. Boyce, "The Parthian *Gōsān*," 19–20. Herodotus, *The Histories*, I.107–29 provides an account of some of the stories that had accrued around the figure of Cyrus, whose legendary biography has many parallels with the *Deeds of Ardashir*, especially the prophetic dreams, the secret upbringing, the uneasy rapprochement, and finally betrayal and revolt: see *Kārnāmag ī Ardašīr*, 11–23.

> So many other songs you know to hold us spellbound,
> works of the gods and men that singers celebrate.
> Sing one of those as you sit beside them here
> and as they drink their wine in silence. (1.336–39)[6]

In addition to stories about the gods and heroes, the love-story of *Odatis & Zariadres* is likely to have belonged to this bardic repertory; Chares writes that "the barbarians who live in Asia tell this love-story, and it is extremely popular among them; they have pictures that depict the tale in their temples and their palaces, as well as in their private homes."[7] While we have no extant examples of this ancient oral corpus save the digests provided by Greek writers like Athenaeus and Xenophon, we can make some inferences about what this literature was like from the liturgical and devotional Avestan texts that have been preserved by the Zoroastrian community. These texts generally adhere to the meters, formulae, and structure of Indo-European oral composition, with parallels in the *Rigveda*, Homer, and Germanic heroic poetry; in particular, the *Yasht*s, a set of twenty-one hymns, made use of mnemonic aids such as octosyllabic lines and refrains that allowed for guided improvisation to fit the circumstantial requirements of a particular recitation.[8] As "heroic stories entered liturgical texts, and ancient gods appear as heroes in the secular epic," Mary Boyce thinks it likely that there was "a cross-fertilization down the centuries of priestly and minstrel traditions."[9] We also have an interesting anecdote that gives us a taste of how the minstrel might have functioned at the ancient Iranian courts: Athenaeus tells us of a bard and boon-companion to Astyages, the last king of the Medes, who sang to him a parable about a great beast who would ravage the kingdom if allowed to run free: upon further questioning, the bard revealed that the beast stood for Cyrus the Persian.[10] This episode is remarkably similar to the story of Mobad and the minstrel in *V&R*, and it suggests that minstrels were a familiar presence at court, and could at times use their unique position and medium to say things to the king that no one else could (at some risk).

6. Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fagles, with an introduction by Bernard Knox (New York: Viking, 1996), 88; cf. Athenaeus, *The Learned Banqueters*, xiv.633c–d.

7. ibid., xiii.575a–f. The tale is also found in Felix Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1923), 2:B no. 125, 657–661, and Boyce remarks that Chares's final statements (p. 661[27–32]) "suggest a wide-spread oral transmission of the story." See Boyce, "The Parthian *Gōsān*," 20.

8. Hintze, "Avestan Literature," 4, 13–14, 54, 61–62; cf. Mary Boyce, *The Manichaean Hymn-Cycles in Parthian* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954).

9. Boyce, "The Parthian *Gōsān*," 31.

10. Athenaeus, *The Learned Banqueters*, xiv.633e.

Though direct sources are scanty, we have every indication that the tradition of minstrelsy continued unabated in the Parthian era (roughly 200 BCE–200 CE). The Armenians and Georgians used the Parthian word *gōsān* (*gusan* and *mgōsāni* respectively) extensively to describe a professional class of minstrels who transmitted stories, praised patrons and heroes, entertained rulers and revelers, and lamented the dead.[11] Many of these depictions were penned by men of the cloth, who had little good to say of these entertainers who won their daily bread by pagan custom: a Manichean text from the fourth or fifth century CE famously denounces the *gōsān* as one "who proclaims the worthiness of kings and heroes of old, and himself achieves nothing at all."[12] Nonetheless, Mandean sources confirm that the minstrel could hold high positions at court, and he is a frequent character in the twelfth-century Georgian romances *Amiran-Darejaniani* and *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*.[13] As marketplace jongleur or court rhapsodist, the *gōsān* seems to have been a fixture at every level of society, "entertainer of king and commoner, privileged at court and popular with the people; present at the graveside and at the feast; eulogist, satirist, story-teller, musician; recorder of past achievements, and commentator of his own times."[14]

Khalegi-Motlagh identifies five types of literature that would have made up the oral repertory of the Parthians: heroic, romantic, lyric, allegory, and debate.[15] A good part of the Kayanian cycle in the *Shāhnāma* was performed and transmitted by minstrels during this period, later to be recorded by Sasanian scribes; so too was the heroic *Memorial of Zarēr* (*Ayādgār ī Zarērān*) and the love-stories of *Bizhan & Manizha* and *Vis & Rāmin*.[16] Lyrical interludes can be found in many of these works: Rāmin in *Vis & Rāmin*, Bastwar in *Zarēr*, and Rostam and Esfandyār in the *Shāhnāma* all perform short songs in the course of their stories. Didactic poetry often took the form of parables and debates (*chistān o monāẓera*); while

11. Boyce, "The Parthian *Gōsān*," 11–17. The Armenian translation of Ecclesiastes 2:8 and 2 Samuel 19:35 uses *gusan* to gloss the Hebrew שרים (*shirīm*, "singers"), and the Georgian translation of Matthew 9:24 uses *mgōsāni* to render the Greek τοὺς αὐλητάς (*tous aulētas*, "flute players").

12. ibid., 11; cf. Boyce, "Gōsān": *chawāgōn gōsān kē hasēnagān shahrdārān ud kawān hunar wifrāsēd ud xwad ēwizh nē karēd*.

13. For more on the Mandaean *gwsānā*, see Lidzbarski, *Das Johannesbuch der Mandäer*, 164, 166–67; cf. Boyce, "The Parthian *Gōsān*," 15–16.

14. ibid., 17–18.

15. That is, *ḥamāsi, 'āsheqāna, ghanā'i, tamṡili, chistān o monāẓera*. Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Bīzhan va Manīzhah," 289.

16. Boyce, "Gōsān"; Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Bīžan"; Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Bīzhan va Manīzhah"; Bo Utas, "On the Composition of the Ayyātkār ī Zarērān," in *Monumentum H. S. Nyberg*, Acta Iranica 5 (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 399–418. There is some speculation that the story of *Odatis & Zariadres* and *Zarēr* might be part of the same cycle; for more on this, see Boyce, "Zariadres and Zarēr." For more on Parthian poetry, see Gilbert Lazard, "La métrique de la poésie parthe," in *Papers in Honour of Professor Mary Boyce*, Acta Iranica 25 (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 371–400.

reiterating the words of Xenophon and Chares that "both with and without song and through odes [the Persians] present the deeds of gods and the best men," the geographer Strabo (d. ca. 24 CE) mentions a Persian song that lists the three hundred and sixty benefits of the palm-tree.[17] This reference calls to mind *The Babylonian Tree* (*Draxt ī Asūrīg*), a charming *tenson* between a tree and a goat in eleven-syllable verses (a form with parallels in Manichean hymns).[18] The debate genre also appears in the *Book of Yōsht of the Friyān* (*Mādiyān ī Yōsht ī Friyān*) and the catechisms of Zāl and the sons of Feridun in the *Shāhnāma*; it was revived in the eleventh century CE with the debate poems (*monāẓeras*) of Asadi Ṭusi (d. 465/1072) and was also deployed as a set-piece ("I-said He-said," *goftam goftā*) in the ghazal tradition.[19] The minstrels also seem to have accompanied the Parthian kings to battle, and at times played a part in it. In *Vis & Rāmin*, we saw how the armies of Mobad and Viru used great drums and fifes to disorient their foes in battle (20.2–10), and Boyce draws our attention to a Manichean text that describes how musicians would distract the defenders of a fortress "with much song and music" (*srūd ud niwāg ī was*) while the soldiers stormed it from the rear.[20] Plutarch corroborated this practice in his *Life of Crassus*, noting too how a long train of minstrels, courtesans, and concubines followed the train of Suren in his triumphant march to Armenia.[21] Such a sight could be seen centuries later in the processions of the Sasanian kings; even as he fled the victorious armies of the Arabs, Yazdgerd III is said to have brought a thousand cooks and musicians in his entourage.[22]

17. Strabo, *The* Geography *of Strabo*, trans. Duane W. Roller (Cambridge University Press, 2014), XV.3.18, XIV.1.14. Cf. Boyce, "The Parthian *Gōsān*," 27, 31.

18. For more on the *Draxt ī Asūrīg*, see Émile Benveniste, "Le texte du *Draxt Asūrīk* et la versification pehlevie," *Journal Asiatique* 2 (1930): 193–225; Walter Bruno Henning, "A Pahlavi Poem," *BSOAS* 13, no. 3 (1950): 641–648; J. C. Tavadia, "A Rhymed Ballad in Pahlavi," *JRAS*, nos. 1/2 (1955): 29–36; Saul Shaked, "Specimens of Middle Persian Verse," in *W. B. Henning Memorial Volume*, ed. Mary Boyce and Ilya Gershevitch (London: Lund Humphries, 1970), 395–405; Christopher J. Brunner, "The Fable of the Babylonian Tree," *JNES* 39, nos. 3–4 (1980): 191–202, 291–302.

19. Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Bīzhan va Manīzhah," 289; Furūzānfar, *Sukhan*, 443. Firuza Abdullaeva, "The Bodleian Manuscript of Asadī Ṭūsī's *Munāẓara* Between an Arab and a Persian: Its Place in the Transition from Ancient Debate to Classical Panegyric," *Iran* 47 (2009): 69–95, Firuza Abdullaeva, "The Origins of the *Munāẓara* Genre in New Persian Literature," in *Metaphor and Imagery in Persian Poetry*, ed. Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 249–273; *Ābān Yasht* (*Yt* 5.81–83) also refers to the *Yōsht ī Friyān* story, indicating that it dates back to a much earlier period. See Müller, *The Zend-Avesta*, 1:72–73.

20. See Boyce, "The Parthian *Gōsān*," 27 and Davoud Monchi-Zadeh, ed., *Die Geschichte Zarēr's* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1981), 17, 32, 42 (§26–27); also 270 in this dissertation.

21. Plutarch, *Fall of the Roman Republic*, *Crass*. 23, 32, pp. 140, 152.

22. Eckhard Neubauer, "Music History ii. ca. 650 to 1370 CE," in *EIr*, online edition (2009), accessed June 11, 2015, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/music-history-ii.

The Sasanian equivalent of the *gōsān* was the *huniyāgar* (Pers. *khonyāgar*), and like his Achaemenid and Parthian predecessors, he would be called upon to extemporize songs at the king's pleasure as well as perform them ritually at formal occasions.[23] Bahrām Gur (r. 420–38 CE) and Khosrow Parviz (r. 590–628 CE) were famous for their patronage of minstrels; the latter especially, according to the *Compendium of Histories and Tales*, seems to have been quite the philanthropist in this regard:[24]

> There never was nor will be a king so brave and joyful, and the people have never known such music and merry-making as that of his reign. . . . No one suffered any grief or injury, save that the commoners took their wine without minstrels. He therefore had a letter sent to the king of the Indians requesting *gōsān*s from him, *gōsān* being the Pahlavi word for *khonyāgar*. Twelve thousand Indian minstrels (*moṭreb*), women and men, came to him, and the Lōrs of today are descended from that that folk. Bahrām granted them means and provender so they could freely entertain the most humble of his people.[25]

On a more serious note, *The Letter of Tansar*, a political treatise translated from Middle Persian into Arabic by Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (preserved in a Persian translation by Ibn Esfandyār, w. ca. 603/1206), places minstrels, along with secretaries, physicians, and astronomers, into the "third estate," namely the class of professionals who assisted the king in the administration of his realm.[26] These same four professions are named in Neẓāmi ʿArużi's *Four Discourses*, written some four centuries later in 551/1156.[27] As we saw in the story of Astyages, the minstrel could sometimes act as an invaluable liaison between the king and

23. See Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides*, 402–3. For a translation and discussion of the Sasanian story of *Khosrow and a Page*, which names many different kinds of music and entertainment, see Samra Azarnouche, ed. and trans., *Husraw ī Kawādān ud Rēdag-ē = Khosrow fils de Kawad et un page* (Paris: Association pour l'avancement des études iraniennes, 2013), 89–95, 140–46.

24. There is evidence too that women harpists were a standout feature at the royal banquets of these two kings; see Boyce, "The Parthian *Gōsān*," 22, 28–30.

25. Najm´ābādī and Weber, *Mujmal al-tavārīkh va al-qiṣaṣ*, 57. Boyce, "Gōsān," suggests that by "Lōrs" is meant "gypsies." Cf. Azarnouche, *Husraw ī Kawādān*, 141.

> ازان شادخوارتر پادشاه نبود و نباشد و دلیرتر. و مردمِ رعیّت ازان به نشاط و رامشگری که در ایّام وی بودند، به هیچ روزگار نبوده‌است. . . . و کس را هیچ رنج و ستوه نیافت، جز آنکه اندک مردمان بی رامشگر شراب خوردند. پس بفرمود تا به مَلِكِ هندوان نامه نوشتند و از وی گوسان خواستند و گوسان به زبان پهلوی خنیاگر بُوَد. پس از هندوان دوازده هزار مطرب بیامدند، زن و مرد. و لوریان که هنوز بجایند از نژاد ایشانند، و ایشان را ساز و چهارپا داد تا رایگان پیشِ اندک مردم رامشی کنند.

26. Tansar, *Nāmah-i Tansar bih Gushnasp*, ed. Mujtabā Minūvī (Tehran: Khvārazmī, 1354 [1975]), 57; cf. *The Letter of Tansar*, trans. Mary Boyce (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1968), 38. The word used for "minstrels" is actually "poets" (*shoʿarā*), but because there was no distinction between the two in Middle Persian, Boyce's inference that the original word was *huniyāgar* is probably sound. Cf. Boyce, "The Parthian *Gōsān*," 21.

> عضو سوم کتّاب، و ایشان نیز بر طبقات و انواع: کتّابِ رسایل، کتّابِ محاسبات، کتّابِ اقضیه و سجلّات و شروط، و کتّاب سیر، و اطبّا و شعرا و منجّمان داخلِ طبقاتِ ایشان.

27. By name: *dabir, shāʿer, monajjem, ṭabib*. Cf. Niẓāmī ʿArūẕī, *Chahār maqālah*, ed. Muḥammad Qazvīnī (Tehran: Khāvar, 1319 [1940]), 11; *Chahár Maqála*, 12.

the rest of the court, for he could communicate messages in a language that others did not have access to.[28] In his *Monuments of the Lands* (*Āthār al-bilād*), Zakarīyā Qazwīnī (d. 682/1284) tells us the story of how Khosrow Parwēz threatened death to anyone who informed him of the death of his favorite horse, Shabdiz. When the fateful day came, the Master of Horse begged Khosrow's chief minstrel Bārbad to intercede, and the minstrel agreed to compose a song that would communicate the sad news without saying it outright. "When Kisrā [Khosrow] hearkened to it, he divined its purport, and said, 'Woe unto thee! Shabdīz is dead!' And [Bārbad] said, 'It is the King that sayeth it.'"[29] By this stratagem, no one but Shabdiz lost his life that day. Again, Neẓāmi 'Arużi has an anecdote from the eleventh century that offers some parallels: the Samanid king Naṣr b. Aḥmad had set up residence in Herat, and his courtiers, homesick for Bukhara, begged the king's poet-minstrel Rudaki to get his liege to change his mind.

> Rúdagí agreed; and since he had felt the Amír's pulse and understood his temperament, he perceived that prose would not affect him, and so had recourse to verse. He therefore composed a *qaṣída*; and, when the Amír had taken his morning cup, came in and sat down in his place; and, when the musicians ceased, he took up the harp, and, playing the "Lover's air," began this elegy:—
>
> [*bu-ye ju-ye muliān āyad hami · bu-ye yār-e mehrabān āyad hami*]
> *"The Jú-yi-Múliyán we call to mind,*
> *We long for those dear friends long left behind."*
>
> Then he strikes a lower key, and sings:— [The rest of the poem follows.] The Amír was so much affected that he descended from his throne, all unbooted bestrode the horse which was on sentry-duty, and set off for Bukhárá so precipitately that they carried his leggings and riding-boots after him for two parasangs.[30]

28. Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Ḥamāsah´sarā-yi bāstān," 6; Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 5–9.

29. Edward Granville Browne, "The Sources of Dawlatshāh: With Some Remarks on the Materials Available for a Literary History of Persia, and an Excursus on Bārbad and Rūdagī," *JRAS* (1899): 58–59; cf. Boyce, "The Parthian *Gōsān*," 24.

30. Niẓāmī 'Arūẓī, *Chahár Maqála*, 35–36. For the Persian, see *Chahār maqālah*, 29. See also Lewis, "Reading, Writing, and Recitation," 73–75. Neẓāmi has a number of other entertaining stories that describe how the poet could use his art to influence the king or diffuse his anger; in one episode, he tells us how 'Onṣori was able to restore Sultan Maḥmud's temper after the latter had regretted ordering his favorite slave (the famous Ayāz) to cut his hair; so too did Azraqi salvage the situation when the Seljuk king Ṭughānshāh threw snake-eyes in a game of backgammon, whereupon the poet improvised the following quatrain:

> *Reproach not Fortune with discourteous tricks,*
> *If by the King, desiring double six,*
> *Two ones were thrown; for whomsoe'er he calls*
> *Face to the earth before him prostrate falls.*

This anecdote is helpful in that it shows the changes that were gradually taking place after the collapse of the Sasanians. Like the ancient minstrels, Rudaki is an accomplished harpist and sings his own material; but we see at the same time that he has been singled out from the court "musicians" (*moṭrebān*) who play for the king as he takes his morning draught. The Sasanians made no distinction between poet and minstrel: as the *History of Sistan* reminds us, "as long as they [the Iranians] remained [culturally] Zoroastrian, they recited verses with musical accompaniment" (*tā pārsiān budand sakhon pish-e ishān be rud bāz goftandi*).[31] But with the rise of a New Persian idiom that was steeped in Arabic influences—Boyce's analogy with English verse, which dropped the old Anglo-Saxon poetics in favor of French-inspired models after the Norman conquest, is quite apt—the practitioners of this new art form adopted the Arabic word *shāʿer* to describe their profession, which followed a set of aesthetic and prosodic principles very different from those of the old lays.[32] This division is evident in the *Qābusnāma*, an eleventh-century treatise on manners and courtly protocol that devotes two separate chapters to poetry (*shāʿeri*) and minstrelsy (*khonyāgari*). Aspiring poets are given a specific and rigorous course of study: they must master the science of prosody and the manifold kinds of ornament, to fit mood to content, to avoid tasteless Arabisms, to make just analogies, and to always be of good cheer in polite company.[33] Minstrels must be equally well-behaved and avoid drunken brawls with other musicians (a timeless nugget of wisdom), but their role at court is somewhat more akin to a physician's, for they must be able to identify what would please the diverse needs of his listeners.

> If you see a group of elite and intelligent men who know and appreciate music, then always play nice modes and melodies for them, but keep most of your songs about old age and contempt for the world. If you see a group of youths before you, use the lighter modes and sing songs about women and the praise of wine and wine-drinkers. If you see a group of soldiers and professional mercenaries, sing quatrains about Transoxiana, about battle, spilling blood, and the praise of chivalry. . . . The most important skill for a minstrel is to arrive at the character of his audience.[34]

31. Bahār, *Tārīkh-i Sīstān*, 227. Cf. Boyce, "The Parthian *Gōsān*," 18, 21; also page 85 in this dissertation.

32. ibid., 41; cf. Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh, "Pīrāmūn-i vazn-i Shāhnāmah," *Īrān shināsī* 2, no. 1 (1990): 59–61.

33. Kaykāvūs ibn Iskandar ibn Qābūs, *Qābūs nāmah*, 189–92; cf. *Qābūs nāmah* (*tr. Levy*), 183–85. Neẓāmi ʿArużi seconds this advice, and adds that any poet worth his salt should have memorized 20,000 verses by the Ancients and 10,000 by the Moderns. If he succeeds in these efforts, "his name may appear on the page of Time like the names of those other Masters whom we have mentioned that he may thus be able to discharge his debt to his patron and lord for what he obtains for him by immortalizing his name" (*Chahár Maqála*, 31–32).

34. Kaykāvūs ibn Iskandar ibn Qābūs, *Qābūs nāmah*, 195–96; cf. *Qābūs nāmah* (*tr. Levy*), 188–89.

In addition to his primary task in supplying the heart with that which it most desires to hear, the musician is offered a further word of advice regarding his relationship with storytelling and poetry:

> Try to become a storyteller, so that you can lessen the work of minstrelsy by telling a number of stories, jokes, and pleasing anecdotes. Also, if you are a minstrel but also know poetry, don't be in love with your own poems and don't always recite your own material, for even if you like it, others may not. Minstrels perform the work of poets; they do not perform their own work.[35]

This is a very important distinction, and it begins to give us an idea how minstrels were losing ground to poets in terms of their prestige and honor. The great Arab poets where rather like composers in Western classical music, whose works were performed by professional reciters (*rāwī*s) endowed with pleasing voices and prodigious memories.[36] After centuries of interaction with this model, the same division of labor began to emerge in the Iranian lands, as de Bruijn writes: "The [poet] was the representative of a branch of knowledge, namely all that was needed to compose correct and successful poems in the various genres fashionable in his times. He was, essentially, a textwriter . . . The minstrel, on the other hand, is exclusively a performing artist to whom it is even forbidden to include poems of his own in his repertoire."[37] Although minstrelsy in the old style continued well into the tenth and eleventh centuries CE, it is clear that celebrated minstrel-poets like Rudaki and Farrokhi Sistāni (d. 429/1038) were a dying breed, and whatever still remained of the old Parthian and Sasanian songs in the oral tradition was considered inferior to the new poetry. On the lays of Bārbad, the biographer Moḥammad ʿOwfi writes that "they are remote from meter, rhyme, and the observance of poetical congruities" (*az vazn-e sheʿr vo qāfeyat*

اگر قومی مردمانِ خاص بینی سزای عقل که صرفِ مطربی دانند پس مطربی کن و راه‌های نیک و نواهای نیک همی زن اما سرود بیشتر اندر پیری گوی و اندر مذمتِ دنیا؛ و اگر قومی جوانان و کودکان بینی نشسته بیشتر طریق‌های سبک گوی و سرودهایی گوی که بیشتر در زنان گفته باشند یا در ستایشِ نبید و نبیدخوارگان. و اگر قومی سپاهی و عیار پیشگان را بینی دو بیتی‌های ماوراءالنهر گوی در حرب کردن و خون ریختن و ستودنِ عیاران. . . . خنیاگر را بزرگترین هنری آنست که بر طبعِ مستمع رود.

35. Kaykāvūs ibn Iskandar ibn Qābūs, *Qābūs nāmah*, 194–95; cf. *Qābūs nāmah* (*tr. Levy*), 187.

جهد کن که محاکی باشی که به مقدارِ حکایت و مزاح و مطایبه کردنِ تو از رنجِ خنیاگریِ تو بکاهد. دیگر آنکه اگر خنیاگری باشی و شاعری نیز دانی عاشقِ شعرِ خویش مباش و همه روایتِ شعرِ خویش مکن که چنانکه ترا با شعرِ خویش خوش باشد مگر آن قوم را خوش نباشد که خنیاگران راویانِ شاعرانند نه راویانِ خویش.

36. See Abdulla El-Tayib, "Pre-Islamic Poetry," in *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, ed. A. F. L. Beeston et al. (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 29; for specfic example of the relationship between poets and reciters, see Ritter's article in the *EI*^{2} (Brill Online), s.v. "Abū Tammām," accessed June 11, 2015, http://www.paulyonline.brill.nl.proxy.uchicago.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/abu-tammam-SIM_0261.

37. Bruijn, "Poets and Minstrels," 16.

o morāʿāt-e naẓā'er-e ān dur ast) and therefore did not find them worth including in his anthology of poetry.[38] Even Rudaki's poems had a mixed reception in later generations; in a famous passage in his *Memorial*, Dowlatshāh writes of the very same verses that stirred Naṣr b. Aḥmad to ride two parasangs without his boots: "The verses are extremely simple, entirely devoid of rhetorical artifices and embellishments, and lacking in strength; and if in these days anyone were to produce such a poem in the presence of kings or nobles, it would meet with the reprobation of all."[39]

Though diminished in stature, minstrels continued to be a fixture at court. They make regular appearances in Bayhaqi's chronicle of the Ghaznavid court, usually for semi-private events such as the hunt, promenades, feasts, and merry-making. Meanwhile, poets assumed many of the court functions previously carried out by the minstrels: the poet took his place among the boon-companions of the king, and he would be summoned to recite his compositions for formal occasions, much like the singers of old had done.[40] This would have been the milieu in which we might imagine the works of a poet in the eleventh century CE being performed: music and musicians were in abundant supply, and the old practice of singing short topical songs to musical accompaniment was as popular as ever.[41] However, the old bardic lays were going extinct; the language was archaic and often incomprehensible, and its forms and meters did not at all adhere to what was considered poetic by the standards of the day. Thus we see how Gorgāni, looking at the archaic text of *Vis & Rāmin* in 1054, came to the conclusion that there was no professional poet in those days (*ke āngah shāʿer-i pisha nabud ast*, 7.36) and declared that "if a scholar took some trouble with it, it would become beautiful as a gem-filled treasury" (*agar dānanda-i dar vay bord ranj · shavad zibā cho por gohar yak-i ganj*, 7.54).[42] Because he and other poets of his century took such efforts to update these stories to suit modern tastes, some of the old lays of the *gōsān*s ultimately survived, albeit in altered form.

38. ʿAwfī, *Kitāb-i Lubāb al-albāb*, 1:20, *Lubāb al-albāb*, 21; cf. Boyce, "The Parthian *Gōsān*," 38.
39. Browne, "The Sources of Dawlatshāh," 68.
40. Bruijn, "Poets and Minstrels," 22; Brookshaw, "Palaces, Pavilions and Pleasure-gardens," 199–201.
41. See Lewis, "Reading, Writing, and Recitation," 72–91; Ehsan Yarshater, "Affinities between Persian Poetry and Music," in *Studies in Art and Literature of the Near East*, ed. Peter J. Chelkowski (The Middle East Center, 1973), 59–78.
42. Another way to translate this line is that "poetry (*shāʿeri*) was not a profession" in those days. For a full discussion of this passage, see section 2.5.

With this historical background in mind, it makes perfect sense to see minstrelsy woven throughout the textual fabric of *Vis & Rāmin*, with both meta-characters (the narrator) and intradiegetic characters (Rāmin) taking on this role. As has been speculated about the stories of Rostam, Esfandyār, and Zarēr, all heroes who sing songs in the middle of their tales, it is likely that the songs of Rāmin were in fact sung as such during the Parthian and Sasanian eras of Iranian history. Though the professional minstrels had dwindled somewhat by Gorgāni's time, they still occupied an important place in the court, entertaining the king and his boon-companions and setting the poets' compositions to music. As Franklin Lewis writes, this performative aspect played a critical role in the way a poetic text was delivered, received, intended, and interpreted:

> The musical setting of the poems and the manner of recitation would obviously give further contextual clues to the understanding of the poem. My assumption is that the *majāles* in which the Persian ghazal was performed was, like a theatrical performance, a meshing of the oral and textual spheres in which meaning sometimes arose from gesture, from the direction faced by the performer, from the presence of both reciter/singer and poet, who may take turns rendering various lines, from musical cues; and from a shared performance history, in which actual members of the audience, such as those serving wine to the guests, and other features of the *hors de texte* are embodied in the text, becoming themselves somehow "intertextual" and giving shape to the semiotics of the poem in ways both serious and humorous, that emphasize and make poignant or even undercut the surface meaning of a poetic text.[43]

All of these dynamics may be found not only in the performance context of the ghazal, but even inscribed into the written text of narrative works like *Varqa & Golshāh* and *Vis & Rāmin*. Just as short lyric poems were often sung at court along with musical accompaniment, we might too speculate that the intercalated or "abstracted" (a term we will discuss presently) lyrics in the masnavi could also have been treated as sung performances, or at least situated by their audience as taking part in that same performative space.[44] We will consider this idea with a short analysis of the earliest surviving romance in Persian literature, the tale of *Varqa & Golshāh*. As we discussed in section 2.4, this was a story drawn out of an Arabian tale of an udhri poet named ʿUrwa b. Ḥizām and his fatal love for his beloved ʿAfrāʾ,

43. Lewis, "Reading, Writing, and Recitation," 108–9. See also Khan, "The Broken Spell," 94–96 for a discussion of the various performance styles that ought to be employed by romance storytellers (*dāstān-guyān*) in the seventeenth century manual *The Embroidery of Tales* (*Ṭerāz al-Akhbār*).

44. Lewis, "Reading, Writing, and Recitation," 48 suggests that these inlaid poems are "linked to a musical or cantillated style of delivery distinct from the declamatory style of the rest of the *maṣnavi* poem."

but when it was transposed into Persian, it picked up many interesting features, not least of which is its unprecedented use of songs within the story.

5.2 Songs in the story

In 1984, Robert Dankoff published a groundbreaking article entitled "The Lyric in the Romance," in which he conducted a survey of the practice of embedding ghazals within Persian and Turkish narrative poetry. His insights were valuable for thinking about both genre and narratology in this tradition. On the former, he observed that these intercalated lyrics mostly appear in romantic narratives:

> While a poet like Jalāladdīn Rūmī excelled at both forms [long and short], he refrained from mixing the two; and so we have his Dīvān of over 3,000 ghazals and his *Maṡnavī* of 26,000 couplets. Firdausī's *Shāh-Nāmeh*, consisting of 60,000 couplets, is likewise uninterrupted by any lyric outburst.[45] So much for the mystical/didactic and epic maṡnavīs.
>
> When we come to the romances, the situation is more complicated. ʿAyyūqī, who initiated the romantic maṡnavī in Persian in the eleventh century, included ghazals in the course of his poem . . . But Niẓāmī, who put his imprint on the genre in the twelfth century, eschewed the lyric insertion; and in the subsequent Persian tradition (notably the works of Amīr Khusrau and Jāmī), as well as the Eastern Turkish tradition (Quṭb and Navā'ī, but also the Western Turkish Faḫrī), the romantic maṡnavī has the same austere and unrelieved quality that we find in the epic and religious maṡnavī.[46]

Dankoff's survey of the material suggests that love-stories were seen by medieval poets as the most appropriate setting to interweave lyrical passages, if and when they chose to do so. Such a confluence of genres is hardly surprising given their shared thematic roots: just as the theme of love established a basis around which certain literary habits and practices generated the love-story as a discrete kind of narrative, so too did poets define the ghazal (before it evolved into a fixed form) as a short poem that took up love as its organizing principle.[47] By virtue of the shared topic that endowed both genres with a distinctive identity, the ghazal and the romantic masnavi were kissing cousins, so to speak: "What is only alluded

45. As discussed in the previous section, Boyce and Khaleghi-Motlagh might disagree with this assessment and point to the songs sung by Rostam and Esfandyār during their seven labors.

46. Dankoff notes that some of Amir Khosrow's historical poems, and his wholly original *Noh Sepehr*, do include formal ghazals; "The Lyric in the Romance," 9.

47. Cf. Lewis, "Reading, Writing, and Recitation," 104–108. For more on the concept the "organizing principle" in the discussion of genres, see section 2.2.

to in the *ghazal* is fully developed in the epic; what is abstract there, is concrete here; the spirit of the *ghazal* has its flesh and blood in the romantic epics, which therefore serve as an indispensable supplement to the *ghazal*."[48] Nor was this generic interplay unique to Persian literature; the same blending of narrative prose and short-form lyric poetry in anthologies like Ibn Qutayba's *Poets and Poetry* and Abu l-Faraj Iṣbahāni's *Book of Songs* provided the source for ʿAyyuqi's *Varqa & Golshāh*; Neẓāmi of Ganja is likely to have relied on these and similar collections of anecdotes in developing his famous rendition of *Layli & Majnun*.[49] The effect of this genre-blending is well-described by Dankoff:

> The ghazals serve to give the reader or listener an occasional glimpse into the character's inner state at various points in the story, whether critical or not; and the characters often seem to be reflecting aloud, rather like an "aside" in drama, not caring whether anyone else hears their laments. . . . The recurrence of this feature throughout the poem rather suggests that ʿAyyūqī used it intentionally, perhaps to bring the romantic relationship among the characters into sharper focus against the background of his heroic story.[50]

The modulation between lyric and epic registers is an important aspect of the text to keep in mind, for it shows how the Persian romance can incorporate and blend a variety of genres together by tapping into established clusters of form, topic, and mood (see page 99). Although the ghazals are recited in the same energetic, pulsing *motaqāreb* meter as the rest of the work—a meter traditionally associated with heroic themes—they still sound and feel like independent lyric poems.[51] This brings us to Ṣafā's valuable insight into how these romances developed:

> In my view, the original reason [for these embedded ghazals] is that in the original story of *Varqa & Golshāh*, that is, the story of *ʿUrwa and ʿAfrā'*, events in the narrative were accompanied by love lyrics and sad ghazals recited by ʿUrwa, the Arab poet, in the same manner that we see in the old Arabic sources; whenever the one who transposed the story into Persian poetry came across some explicating lines or love lyrics (which we understand as ghazals), he would insert a ghazal in the midst of the masnavi.[52]

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48. Bürgel, "The Romance," 162.

49. Cf. Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnūn: Love, Madness and Mystic Longing in Niẓāmī's Epic Romance*, 52–57 and Khairallah, *Love, Madness, and Poetry*, 49–56. A similar interplay of poem, quotation, and narration can be found at work in the construction of the troubadour *razos*; see Kay, *Parrots and Nightingales*, 1–87.

50. Dankoff, "The Lyric in the Romance," 12–13. Cf. Maureen Barry McCann Boulton, *The Song in the Story: Lyric Insertions in French Narrative Fiction, 1200–1400* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 24.

51. For a wonderful study of the relation between meter and genre, see J. T. P. de Bruijn, "The Individuality of the Persian Metre *Khafīf*," in *Arabic Prosody and its Applications in Muslim Poetry*, ed. Lars Johanson and Bo Utas (Uppsala: Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, 1994), 35–43.

52. ʿAyyūqī, *Varqa va Gulshāh*, ix.

The lyric and narrative passages of ʿAyyuqi's *Varqa & Golshāh* thus speak to one another on the basis of their mutual interest in the same theme, the one complementing and enriching the other. In the unique manuscript of *V&G*, the embedded poems are explicitly marked in both the text and the paratext, prefaced by special headings and following the formal principles of the ghazal, with rhyming hemistichs in the opening line and the use of the refrain (*radif*) throughout the poem; as Lewis remarks, they "look for all the world like formal ghazals."[53] Varqa, the hero, has the lion's share of these performances (six out of ten), but his beloved Golshāh, and even his mortal enemy Rabiʿ b. ʿAdnān, both perform two poems of their own. As we shall see, the interaction between the lyric and narrative passages depends greatly on the aims and techniques of the individual poet; Yūsuf Meddāḥ, an Ottoman poet who adapted *V&G* into Turkish in 743/1342, inserts his ghazals at the dramatic cruxes of his story, using them both to mark the plot's milestones and to further it along its course. ʿAyyuqi, on the other hand, tends to place them at the emotional climaxes of the story, where the action freezes, time appears to stand still, and the speaking character adopts an "I-Thou" stance in which she or he addresses an absent beloved, boasts of heroic deeds to come, supplicates an ally, or mourns the passing of a loved one. Placing the lyrics at the emotional crests of the narrative has a significant impact on both the story's relationship with time and its self-presentation as a performative act. In such cases, the plot has no direct impact on the poem to be recited; rather, it sets the stage for a lyrical performance of the kinds of emotions a character might be imagined to feel in a particular situation. The way in which these asides are framed, moreover, enhance our perception of a narrator who steps into the role of the characters of his own story, switching modes from narrative to lyric, as it were.

We may explore how this happens in the following dramatic scene from *Varqa & Golshāh*: the eponymous couple, paternal cousins who have loved each other since their childhood, are now of age and the night has come for them to be wed. But that very evening, Golshāh is carried off in a surprise attack by

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درین منظومه چندین بار غزلهایی به بحر متقارب یعنی بحر اصلی منظومه آمده‌است که در آنها به روش غزل‌گویان رعایت‌ایراد قوافی در اواخر ابیات شده‌است. این کار در ادبیات فارسی تازگی داشت و علت اصلی به نظر منِ آن بود که در اصل داستان ورقه و گلشاه یعنی در قصهٔ عوره و عفراء (که به زودی شرح خواهیم داد)، به همان نحو که در مآخذ قدیم عربی می‌بینیم بیان مطلب با ذکر ابیات عاشقانه و غذلهای خزن‌آوری از عوره شاعر عرب همراه بوده‌است و ناقل داستان به شعر فارسی، هر جا که با به این ابیات و اشعار عاشقانه (که حکم غزلهای مارا دارد) رسیده یک غزل در میان مثنوی گنجانیده‌است.

53. Lewis, "Reading, Writing, and Recitation," 47–48.

the Banu Żabba, led by Rabiʿ b. ʿAdnān. Now, as Rabiʿ attempts to lure Golshāh over to him with promises of wealth and power, and as Golshāh, employing a tactic familiar to heroines across the love-story genre, begs for some time while she is undergoing the "excuse of women" (*ʿoẕr-e zanān*), Varqa and his people have begun their search for the missing bride:[54]

> When fate turned upon Varqa that night, he was sundered from love and livelihood alike.
> Corpses made mountains of the Banu Shayba's lands, so many had died in the darkness.
> There was Golshāh, a wretched prisoner; here was Varqa, filled with pain and sorrow.
> They passed the whole night in that state, crying out against fate,
> No one rested from lamentation, the men and women deprived of sense and sustenance,
> No one knew what had transpired: who was responsible for the raid and bloodshed?
> When the earth donned its silver mail, and the celestial vault loosened the knots that bound its heart,
> The heroes gathered and learned how the enemy had come and gone.
> Though high and low they sought Golshāh, there was no trace of her left.
> When Varqa saw the land was robbed of her, he fell apart like one robbed of sense:
> Now pouring dark earth upon his head, now rending his garments,
> Now sowing yellow buds among the saffron, now spilling heart-blood upon the Judas-tree.
> The lovelorn youth composed a poem of burning pain, of loss and ruin,
> Saying all the while, "O heart-ravishing beauty, where can I find you in this wide world?"
>
> **Varqa's Poem On Separation from Golshāh**
> Where have you gone, O cleaver of hearts?
> Have you grown bored of seeing me?
> I never sought to harm you, love
> Why take you joy in distressing me?
> How are you, my love, without me around
> With my life and soul thus afflicting me
> Were you to hear the pain of my plaint
> You'd grow more wretched in hearing me
> Take care, my heart and soul are in your trust
> Take care of my trust, and trust in me (14/21–15/18)[55]

54. Many of the topoi discussed in this and the following scenes, such as the bride's menstruation, plying a reluctant mother with gifts, and rival claimants for the woman's hand, reappear in *V&R* and are discussed in further detail in section 3.4.

55. ʿAyyūqī, *Varqa va Gulshāh*, 14–15; for a French translation, cf. Melikian-Chirvani, "Varqe et Golšâh," 112–13:

همان شب چو بر ورقه بگذشت حال   بری شذ ز یار و جذا شذ ز مال
ز بس کس که در تیره‌شب کشته بوذ   بنی شیبه از کشته پر پشته بوذ
بذان جای گلشاهِ مسکین اسیر   بذین جای ورقه به درد و زحیر
همه شب بذان حال بگذاشتند   همه نعره از چرخ برداشتند
نیاسذ آن شب کسی از خروش   زن و مرد بوذند بی مال و هوش
نذانست کس هیچ که احوال چیست   شبیخون و خون‌ریختن کارِ کیست
چو گیتی بپوشیذ سیمین زره   گشاذ از دلِ چرخِ گردان گره
دلیران همه جمله گرد آمذند   وز آمذ شذِ دشمن آگه شذند

This passage sparkles with dramatic energy. We can almost see the storyteller standing before us, gesturing here at Varqa, shocked and bewildered; there at Golshāh, caught in the clutches of a wily foe. We learn of Varqa's bereavement and watch him go through the motions one would expect of an ardent lover separated from his one and only, rending his clothes, pouring dust on his head, and weeping prodigiously. Then we arrive at the lyrical interlude; the narrator steps into the persona of Varqa himself and recites—or, I imagine, sings—a lament of separation, ventriloquizing the young hero whom he has until now illustrated for us from the outside. As Dankoff observed, this passage does nothing to further the plot, but rather pulls us into a world where time stands still, leaving our speaker free to explore the hills and valleys of his emotions at his leisure. In the course of shifting modes, the poetry undergoes too a logical metamorphosis. The first question Varqa poses to his absent beloved is a variation on the tried-and-true "why did you leave me?" topos, an absurd question if asked from the context of the story; imagine the guffaws that would ensue if the hero of an action movie said such a thing after seeing his girlfriend kidnapped by his nemesis. The lyrical turn cannot be interpreted along a reading that relies on plot to produce pleasure through understanding; it rather depends on the audience's familiarity with a different literary mode to ensure its aesthetic appreciation. It requires the same kind of suspension of disbelief we are expected to bring to a musical, a Shakespearean soliloquy, or a magician's show, and in any of these cases we are rewarded by our enjoyment of the performance *qua* performance, rather than how it connects with or furthers the story. Because the ghazals in *V&G* draw attention to themselves as such, explicitly marked in both the manuscript ("Varqa's Poem On Separation from Golshāh") and the narrative ("The lovelorn youth composed a poem . . . "), I wonder, if I may argue *ex silentio*, if this may be

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بجستند گلشاه را سر به سر ندیدند ازو هیچ جایی اثر
چو ورقه ز گلشه تهی دیذ جای چو سرگشتگان اندر آمذ ز پای
گهی کرد بر سر همی تیره خاک گهی کرد بر تن همی جامه چاک
گهی رزدگل کِشت بر زعفران گهی خونِ دل راند بر ارغوان
یکی شعر گفت آن دل آزرده مرد ز تیمار و هجران وز داغ و درد
همی گفت ای لعبتِ دلستان کجا جویمت من به گردِ جهان

شعر گفتن ورقه در هجر گلشاه

کجا رفتی ای دلگسِل یارِ من مگر سیر گشتی ز دیذارِ من
نجستم بتا هرگز آزارِ تو چرا جستی ای دوست آزارِ من
چگونست بی من بتا کارِ تو که با جان رسیذ از عنا کارِ من
ز من زارتر گردی اندر فراق اگر بشنوی نالهٔ زارِ من
برِ تُست زنهار جان و دلم نگه دار زنهار زنهارِ من

one of the first Persian works that envisioned a new possibility for the romance, not just as a versification of an already-known story, but as a written text that presents itself as an oral performance, inscribing multiple literary modes and perspectives for its readers to experience. At least, this is how Varqa's performance, if understood as a lyric poem and placed within that genre's topography, can be enjoyed, not as a *response* to the situation at hand, but as a *complement* to the emotional state inspired by Golshāh's abduction.[56]

Such polyphonies generate new questions and complications in our analysis of narrative. Although Bürgel is right that the dual modalities of "epic romantic" (the narrative) and "lyric" (the sung ghazals) are united in their interest in the same basic theme of love, it is clear that they are constructed around discrete architectonic systems that produce radically different accounts of love and gender. In the poetic world of the lyric, it is the lover's prerogative to blame his sweetheart for indifference and rejection, while the absent beloved is by definition helpless to respond or defend him or herself from such accusations. The poem and poet thus stand unchallenged on their own terms; the reality or irreality of her person is but an incidental detail. Once brought into the framework of *V&G*, however, these poems are no longer self-contained: the narrative polyphony generates a number of counter-narratives that may countermand or disprove the totalizing aspirations of the lyrical voice. This is possible, in fact, even within the "I-said He-said" dialogues one finds in some ghazals, or the lyrical debates in the *monāẓera* tradition, exemplified in the "Ten Letters" genre. Due to its infinitely expandable form, however, the romance provides the most room for alternate personae to present themselves in contradistinction to their rivals and counterparts.

Considering that the ghazal-as-mode typically assumes a male speaker addressing an absent beloved, it is especially interesting to see what happens when Golshāh assumes this role in her lyrics. Her first poem occurs much later in the story, after the war between the Banu Shayba and the Banu Żabba has

56. The same can be said for the remarkable illustrations that decorate the pages of the unique manuscript of *Varqa & Golshāh*. In his studies of the image cycle, Melikian-Chirvani emphasizes the independence of the images from the text, but a later monograph by Abbas Daneshvari demonstrates how the images use symbolic images to deepen and enhance the reader's understanding of the scene. See Melikian-Chirvani, "Varqe et Golšâh," 53–71; Assadullah Souren Melikian-Chirvani, "The Romance of Varghe and Golshah," *The UNESCO Courier* 24 (1971): 27–29; Abbas Daneshvari, *Animal Symbolism in* Warqa wa Gulshāh (Oxford University Press, 1986).

come to an end. Now Varqa is in Yemen, fighting wars for his uncle in the hope that he will make enough money to pay the bride-price for his beloved; meanwhile, word of Golshāh's beauty has spread and the king of Damascus has come to ask for her hand. He is at first rebuffed by Golshāh's father, but he eventually wins over the mother with extravagant presents. The mother then tells Golshāh that Varqa has died, and that she has been engaged to the king of Damascus.

> And so Golshāh learned that the scoundrel had sundered her from her beloved Varqa!
> She screamed in pain, she fell to the ground, she lost her senses;
> And when that musky moon came to, she drove the blood of her heart out her eyes.
> She plucked the rose from the radiant moon with hazel lips and cast her fragrant locks to the floor:
> A silver cypress bent double, a face of rose turned yellow.
> With twisting hands, she tore the shirt that clad her silver body
> And rolled without hope amidst the dirt, groaning in pain and wretched weeping:
> "O Judge, give justice, for just are all your works!
> Break that slave[57] of stony heart, who broke up two lovers!
> Who has sundered two hearts joined? Who wounded the hearts of two united?
> We who are piteous he pites not; all he desired has come to pass, for that was his destiny.
> (74/5–15)[58]

What is first apparent is the fact that Golshāh's behavior is nearly an exact parallel of Varqa's when he is first separated from her. The gestures of despair and distress are identical: she faints, her face turns pale, she rends her garments, she covers herself in dust. The repetition of these actions show us both that we are dealing with behaviors on an archetypal level that are not distinguished on the basis of gender. They also reinforce the parallelism of the two characters in the narrative: the joy in union, and the distress in separation, is equal and constant between hero and heroine. More interesting still is her cry for justice

57. Following Melikian-Chirvani's amendation of *borda* to *banda*: "Varqe et Golšâh," 169.
58. ʿAyyūqī, *Varqa va Gulshāh*, 74; Melikian-Chirvani, "Varqe et Golšâh," 169:

خبر یافت گلشاه کآن مستحل   جدا کردش از ورقهٔ برده‌دل
ز دردِ دل از وی برآمذ خروش   بیفتاذ بر خاک و زو رفت هوش
چو بازی هُش آمذ مهِ مشک سر   بباریذ از دیذه خونِ جگر
به فندق گل از ماهِ رخشان بکند   به خاک اندر افگند مشکین کمند
دو تا کرده آن سروِ سیمینِ خویش   چو زر کرده گل برگ رنگینِ خویش
بزد دست وز دست پارهنش   بدرّیذ بر سیمِ پیکر تنش
بغلتیذ بر خاک بیچاره‌وار   بنالیذ از درد و بگریست زار
همی گفت کای داور داذ ده   همه از تو داذست بیداذ نه
تو بُگسِل مر [آن] سنگ‌دلِ بنده را   که بگسست از هم دو دل‌برده را
گستته کی کرد این دو دل‌بسته را   کی دل خسته کرد این دو پیوسته را
نبخشوذ بر ما دو بخشوذنی   ببُذ هرچ می‌خواست و بُذ بوذنی

and redress, through which she affirms the virtue of her own actions and the nobility of a chaste and committed love relationship. Then, like Varqa, she launches into a formal ghazal:

> In pain and loneliness, she moaned and said, "Alas, that my good lover is gone!
>
> **Golshāh's Poem On Separation From Varqa**
> O delight and repose of my soul!
> O heart and eye and life upon life!
> You're the cure of my soul and the pain of my heart
> Where have you gone, O my pain and cure?
> They took me from you, they showed no mercy
> For my wounded, weeping eyes
> My ruddy face has turned sallow from pain
> My garden cypress has bent over in grief
> For the sake of money, they've given me
> To a stranger without my consent
> By your life, don't break your troth
> for they've broken theirs regarding my soul (74/17–75/6)[59]

This ghazal contains many of the same elements as Varqa's lament that we encountered before: the same question of "Where have you gone?", the same complaint of long distress and suffering. As Dankoff observes, the ghazals of both Varqa and Golshāh adhere to the same refrain (*ān-e man*), as does a poem by Golshāh's captor, Rabiʿ b. ʿAdnān, effectively creating a leitmotif that binds the three figures together and highlights their competing claims on one another.[60] Most interesting is how both poems end with a riff on the word *zenhār*, which can be used either as a noun meaning "trust" or "troth," or as an exclamation, "beware!" The speakers in both poems thus reaffirm the sacred bond that will tie them together for eternity, the boy asking the girl to guard his trust (by preserving her virginity), and the girl warning the boy not to break his (for betrayal can even be committed by one's own family). Golshāḥ's cry of outrage seems a clear echo of the short, one-line poem she declaims in the *Book of Songs*: "ʿUrwa! The tribe has

59. ʿAyyūqī, *Varqa va Gulshāh*, 74–75; Melikian-Chirvani, "Varqe et Golšâh," 169–70:

بنالیذ و بر درد و هجران بگفت　　دریغا شد از دستم آن نیک جفت
شعر گفتن گلشاه در هجرِ ورقه
ایا نزهت و راحتِ جانِ من　　دل و دیذه و جان و جانانِ من
تو درمانِ جانّی و دردِ دلی　　کجا رفتی ای درد و دامانِ من
گسستندم از تو نکرند رحم　　بر این خسته دو چشمِ گیرانِ من
ز دردِ دلم گشت رخساره زرد　　ز غم گوژ شذ سروِ بستانِ من
ز بهرِ درم به غریبی مرا　　بداذند بی امر و فرمانِ من
تو بر جانِ خوذ بر مخور زینهار　　که خوردند زنهار بر جانِ من

60. Dankoff, "The Lyric in the Romance," 13.

broken the sacred pact and committed treachery!" (*yā ʿUrwa inna l-ḥayya qad naqaḍū · ʿahda l-ilāhi wa-ḥāwalū l-ghadrā*), and her poem as a whole dwells on the injustice she has suffered through her family's breach of trust.[61]

All of these features reinforce the affinity of *Varqa & Golshāh* with the basic structure of the Greek novel, wherein the two lovers are bound by oaths of fidelity and strive mightily to uphold those vows at all costs. Like the soliloquies and monologues found in that genre, the lyric performances in *V&G* contribute a great deal to the development of its characters in their capacities as individuals and as archetypes. By associating characters together, creating leitmotifs, and establishing ties to the outside world of narrative love-stories and lyric poetry, the ghazals fulfill both intratextual and intertextual functions.[62] They also affect a shift in tenor or mood in the narrative; while *V&G* is primarly concerned with tales of battle and heroism, placing it within the "epic" or "heroic" register of tale-telling, the periodic pauses allow both the characters and the audience to reflect on the emotional or psychological effect such moments might have on the individual. For example, once Varqa is done reciting his lament on his separation from Golshāh, time starts up again, the poet steps back into the role of the third-person narrator, and other characters get their say.

> When Varqa finished his poem, he got to his feet and let out a cry like rolling thunder.
> He went to his father and said, "Your son is gone, his life is come to an end;
> Be quick, and find a cure for this pain! I'm lost if you fail, and may you fare well!"
> The father spoke: "O joy of my life, heed now your Father's command,
> For the time is not come for grief and lament—now is the moment for deeds and fury!
> Up! Rise! Don your coat of mail! For today to seek vengeance is better than tears!
> And my face shall turn not from the lands of the Banu Żabba,
> Until my shining, deadly sword releases a bloody hail from their heads,
> Until I exact your due from those insolents and deliver to you your noble cypress."
>
> (16/1–9)[63]

61. See Appendix C.

62. Cesare Segre discusses how intercalated texts and genres expand the expressive range of the medieval romance and produce a kind of Bakhtinian heteroglossia; see "What Bakhtin Left Unsaid: The Case of Medieval Romance," in *Romance: Generic Transformations from Chrétien de Troyes to Cervantes*, ed. Kevin Brownlee and Marina Scordilis Brownlee (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1985), 30–31.

63. ʿAyyūqī, *Varqa va Gulshāh*, 16; Melikian-Chirvani, "Varqe et Golšâh," 113–14:

چو از شعر فارغ شذ آمذ به پای — بغریذ چون رعدِ نالان ز جای
به نزدِ بذر رفت گفت ای پذر — پسر رفت و عمرِ پسر شذ به سر
مر این درد را چاره کن زوذ باش — وگر نه شذم من تو به ذْروذ باش
پذر گفت ای نازشِ جانِ باب — نگر سر نتابی ز فرمانِ باب

It is important to note that the shift from weeping to war, from an elegiac mode to a heroic one, was not effected by the narrator but was rather brought about by a speech act within the imaginative landscape, a rhetorical performance that acted upon both the characters of the story and the narrative that carries them along. Until this point, we had on our hands what seemed the structural foundation of a Helleno-Arabic love-story: the introduction of a high-born family from which emerge two children, perfectly matched in beauty and nobility, who seem destined for one another since the moment of their birth; the days of their childhood and the sweet torture they experience as they fall in love; the discovery of their mutual passion and the pledge of their troth, which will bind them together through thick and thin. Even the night attack falls within this pattern, for it is but a reiteration of the classic abduction-by-pirates topos found in the Greek novel. Yet the launch of a counter-attack is not typically found in this tradition, nor indeed in the Arabic anecdotes that provided ʿAyyuqi with his source material. By injecting the themes of anger, courage, and revenge into the story, the speech by Varqa's father introduces a sub-story within the narrative framework. The father becomes an efficacious figure who enables the blending of romantic and heroic modalities in a single work. Varqa's next poem is thus not at all like the love-lyrics we have encountered thus far; it is rather a war-song, using the proto-ghazal form to heighten the dramatic power of the already energetic epic mode.

> Like a raging lion at the vanguard, his head proudly raised higher than the moon and sky,
> Tearing up the earth in his haste, his sword shining, his heart filled with wrath,
> Mounted upon a purebred Arabian bay, Varqa drove ever onward, reciting a poem to himself as he went:[64]
> "O light of my heart and soul, O rose-cheeked idol, O my life of lives!
>
> **Varqa's Poem**
> I cannot last a moment apart from you
> Even stone and steel are softened by love
> My love is gone, and so too in her loss

نه هنگامِ غم خوردن و شیوَ نَست   که گاهِ دلیری و کین جستن است
هَلا هین بپوش از پیِ کین زره   کی امروز کین جسنتن از ناله به
که من بر نخواهم همی تافت روی   ز حیّ بنی ضبّه وز قومِ اوی
که تا بر سرانْشان من از خون تَگرگ   ببارم به شمشیرِ رُخشنده مرگ
ستانم از آن سرکشان داذِ تو   سپارم به تو سروِ آزاذِ تو

64. An interesting problem presents itself here. The critical edition, which presumably follows the headings in the manuscript, introduces Varqa's poem one line *before* the ghazal proper, whose beginning is quickly identified by the rhyming hemistichs and the introduction of the refrain. I provide the Persian as it appears in Ṣafā's edition, but in my English translation, I move the title to announce the start of the formal poem.

Joy has fled from my heart and color from my face
Now that fortune has shown me a way to her
I shall not waste another patient moment
From my foe's soul and blood, I shall turn
the sky dark and the earth tulip-colored
I shall not spring at night! I shall not lay a trap!
For these things bring shame and dishonor to a man
Even if my idol were in the mouth of a dragon
I should extract her from it
Now with the sword of war shall I bathe my heart and soul
In the blood of Rabiʿ b. ʿAdnān!" (17/8–18/3)[65]

In *Varqa & Golshāh*, the architectonics of the epic and romance come together in interesting and novel ways: the original love-story has been blown up and expanded to accommodate a large number of episodes that give the story a strong epic flavor. Yet at its foundation, the original structure remains intact: despite the many heroic digressions, the overarching narrative is one of the two lovers—hero and heroine as equal and complementary protagonists—who are separated and must struggle to be reunited. The same bedrock organization is found in *Vis & Rāmin*, which leads me to contend that both texts participate in the same world of romance expectations. Nonetheless, the two works move in radically different directions; while *V&G* is a love-story that has been injected with a healthy dose of feasting and fighting, only one chapter in *V&R* is dedicated to the description of a battle, and even that to a very different rhetorical effect (see section 4.2). Therefore, not all the features of the lyric-narrative interplay we observed in *V&G* can be found in *V&R*; but what both poems demonstrate is how the techniques of lyric insertion could move the romance in new and unexpected directions.

65. ʿAyyūqī, *Varqa va Gulshāh*, 17–18; Melikian-Chirvani, "Varqe et Golšâh," 114–15:

چو [شیرِ] دُژم ورقه پیشِ سپاه　　سر از کبر برده برِ چرخ و ماه
زمین را همی در نَوَشت از شتاب　　دلش پر ز کین و دو چشمش پر آب
به زیرش یکی بورِ تازی نژاذ　　همی راند و شعری همی کرد یاذ

شعر گفتن ورقه

بگفت ای چراغِ دل و جانِ من　　بتِ گل رخ [و] جان و جانانِ من
به هجر اندرون کرد نتوان درنگ　　شود نرم از عشق پولاذ و سنگ
نگارم شذ و شذ ز هجرش مرا　　هم از دل نشاط و هم از روی رنگ
کنون کِم قضا سوی او ره نموذ　　نگیرم دگر در صبوری درنگ
ز جان و ز خونِ معادی کنم　　هوا تیره قام و زمین لاله رنگ
نیارم شبیخون نسازم کمین　　کزین هر دو بر مرد عارست و ننگ
بتم گر به کامِ نهنگ اندرست　　برون آرم او را ز کامِ نهنگ
به خونِ ربیع ابنِ عدنان کنون　　بشویم دل و جان به شمشیرِ جنگ

5.3 Speaking lyrically

The lyrical asides of *Vis & Rāmin* differ from those of its predecessor *Varqa & Golshāh* in a number of critical ways. While *V&G* features ten lyrical performances, they are all rather short and indicate only brief musical interludes in the otherwise epic flow of the story. In contrast, Rāmin performs about thirty songs in the course of his story, with a median length of eleven lines each and some extending into the high teens.[66] However, these songs are not evenly distributed; the first third of the work, which relates the story of Vis's pre-arranged marriage, abduction, and seduction, is virtually devoid of them.[67] Once the affair has commenced, however, the mood, narrative style, and language of the poem all undergo a palpable change. Vis is no longer the beleaguered virgin beset on all sides by temptation; the text now describes her as "crafty," "clever," and even "sinful" as she repeatedly thwarts Mobad's ambitions to keep her and Rāmin apart. Indeed, we are treated to four complete cycles in which the same basic story repeats itself: the lovers are separated by Mobad, they find a way to get together, Mobad returns and forces them apart again, and the cycle ends with Vis back in Mobad's court, as pleased as Persephone in Hades. In essence, the stories adhere to a "floating timeline" of stasis, destabilization, and restitution such that they end up exactly where they started, like episodes in a detective series or a comedy sitcom. Gabrieli complained about this narrative inertia in his 1939 article on *Vis & Rāmin*, where he observed that "at about a fourth of the way into the poem, the situation posed at the beginning of the work reaches full maturity," namely, Rāmin seduces Vis; apparently with nothing left to do, Gorgāni fills the remainder of the poem with "interminable laments" and "melodramatic declamations" that are completely devoid of any "real narration."[68] Ḥamid ʿAbdollāhiān observes the same change in the storytelling and comes to similar conclusions, suggesting that Gorgāni's source was actually a composite of two similar tales that had been collapsed into a single narrative: the story of a young woman who was wedded to an old king against her will and had an affair with the king's younger brother, and the story of a young woman's love

66. This feature of his character generally places Rāmin's character and his poetry into the category of "Poet as Hero" discussed by Boulton, *The Song in the Story*, 24–79, which may be consulted to great benefit for those interested in reading *V&R* against the medieval French material.

67. With its dramatic buildup, character development, and explosive denouement, this section stands well on its own as the story of how Vis and Rāmin came to be a couple, and it suggests to me that it existed as a self-contained unit.

68. Gabrieli, "Note sul *Vīs u Rāmīn*," 174–75. See page 51.

for a frivolous minstrel who betrays her. This explains the many "logically unacceptable" (*az naẓar-e manṭeq paẕiroftani nist*) inconsistencies and flaws in the work, which he proceeds to list in bullet-point form.[69]

The episodes are indeed superfluous, as far as the plot is concerned; they could be embellished, abridged, shuffled, or removed without having a major impact on the story, which is in a sense suspended in time, waiting for Rāmin to pull his act together and get married to Vis once and for all.[70] Although this temporal limbo has at time taxed the patience of readers anxious for the story to get on with it, Patricia Parker notes that the techniques of deferment, dilution, and pendency are important strategies in creating a kind of space-time distinctive to the romance, "a form which simultaneously quests for and postpones a particular end, objective, or object."[71] This idea of a specific kind of space-time, or chronotope, that organizes the structure of literary work goes back to Bakhtin, whose notion of "adventure-time" speaks directly to this portion of *Vis & Rāmin*. In his analysis of the Greek novel—whose comparison in this case to the Persian romance is especially apt—Bakhtin contends that there are only two temporal points that delineate the story: (1) boy and girl fall in love, and (2) boy and girl consummate their love. Because the love between the hero and heroine is understood as a given, unaffected by the passing of time, the time that transpires between these two points can be extended *ad infinitum*: "The adventures themselves are strung together in an extratemporal and in effect infinite series: this series can be extended as long as one likes; in itself it has no necessary internal limits."[72]

In addition to elucidating the temporal dynamics of a written work, Bakhtin's insights also allow us to tie *Vis & Rāmin* back to its origins in the minstrel tradition. It is certain that a tale that flourished for centuries over such a wide area would produce to all sorts of local variations and episodes (bringing us back to Abu Nuwās's description of *Vis & Rāmin* as existing in *firjardāt*, or songs).[73] Once the basic setup is achieved—that is, once Vis and Rāmin have become a couple—it is possible to generate an endless amount of material through the cycle of stasis–destabilization–restitution, based on the specific

69. ʿAbd Allāhiyān, "Girdāvardah," 123.
70. See Khan, "The Broken Spell," 77–82 for a rich discussion of these "arrested" narratives in the Indo-Persian tradition.
71. Parker, *Inescapable Romance*, 4.
72. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 94; see page 130 for the rest of the citation.
73. See page 32.

requirements of each performance. It is thus no surprise that it is precisely these stories, where nothing happens and the plot goes nowhere, that Rāmin's "interminable laments" fill up the page and take center-stage—the point is not to know what happens, but to enjoy a good rendition of a familiar tale. The first cycle, which tells the story of Vis's escape from the ordeal by fire, features two fairly long lays that bookend the piece. The second cycle, the tale of the banquet and the bed-trick, is regularly interrupted with short performances that Rāmin literally sings before his audience. The third cycle, the story of Vis's imprisonment in the fortress of Devils' Cavern, moves along at a glacial pace, providing a near-stationary backdrop for a musical extravaganza with songs on a wide variety of themes and topics. The final cycle is the shortest, and features just one song that stands out as a kind of set-piece to accompany the general mood. These four episodes form the bulk of Rāmin's musical career, and they each demonstrate different ways in which the relationship between character, text, and performer can be manipulated for a variety of artistic and rhetorical effects.

Before turning to these musical cycles, we should take a moment to think about Rāmin's significance as a literary character who sings. Unlike *Varqa & Golshāh*, in which the hero, heroine, and villain all get their time in the spotlight, Rāmin, the minstrel, has a near monopoly on the songs in *Vis & Rāmin*. His songs are many and varied, performed for a wide range of addressees and occasions: he sings for royalty at feasts and banquets; he bellows out lays while galloping on horseback; he serenades the wind on the eve of separation; he intones silent melodies as he wrestles with his heart. The scope and versatility of these performances present us with a challenging conceptual problem, for the songs in *V&R* not all "songs" in the technical sense of the word. We recall that the lyrical asides in *V&G* are marked by both paratextual indications and formal features to announce their identity as independent lyrical poems, open to being declaimed in a manner distinct from narrative poetry or even sung, should the performer desire. Neither element is present in the poems of *V&R*, which are unannounced by headings and ignore the formal requirements of a ghazal; in terms of meter, rhyme, and paratext, the lyrics are indistinguishable from the verses that surround them.[74] The claim that the lyrical passages even exist

74. Illustrating this difficulty, Davis writes that he was advised to add an extra chapter heading, "Ramin reproaches his heart," in his translation of *V&R*, because the transition was otherwise disorienting for readers unaccustomed to such abrupt and unannounced shifts in voice and register. See Davis, "Introduction," xliv.

Table 8: Rāmin's songs (marked with ✧) and lyrics

Rāmin falls in love R82/T95/M61/D58 *ff.*	"What If My Fair Fortune?": wonders if she would love him in return (32.38–48) "O Heart, What's Wrong With You?": thinks Vis aloof, unattainable, and unkind (32.51–72)
Rāmin woos Vis R96/T114/M74/D77 *ff.*	"Why Do You Wail?": a reproach to the nightingales (39.28–33) Rāmin confesses his love to the Nurse: describes the state of lovers and sends a message to Vis (40.27–40) "No One Suffers Like A Lover": a message to Vis begging her for a boon (40.50–135)
R140/T182/M121/D145	"O Heart, What Will You Of My Soul?": curses his heart and Fate's cruelty when Vis is exiled (49.34–59)
Cycle 1: Trial by fire R156/T205/M137/D168	✧ "We Are Two Dear Lovers": a celebratory wine-song on his union with Vis, counseling his heart to take joy in the moment (55.85–122)
Cycle 2: The bed-trick R165/T219/M146/D181 *ff.*	✧ "O Wounded Heart, Don't Worry So": a *carpe diem* wine-song (59.9–15) ✧ "I Saw A Gliding Garden Cypress": the story of his love for Vis (59.18–27) ✧ "My Face Is Blanched": a lament (59.55–65) "Do You Think It Right?": a complaint to the storm that Vis sleeps indoors while he is battered by rain and snow (59.143–54) "O Idol, O Moon-Face, O Easily Sated": complains of Vis's scorn and neglect (59.159–81) "O Night So Fair and Fetching": an *alba* on the passing of the night (59.220–32)
Cycle 3: The Devils' Cavern R180/T239/M161/D203 *ff.*	"What Is This Love That Never Lessens?": when Vis is imprisoned (61.22–32) "Sigh, My Heart, For You're A Lover": a second despairing lament (61.34–43) "I'm That Broken-Hearted One": begs the breeze to bear his message to Vis (61.48–56) "Without You, My Love, I Don't Desire Life": a final song in which he pledges to find her (61.82–93)
R185/T247/M166/D211 *ff.*	"O Happy Abode, O Nest Of My Idol': a song to the fortress holding Vis (63.10–21) "Give Up Your Soul And Fear No Enemy": musters his courage (63.58–73) ✧ "O Lover, What Does It Matter": celebrates their love when they are united (63.131–42) ✧ "Blood-red Wine Scours Rust From The Heart": sung as they winter together (63.161–77) "O Moon! Bring The Cup Of Rose-red Wine!": a wine-song (63.179–89)
R196/T264/M178/D228 *ff.*	"O Fate, What Do You Want Of Me?": escapes Mobad and leaves Vis to be beaten; curses his fate and laments his broken heart (64.83–96) "You Cannot Know My State": song to Vis in her absence (64.104–14)
Cycle 4: In the garden R208/T281/M190/D247	"Since They Sundered Me From You": scales the garden wall and calls out to Vis, lamenting her absence (67.28–42)
The breakup R232/T317/M213/D283, R245/T338/M227/D304, R288/T404/M269/D373, R292/T410/M274/D380	"You Foolish, Misguided Heart!": slighted by Vis, he resolves to give her up (73.25–42) "How Strange!": a letter to Vis, telling her he's sick of their love and that she'll never see him again (77.5–62) "You Confused, Senseless Thing": blames his heart for misleading him (84.32–121) "What Is Sweeter?": resolves to return to Vis and die a martyr to love (85.26–121)
Mobad's overthrow R349/T495/M328/D462, R355/T505/M334/D472	"Kisses Were Arrows And Lips The Target": a lament on separation and the vagaries of time (115.41–49) "Perhaps My Days Of Calamity Have Reached Their End": a final song to his heart as he resolves to overthrow Mobad and prove his manliness (118.6–35)

in the first place must therefore rely on other evidence that implies shifts within the story's voice, mode, and register. Considerations of aurality are vital in this context: if we discard the contemporary practice of silent reading and reconfigure our experience of the text to one of *reciting* or *hearing*, we encounter a variety of cues that indicate modal shifts and perhaps prompt a change in oral delivery, especially if we remind ourselves that even as a book, *V&R* is likely to have been read aloud or performed before an audience.

Such cues take their clearest form when the storyteller indicates the beginning of a performance with such formulae as "He [Rāmin] said to his heart" (*bā del hami goft*, 49.33, 59.142, 61.21, 64.82, 85.25), "He sang a song" (*sorud-i goft*, 55.54, 55.84), "And then he said/sang" (*pas āngah goft*, 63.58, 63.178), and so on. Occasionally, the text is unequivocal that these are sung performances within the story; lines like "He sang a sweet song, accompanied by his tambour" (*sorud-i goft khwash bar rud-e ṭanbur*, 63.130) leave little room to debate the mode of delivery, at least within the imagined world of the text. The typical scenario, however, leaves it open to the reader or performer to decide how to interpret the verb *goftan*, whose range of connotations extends from regular speech to the declamation of poetry to the singing of songs. The lines between these categories are rarely discrete and often intersect. For example, when Vis is locked up in the Devils' Cavern, Rāmin performs a number of monologues; the first is introduced, "In secret, he said/sang to his heart" (*hami gofti nehāni bā del-e khwish*, 61.21), and since we have no formal features to tell us that this is a song or a lyric poem, we might conclude that this is a spoken piece. But immediately after this soliloquy ends, the narrator says, "He then began another *song* in his heart" (*be del kardi sorud-i digar āghāz*, 61.33), suggesting that both the following piece and the one that preceded it are indeed meant to be sung, or at least experienced *as though* they were, albeit only in the mind's ear.[75]

Rāmin's importance for the story lies at this intersection of orality, text, and performance. Back in the days when *Vis & Rāmin* was an oral text, performed and preserved by minstrels, one could guess that he was the obvious literary counterpart to the *gōsān*s who told his story; the doppelgänger effect would

75. We might compare this with how Richard de Fournival's (d. ca. 1260) description of the experience: "When one hears a romance read, one *hears* adventures as if one had really *seen* them" (*Car quant on ot .i. romans lire, on entent les aventures aussi com l'on les veïst en present*). Paul Zumthor, *Toward a Medieval Poetics*, trans. Philip Bennett, Originally published as *Essai de poétique médiévale* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972) (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 84.

have been especially visceral at those moments in the story when Rāmin sings and the minstrel performs Rāmin singing, creating a *mise-en-abîme* in which the boundaries of the two dissolve and allow them to occupy the same lyrical persona.[76] But Gorgāni's rendition of an old oral tale in New Persian following new standards of prosody and imagery introduces a further layer of abstractive distortion: just as the *V&R* we have before us is no longer an oral performance, but a written work that imagines and inscribes orality within it, so too are the songs literary abstractions of the minstrel tradition, performances that evoke and invite musicality through the figure of the minstrel.[77] They therefore bear considerable implications as to how we might imagine their historical performance, moments in which the text reflects on itself as a versified recasting of an oral work once performed by a minstrel, with a minstrel acting as the lead character. At such moments, the inscribed narrator assumes the role of a minstrel himself, directing his readers with rhetorical cues, gestures, and flourishes, emphasizing the circularity of these cycles.

It is thus the very presence of Rāmin that acts as one of the strongest textual cues for a performative and lyrically inflected interpretation of the dialogue. Because he and he alone is given the specific "job" as the story's minstrel, he invokes a kind of lyric modality whenever he appears. In a departure from the model of *V&G*, where the shift between epic and lyric, or story and song, is discretely indicated by paratextual and formal cues, the reader is instead invited through Rāmin to *imagine* the songs as a staged performance, even when his performances do not formally adhere to the conventions of the ghazal; to *hear* certain moments in the text lyrically; to *interpret* his monologues and soliloquies if not as literal songs then at least song-like, operating within the same thought-world as the lyric. Thus the lyric is abstracted from its formal features and transmuted into a more general *way of speaking and thinking* that is enacted through its designated representative. The invitation to hear, to imagine, and to experience the long monologues *as though* they were songs has important implications for the possibilities of the lyric

76. Cf. Segre's discussion of the shift between direct and indirect discourse in the European romance: "The interest of these transitions lies in the imposition on the writer of the character's temporal or spatial perspectives, and even of the character's affectivity (exclamations): the author takes the deixis and the psychological reactions on himself." "What Bakhtin Left Unsaid," 30.

77. See Michel Zink, "Suspension and Fall: The Fragmentation and Linkage of Lyric Insertions in Jean Renart's *Roman dde la rose* or *Guillaume de Dole*," in *Jean Renart and the Art of Romance*, ed. Nancy Vine Durling (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1997), 106, who emphasizes the abstracted, written aspect of the intercalated lyrics in his study on Jean Renart's *Roman de la rose*: "This very *written* romance is not a script. Its text cannot be reduced to a screenplay. It does not vanish in performance. The songs, on the contrary, are only evocations of songs."

voice in *Vis & Rāmin*; while the lyric generally clocks in at about ten or eleven lines lines—and indeed the majority of Rāmin's "actual" songs, insofar as they are called so in the text, adhere to that limit—many of his song-like soliloquies extend into the range of twenty or thirty lines, and occasionally entire chapters are dedicated to a narrative exploration of the lyrical voice, released to roam free through the boundless wilds of the masnavi.[78] By virtue of his profession, Rāmin inculcates and develops a distinctive voice that is not only mediated through song and soliloquy, but also grounded in the thought-patterns of that medium; just as he is the archetypal Minstrel, he is also a walking, talking Lyric, that is, someone who says what lyric would say if it were embodied as a character.[79] We might call such a process the lyricization of speech: thanks to the very fact that the formal boundary between his speech and song is so fuzzy, Rāmin's persona invites us to consider his whole world as a kind of lyrical performance, one in which he is guided by and embodies an "image of language" that expands and develops the common assumptions and tropes of the genre that forms the core of his identity.[80]

The alignment of a certain mode of speech with a specific speaking persona has a striking impact on the way characters are developed in this work. If we suppose that the "lyrical voice," with all its variations, complexities, and internal contradictions, is concatenated into and embodied through its ideal

78. Drawing from Zumthor, I might venture to say that the transition from lyric to narrative, from short-form to long-form, allows the further elaboration and actualization of the "latent narrativity" in lyric discourse, in which the speaking "I" is couched within and constantly referring to a wider apparatus of structures, ideologies, and archetypes. See Paul Zumthor, "Les Narrativités latentes dans le discours lyrique médiéval," in *The Nature of Medieval Narrative*, ed. Minnette Grunmann-Gaudet and Robin F. Jones (Lexington, KY: French Forum, 1980), 42:

> Even when loaded with descriptive amplifications, this "circumstantial" discourse remains in its first spirit a language of persuasion more than admission, ceaselessly repeating that the object that it speaks of has found, in the *I* that it utters, a suitable agent. But this object is nothing but a latency, a narrative potentiality, never entirely realized: poetic speech mediates between an ephemeral order that it keeps quiet about and an eternal order that it evokes without designating it.
>
> Ce discours "circonstanciel," même lourdement chargé d'amplifications descriptives, reste dans son élan premier un discours de persuasion plus que d'aveu, réitérant sans fin que l'objet dont il parle a trouvé, dans le *je* qui le prononce, un acteur adéquat. Mais cet objet n'est qu'une latence, une virtualité narrative, jamais entièrement réalizée: la parole poétique est intercession entre un ordre éphémère qu'elle tait, et un ordre éternel qu'elle évoque sans le désigner.

79. Cf. Zumthor's discussion of characters in medieval French poetry, which he describes as "the subject of the enunciation, a communicating psyche, integrated in the text and indissoluble from the way it functions: a talking id." Zumthor, *Toward a Medieval Poetics*, 44.

80. I borrow this term from Bakhtin's essay "Discourse in the Novel," where he posits multiple discursive "unities" that are found and contained within the novel, such that the novel is composed of the system of its manifold languages: "Characteristic for the novel as a genre is not the image of a man in his own right, but a man who is precisely the *image of a language*"; see Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 336, also 262, 277–79, 330–66.

performer, a young minstrel madly in love, this means that the other characters in the story are able to react to him using their own distinctive idiom. As it happens, only one other character gets the same amount of air-time as Rāmin, and that is of course his female counterpart, Vis, who has a number of soliloquies to her name in addition to the "Ten Letters." It is significant that she, too, is typecast to a certain degree: just as Rāmin's preferred vehicle of expression is the song, Vis's rhetorical performances are usually cast in the form of laments (*zāri, muya*). This designation carves out a particular discursive field through which Vis may resist, rebuff, or serve as a counter-example to the thought-world of Rāmin's lyrics.[81] Even more significant is the fact that by far the most outstanding example of Vis's rhetorical power is conveyed in written form, and not by sung performance. In short, through Vis and Rāmin we have the demarcation of two distinct spheres of discourse, one marked as male, sung, and lyrical, the other as female, written, and plaintive. When these modes are then abstracted from their formal constraints and reembodied as active characters who discourse and argue with one another, Gorgāni affords us an exciting dialectic through which the normative claims of each thought-world may be contested and negotiated, and ultimately, a powerful critique of the concept of romantic love.

The ordeal by fire

The first cycle, the story of the ordeal by fire, is relatively short and simple, featuring just one in-text performance of a song. It therefore serves as a good introduction to the ways the inscribed narrator can manipulate mode through rhetorical cues, shifting the object of his address, and interweaving motifs from a variety of performance genres. The embedded song is especially interesting, and serves as a prime example of the "lyrical abstraction" we discussed in the preceding paragraphs. On one hand, it is explicitly identified as a musical performance:

> With harp in hand, or sometimes tambour, charming Rāmin sat before Vis,
> And sang lays of lovers in the mode and melody of *delnavāzān*.[82] (55.83–84)

81. Bakhtin again speaks to this idea of a "thought-world" through his definition of language "not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a world view, even as a concrete opinion, insuring a *maximum* of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life"; *The Dialogic Imagination*, 271.

82. R156/T205/M137/D168:

نشسته پیشِ او رامینِ دلبر　　گهی طنبور و گاهی چنگ در بر
همی گفتی سرودِ مهربازان　　به دستان و نوای دلنوازان

On top of the word "song" (*sorud*) and the instruments he names, Gorgāni incorporates a number of musical terms that help establish the mood of the piece that is to follow. As the narrator says, the song is set to the tune (*navā*) and the mode (*dastān*) of "Lovers" (*delnavāzān*). To this day, many melodies (*gusha*), modes (*maqām*), and modal groupings (*dastgāh*) in Iranian music are identified by such terms, suggesting both their mood and content; "Agitation" (*shur*), "Flirting" (*kereshma*), "Burning and Melting" (*suz o godāz*), and "Lovers" (*ʿoshshāq*) are some prominent examples, and indeed the latter term is simply the Arabic equivalent of *delnavāzān*.[83] Thus, the introduction does not only tell the audience that the piece is a song, but provides additional details as to how it might have been played, and the mood it would have conjured. For all these specifics, the piece itself is *not* a (proto-)ghazal à la *Varqa & Golshāh*, not even close; there is nothing in its formal aspect that would suggest a change in performance or delivery. It is rather the inscribed textual cues of a performance setting, musical terminology, mood, content, and distinctive rhetorical techniques that evoke the feel of "ghazal," if not one in fact. It is rather a demonstration of mode-switching effected by the inscribed narrator, who modulates his voice between the personae of storyteller, poet, and singer, sometimes reaching out to his audience, sometimes turning his back to them and assuming the role of Rāmin. We will therefore focus on the narrator's role in the following tale.

The story begins, as all good stories should, once upon a time: "One day, Mobad sat down in contentment next to his heart's joy and began to speak of her love for Rāmin" (*neshasta shād ruzi bā delārām* · *sakhon goft az havā-ye Vis bā Rām*, 54.3). The placement of the story at an undetermined time alerts the audience that this is the start of a new episode, opening with the stasis of Mobad and Vis sitting together at court while Rāmin lurks in the sidelines. The episodic identity of this story is further established by a tangible change in Vis's character. Up to this point she had made no bones about her affair with Rāmin, but was quite willing to accept whatever punishment Mobad would mete out to her: "I've said the secret plainly before you; get angry if you want, or make your peace!" (*begoftam rāz pish-at āshkārā* · *to khwāhi khashm kon khwāhi modārā*, 47.56).[84] But now we begin to see a new Vis starting to emerge, a kind of

83. Mehdi Barkechli, *La musique traditionnelle de l'Iran* (Tehran: Secrétariat d'État aux Beaux-Arts, 1963), 39–56; Jean During and Zia Mirabdolbaghi, *The Art of Persian Music* (Washington, DC: Mage, 1991), 72–78; Lloyd Clifton Miller, *Music and Song in Persia: The Art of* Āvāz (Surrey, UK: Curzon, 1999), 74–86.

84. See page 233.

trickster figure who along with Rāmin delights in fooling her husband. We might recall from Chapter 4 how Mobad almost fought a second war with Viru, but was so ashamed by Viru's reply that he called off the campaign. Though the war is off, Mobad is still plagued by doubts about Vis's fidelity, and asks her what was going on in Media. She replies that Viru and Rāmin are like two peas in a pod and it was they who were off carousing together. "Youths please the hearts of other youths" (*javān rā ham javān bāshad delārām*, 54.15), she claims, a clever redeployment of the logic that justified her relationship with Rāmin. Mobad is reassured, but still craves certainty. He therefore asks if she would swear an oath affirming her innocence. Vis replies:

> Why should I fear an uncommitted sin? I shall show my straight ways by oaths.
> A soul does not writhe from crimes undone; a mouth does not stink from garlic uneaten.[85]
> (54.27–28)

Delighted, Mobad decides that a public ordeal will permanently settle all doubts that linger between them and the general populace.

> I'll go now and kindle a bright fire, and heap upon it musk and agarwood.
> In that fire, swear a solemn oath before the world's priests;
> The moment you swear, you'll absolve your soul of sin.
> There'll be no more words between us, no strife, argument, or fighting.[86] (54.33–36)

As Davis notes, the ordeal by fire is a topos that occurs in the *Ephesiaca*, the *Aithiopica*, the *Martyrdom of St. Parthenope* (probably derived from the now-fragmentary *Metiochos & Parthenope* and *Vāmeq & ʿAẕrā*), and of course the story of Siāvakhsh in the *Shāhnāma*, in which the chaste heroine (or hero, in the case of Siāvakhsh) is vindicated by passing through the flames unmolested.[87] Due to her particular circumstances, Vis does not have that luxury; the closest parallel to her situation is probably that of Iseut,

85. R152/T200/M133/D162:

چرا ترسم ز ناکرده گناهی   به سوگندان نمایم خوب راهی
نپیچد جرمِ ناکرده روانی   نگندد سیرِ ناخورده دهانی

86. R152/T200/M133/D163:

کنون من آتشی روشن فروزم   برو بسیار مشک و عود سوزد
تو آنجا پیشِ دیندارانِ عالم   بدان آتش بخور سوگندِ محکم
هر آن گاهی که تو سوگند خوردی   روان را از گنه پاکیزه کردی
مرا با تو نباشد نیز گفتار   نه پرخاش و نه پیگار و نه آزاد

87. Davis, *Panthea's Children*, 83–104.

where the fire would have told a different story had it engulfed her.[88] As the pyre rages and the nobles gather to witness the spectacle,

> Vis turned to Rāmin at that moment and said, “Look at this man,
> Who’s built a great fire, hoping to roast us on it.
> Come, let’s get away from here; we’ll burn him instead on those flames!
> Mobad fooled me yesterday into making an oath, with his sugar-sweet words;
> But I’ve put him in his own trap; I’m not the one to be caught by it![89] (55.16–22)

With the Nurse’s aid, the three conspirators seize a goodly sum of cash and gems from the palace, scramble through a secret passageway in the bathhouse, scale the garden walls using Rāmin’s turban as a rope, and escape the palace gates “hiding their faces like demons” (*cho divān chehra az mardom nehoftand*, 55.42). After being outfitted with gear and provender from a local (and apparently well-to-do) gardener, they ride out into the desert on a ten-day journey to Rayy, where Rāmin has a friend who can shelter them. Like the passages discussed in *Varqa & Golshāh*, this brief episode sounds as though it were coming straight out of an oral performance. The narrator makes his presence known throughout the story, crying out phrases like “Look at what a trick she pulled!” (*negar z-ānjā cheguna sākht dastān*, 55.35) and punctuating his story with regular asides that reflect on the narrative even as it unfolds, shifting at will between third-person narrative and direct address to the audience. Consider, for example, his description of the lovers’ journey through the desert, which combines story, description, and a didactic reflection on the nature of love:

> He fled from Marv into the desert like the wind; none born of Adam saw his face.
> A desert, the resting-place of ruin, as terrible as a dragon’s maw,
> Grew lovely by their faces, as fragrant as a druggist’s tray;
> The wasteland of salt-marsh, quick-sand, roaring lions, and simooms that rend your soul
> Seemed a bright garden to the two lovers, such joy they were in.
> . . . .
> For when a man in love is embraced by his lover, all ugliness becomes lovely in his eyes.

88. See Béroul, *Tristran*, vv. 892–1234.

89. R154/T202/M134/D164:

همان گه ویس در رامین نگاه کرد   مَرُو را گفت بنگر حال این مرد
که آتش چون بلند افروخت ما را   بدین آتش بخواهد سوخت ما را
بیا تا هر دو بگریزیم از ایدر   بسوزانیم او را هم به آذر
مرا بفریفت موبد دی به سوگند   به شیرینی سخنها گفت چون قند
مرُو را نیز دامِ خود نهادم   نه آن بودم که در دام اوفتادم

For him, desert and mountain are a garden, the banks of snow like a bed of roses.
A lover's like a drunkard, who cannot tell joy from pain in his intoxication.[90]
(55.50–53, 55–58)

Once safely ensconced in Rayy, the lovers settle in for a six-month getaway of drink and dalliance, a period that affords Rāmin ample opportunity to serenade his lover. The song performed is a long lay of thirty-eight verses, far longer than the proto-ghazals of five to eight lines found in *Varqa & Golshāh*. This is a perfect example of the techniques I call abstraction and lyricization, drawing from a variety of rhetorical devices that draw attention to itself as a discrete performance event within the text, declaimed in a lyrical register. A section of the song will be quoted in transliteration to demonstrate how this works.

hami gofti ke mā do nik yār-im *be yāri yak-digar rā jānsepār-im*
be hangām-e vafā ganj-e vafā-im *be chashm-e doshmanān tir-e jafā-im*
cho mā rā khorrami vo shādkhwāri-st *badandishān-e mā rā ranj o zāri-st*
be ranj az dusti siri nayābim *ze rāh-e mehrbāni rokh natābim*
be mehr andar cho do rowshan cherāgh-im *be nāz andar cho do beshkofta bāgh-im*
ze mehr-e khwish joz shādi nabinim *ke az piruzi arzāni bedin-im*
khwashā Visā neshasta pish-e Rāmin *chonān kabg-e dari dar pish-e shāhin*
khwashā Visā neshasta jām bar dast *ham az bāda ham az khubi shoda mast*
khwashā Visā be kām-e del neshasta *omid andar del-e Mobad shekasta*
khwashā Visā be khanda lab goshāda *lab āngah bar lab-e Rāmin nehāda*
khwashā Visā be masti pish-e Rāmin *ze 'eshq-ash kish hamchun kish-e Rāmin*
zehi Rāmin neku tadbir kardi *ke chun Visa yak-i nakhchir kardi*
zehi Rāmin be kām-e del hami nāz *ke dāri kām-e del rā nik anbāz*
zehi Rāmin ke dar bāgh-e beheshti *hamisha bā gol-e ordibeheshti*
zehi Rāmin ke joft-e āftāb-i *be farr-ash harche to khwāhi biābi*
hazārān āfarin bar keshvar-e Māh *ke chun Vis āmada-st az vay yak-i māh*
hazārān āfarin bar jān-e Shahru *ke dokht-ash Visa bud o pur Viru*

90. R155/T203/M135/D166. A very close parallel to this kind of storytelling can be found in Béroul's *Tristan & Iseut*, where the narrator comments on the lovers' exile in the forest of Morrois after their escape from the ordeal: "They had no bread; they lived on meat and ate nothing else. Is it any wonder that they became pale? They had torn clothes, made ragged by the branches. For a long time they fled through Morrois. They both suffered equally, but because of the other's presence, neither felt pain." (*Molt sont el bois del pain destroit / De char vivent, el ne mengüent / Que püent il, se color müent / Lor dras ronpent, rains les decirent / Longuement par Morrois fuïrent / Chascun d'eus soffre paine elgal, / Mais l'un por l'autre ne sent mal*, 1644–50) Béroul, *Tristran*, 78–79.

ز مرو اندر بیابان رفت چون باد   ندیده روی او را آدمی‌زاد
بیابانی که آرامِ بلا بود   ز ناخوشی چو کامِ اژدها بود
ز روی ویس و رامین گشته فرخار   ز بوی هر دوان چون طبلِ عطار
کویر و شوره و ریگِ رونده   سمومِ جان‌کش و شیرِ دمنده
دو عاشق را شده چون باغ خرّم   از آن شادی کجا بودند با هم
چو باشد مردِ عاشق در برِ دوست   همه زشتی به چشمش سخت نیکوست
کویر و کوه او را بوستانست   فرازِ برف همچون گلستانست
کجا عاشق به مردِ مست ماند   که در مستی غم و شادی نداند

hazārān āfarin bar jān-e Qāren	*ke az posht āmad-ash in māh-e rowshan*
hazārān āfarin bar bar khanda-ye Vis	*ke karda-st in jahān rā banda-ye Vis*

"We Are Two Dear Lovers," he sang, "giving our souls to the other in love!
We're the treasure of loyalty when loyalty's tested; we're the merciless arrow in the eyes of our foes.
Just as we are happy and joyous, our enemies are burdened and wretched.
We are never tired of toiling for love, our heads never turn from love's way.
In love and flirtation we're two shining lights, two gardens in bloom;
And see nothing but joy in our love, for we are deserving of it in our victory.
Rejoice, O Vis! seated before Rāmin, like a desert fowl before a hawk,
Rejoice, O Vis! with cup in hand, drunk on wine and beauty,
Rejoice, O Vis! seated with her heart's beloved, while Mobad's hopeful heart lies broken,
Rejoice, O Vis! her lips parted in laughter, which she presses upon Rāmin's lips.
Rejoice, O Vis! in drunkness with Rāmin, whose religion is your love, like yours for him.
Well done, Rāmin! you've done well to catch a prey like Vis,
Well done, Rāmin! you've a good match for the coquetry in your heart,
Well done, Rāmin! always with a new year's flower in a garden of spring,
Well done, Rāmin! whose mate is the sun, whose splendor is yours to take.
A thousand boons upon the Medes, whose country produced a moon like Vis.
A thousand boons upon Shahru's soul, whose daughter's Vis, whose son's Viru.
A thousand boons upon Qāren's life, from whose line came this shining moon.
A thousand boons upon smiling Vis, who's made this world Vis's slave."[91] (55.85–103)

The first lines of this poem echo the ghazal's sonority. A typical ghazal begins with a double-rhyme in its initial line, and here, five of the six opening lines contain the double-rhyme *-im*. This might not be considered so unusual, for the form of the masnavi itself demands that every line bear this double-line; but the high frequency of the same rhyme throughout this opening passage, especially in the context of a wine song, suggests an aural kinship with the ghazal form—one might think of it as an extended *maṭlaʿ*, the opening line that sets the tone of the piece.[92] Following this ghazal-esque introit, the song launches into three distinct sections that first address Vis, then congratulate Rāmin, then wish blessings on all and sundry. This is again not a typical feature to see in the ghazal, but it could be seen as the inverse of one of its signature characteristics, the refrain. Just as the ghazals in *V&G* acquired an aural autonomy through the repetition of the refrain "*ān-e man*" (see page 315), here too the anaphoric openings of

91. R156/T205/M137/D168.

92. The distinctive sonority of these continuous rhymes reflects what was not an uncommon practice in the quatrains and proto-ghazals of the tenth and eleventh centuries, which would rhyme all the hemistichs; this could be taken as further evidence that this section of *V&R* is a very singable one.

khwashā Visā, *zehi Rāmin*, and *hazārān āfarin* establishes a set of themes and variations that lends each section a rhetorical cohesion in short units of four or five lines. The internal compactness is reinforced by frequent parallelisms that bind the units together, especially in the concluding section, where praises are heaped upon a particular place or person "who" (*ke*) is in some way linked with Vis, establishing a second anaphora in the latter hemistich. These devices "expand" the amount of space available to treat a particular theme or topic from a single line to a cluster of four or five. Though the lines inside each cluster are more or less interchangeable, the units fit together to produce a well-rounded piece that encases the central characters, Vis and Rāmin, in a congratulatory opening and ending with blessings upon all.

Through such rhetorical cues and tactics, this passage implies a shift in mood and register from the narrative that surrounds it. Though not a lyric poem *per se*, it uses a number of techniques that recall the world of the ghazal for the audience and invite them to see this moment as taking place within it. It is difficult to speculate overmuch on the impact this mode-shift would have had on a live audience, but if we consider this episode as taking place in a performative setting, where the story of the ordeal by fire would have been told in a single session, this song would mark the emotional zenith of the piece, a moment that invites the audience to linger in adventure-time along with the performer of the poem and savor the poetic diction and affective power of these passages. The narrative (and implied narrator) has drawn in its audience through a series of dramatic moments and colorful adventures, interwoven with counsels and advice leveled directly at the listener; now, with the danger now past and the lovers free to celebrate, we are invited to vicariously take part in their joy with an ode to love and wine that resonates with the themes of the lyric and acquires a strong "sing-along" character with its persistent anaphora and parallelism; a narrative abstraction of a song proper that allows the text to function as an extended lyrical performance in lieu of an actual singer who might perform the poem in a similar manner.

Once the song is over, the cycle still needs to return to its *status quo*, and the voice that guides the story returns to a fairly straightforward presentation of events: we learn of Mobad's despair and retreat to the desert, followed by the intervention by his mother that allows the two brothers to reconcile. Thus concludes this short episode, which is, as we have discussed, a relatively stock scene in the love-story genre; one could imagine more elaborate versions being told for different occasions and audiences. In

the end, though, Vis and Rāmin must return to Mobad's court in Marv, none the worse for wear. The narrative ends with an eye-catching reference to its own cyclicity, indicating that the session is over and inviting the listeners to tune in again, same time, same channel, for the next episode in the loves of *Vis & Rāmin*:

> Mobad forgot his bygone woes; you'd say his demon became his angel.
> Once again, they took to song and merrymaking; the world to them was play and sport.
> In joy they sat, contented at heart, and watered the fields of pleasure with wine.[93]
> (58.81–83)

The bed-trick

The second cycle, the famous bed-trick, is considerably longer and more complex than the previous episode. Here Rāmin's songs are more than a rhetorical performance to connect the characters with the audience and linger in the delicious atemporal world of the lyric; they actively move the plot along and heighten the emotional power of each individual moment. It is also noteworthy that, unlike the previous passage discussed, the songs are much shorter, limited to a very manageable ten or so lines. In addition, much of the story takes place at the King's banquet, exactly the kind of setting in which songs were actually performed in court. For these reasons, this cycle is an excellent opportunity to explore the concept of *mise-en-abîme* we had previously discussed, a moment when the story can be seen to be performing itself in a way: a court minstrel, or in Gorgāni's time, a poet accompanied by the court musicians, telling the story of a minstrel performing before the king. By telling the story in such a setting, the minstrel-narrator can hardly help adopting the persona of his main character, as that character is doing in the story the exact same thing the narrator is doing at that moment. This scenario makes it all the more plausible to imagine these embedded songs as actually sung, or at the very least heard as sung in the mind's ear. Let us examine, then, the complex interaction of song and story in this classic story of

93. R165/T218/M145/D180:

فرامش کرد آزارِ گذشته   تو گفتی دیوِ موبد شد فرشته
دگر باره به رامش دست بردند   جهان را بازی و سخره شمردند
به کامِ دل همی بودند خرّم   ز می دادند کشتِ کام را نم

the old switcheroo.[94] The story announces its opening with the classic "one day" formula:

> Now that all three—the King, Vis, and Rāmin—were once again united in love,
> Having forgiven the others' sins, having cleansed the rancor from their hearts,
> The auspicious King of Kings was seated one day in joy with lovely Vis,
> A crystal goblet in his hand, whose ruby wine matched her cheeks,
> He summoned noble Rāmin and bade him sit, delighted to behold their faces.[95] (59.1–5)

Rāmin first entertains the king by playing on his harp; then, as the king looks on in contentment, he takes up "a sweet song about his own state" (*be ḥāl-e khwad sorud-e khwash begofti*, 59.8):

> O Wounded Heart, Don't Worry So
> For you are neither stone nor brass
> Don't act so cross with your beloved
> Don't show the mania inside your heart
> Keep yourself happy with drink and a song
> Let the dust of your worries be settled with wine
> If only a moment of life remains
> The pains of this world will come to an end
> The very spheres that maligned you so
> Will repent one day and bring you your due
> And for days on end, your heart will be gladdened
> Finally free of these cares and concerns
> So what if the world has changed your condition?
> For so too the world's condition will never stay constant[96] (59.9–15)

This poem in many ways is a fairly conventional appeal to patience, endurance, and the solace that may be found in wine. However, many of its details seem appropriate to the particular position of Rāmin's

94. See Wendy Doniger, *The Bedtrick: Tales of Sex and Masquerade* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) for a survey and discussion of this topos.

95. R165/T218/M146/D181:

چو شاه و ویس و رامین هر سه با هم　　دگر باره شدند از مهر بی‌غم
گناهِ رفته را پوزش نمودند　　به پوزش کینه را از دل زدودند
شهِ شاهان به پیروزی یکی روز　　نشسته شاد با ویسِ دل‌افروز
بلورینِ جام را بر کف نهاده　　چو روی ویس در وی لعلِ باده
بخواند آزاده رامین را و بنشاند　　به روی هر دو کامِ دل همی راند

96. R165/T219/M146/D181:

مدار ای خسته‌دل اندیشه چندین　　که نه یکباره سنگینی نه رویین
مکن با دوست چندین ناپسندی　　ز دل منمای چندین مستمندی
زمانی دل به رودِ و باده خوش دار　　به جامِ باده بنشان گردِ تیمار
اگر ماندست لَختی زندگانی　　سر آید رنجهای این جهانی
همان گردون که بر تو کرد بیداد　　به عذر آید ترا روزی دهد داد
بسا روزا که تو دلشاد باشی　　وزین اندیشه‌ها آزاد باشی
اگر حالِ تو دیگر کرد گیهان　　مرُو را هم نماند حال یکسان

character. His self-urging to hide his emotions before the king is certainly apropos to his situation, and his subsequent affirmation that his state will change if he only gives it enough time is equally infused with subtextual messages: the word is out, however obliquely, that Mobad's turn with Vis will come to an end, and Rāmin will be there to snatch her up when it comes. The narrative seems keen to show us how Mobad responds to these subtle hints, in a way similar to Hamlet's staging of a play within the play to gauge Claudius's reaction. Mobad grows drunk and melancholic; he requests another song from Rāmin, "one about love, sweeter than the last one" (*be ḥāl-e ʿeshq az ān pishin shirintar*, 59.17). Rāmin obliges the king's request and sings a praise to beauty, but this song too is lifted out of the "ancient despair" within his heart (*az del bar gereft anduh-e dirin*, 59.18):

I Saw A Gliding Garden Cypress
    I saw a moon speak in the sky
I saw a blooming springtime garden
    A worthy bed for sowing love
There I beheld a rose, a springtime rose
    A paradise of scent and hue
A dispeller of grief in times of sorrow
    A delight to behold in times of joy
I gave my heart to love it forever
    I chose to be a gardener above all other trades
And now I walk among its tulip beds
    And gaze upon its springtime blossoms
I'm the garden's companion, by day and by night
    While my ill-wisher hangs by the door like a knob
Why must the jealous ones persist in their envy?
    For God bestows each one his due
The turning spheres deserve the moon
    For God bestowed her unto him[97] (59.19–27)

97. R166/T219/M146/D182. I'm taking a bit of a poetic license in the last line; lacking gender markings, there is no grammatical indication that the sky would be masculine or the moon feminine, and the roles could easily be reversed if we want to depart from saying "it." However, I feel that in the context of the poem and what comes after it, the implied analogy between the moon and the sky and Vis and Mobad is probably a just one.

رونده سرو دیدم بوستانی   سخنور ماه دیدم آسمانی
شکفته باغ دیدم نوبهاری   سزای آنکه در وی مهر کاری
گلی دیدم درو اردیبهشتی   نسیم و رنگِ او هر دو بهشتی
به گاهِ غم سزای غمگساری   گهِ شادی سزای شادخواری
سپردم دل به مهرش جاودانی   ز هر کاری گزیدم باغبانی
همی گردم میانِ لاله‌زارش   همی بینم شکفته نوبهارش
من اندر باغ روز و شب مجاور   بد اندیسم چو حلقه مانده بر در
حسودان را حسد بردن چه باید   به هرکس آن دهد یزدان که شاید

This poem is an interesting example of a kind of parable, like the minstrel's tale of the bull and the mountain. Here, Rāmin describes himself in a coded language steeped in the tropes and iconography of the ghazal mode: we have the all the stock motifs of the cypress, the garden, the springtime, the envious rival, the moon, and the poetic voice directed inwards in a kind of self-contemplation. Taken out of context, the poem would not seem too different from the kind of lover's lament one finds in the lyric poetry of the Abbasid court. Yet when brought into the context of the wine-banquet and read as a performed text before the king, its latent meanings multiply and its rhetorical effect becomes electrifying. Who does Rāmin intend when he states that the moon is best matched within the sky? In relation to the song that preceded it, and in the context of the story as a whole, we might read this as a continuation of Rāmin's coded claims to Vis: just as he has chosen to be a gardener to best tend the garden, so too will his future position as the sky provide the best match for the moon. Mobad seems to have interpreted the message differently, however: "When the noble king heard this song," the narrator tells us, "love became new in his heart for joy" (*cho beshnid in sorud āzāda khosrow · ze shādi gasht ʿeshq andar del-ash now*, 59.28). Perhaps he sees the poem's closing lines as a concession stating that howevermuch the speaker may yearn for the moon in the sky, the moon is by rights the sky's alone. Whatever be the cause of his joy, the king summons Vis to bring him another cup of wine. As she passes him the cup, Vis asks whether the Nurse might join them; the Nurse is duly summoned and takes her place at Vis's side, while Rāmin, now assigned the role of cupbearer, goes about the room, drinking as much as he dishes out (*be shādi may hami dād o hami khward*, 59.39). The company is now flushed in wine; as Rāmin passes Vis's couch, he bends down to make a whispered proposition: "Drink this wine in joy and song, and we'll water with it the field of love" (*be shādi vo be rāmesh khwar may-e nāb · ke kesht-e ʿeshq rā az may dehim āb*, 59.42). Smiling, Vis, pledges a renewal of their vows and agrees to the tryst.

> Don't prefer anyone over me in your heart, for I hold you dearer than my soul;
> Let joy be yours in me, let joy be mine in you, let you remember me as I remember you.
> Let our two hearts be mines of joy; let Mobad's heart be a blaze of sorrow.[98] (59.46–48)

سزاوارست با مه چرخِ گردان　　ازیرا مه بدو دادست یزدان

98. R167/T221/M147/D183:

به دل مگزین تو بر من دیگران را　　کجا من بر تو نگزینم روان را
تو از من شاد باشی من ز تو شاد　　مرا تو یاد باشی من ترا یاد

As in the previous cycle, these words position Vis and Rāmin as the tricksters of the story, this time using the classic fabliau topos in which a young wife's old husband is cuckolded in full view.[99] There is no anxiety like we encountered in the first third of the work whether Vis or Rāmin are truly meant for each other, or if their mutual feelings are assured. We are firmly in "adventure-time," as Bakhtin would say, and the characters' positions *vis-à-vis* each other are known and well-established. Indeed, Mobad comes across as the victim, not the villain in this scene: "He heard that which was not to be heard, but he manfully kept his heart in control" (*shenida kard bar khwad nāshenida · be mardi dāsht del rā āramida*, 59.50)—a striking choice of words, given the anxieties of impotency and masculinity that pervade his character. Instead of raging at the lovers, he devises a stratagem to pull them apart:

> He told the Nurse to pour the wine, and said to Rāmin, "Take up your harp, Rāmin,
> And sing us a song of lovers. Speak less, and make us all the happier!"[100] (59.51–52)

At this, Rāmin's heart begins to roar in passion (*shoda Rāmin ze mehr-e del khorushān*, 59.53), and he grasps his harp to play. At this moment, right before performing the song, the narrator addresses his audience: "He sang a song both sweet and sad; when you drink wine, listen to this" (*sorud-i goft bas shirin o delgir · to niz ar may hami giri chonān gir*, 59.54). This strikes me as a strong indication that such a poem could have been addressed to the minstrel's own audience as they drink their wine, listening. If such is the case, the minstrel is practically becoming Rāmin in this scene, entertaining his patrons with the same song Rāmin sings to Mobad. The song is furthermore of singable length, placed within the conventional themes and topography of the ghazal:

> My Face Is Blanched in the pain of our distance
> Wash this sallow face with wine
> This rosy wine will make roses of my cheeks
> And cleanse the rust of worry from my soul
> For when my face is red as the Judas-tree

دلِ ما هر دوان کانِ خوشی باد　　　دلِ موبد ز تیمار آتشی باد

99. Cf. Lewis, "One Chaste Muslim Maiden and a Persian in a Pear Tree," 140–64. Such a scene suggests the existence of a number of independent episodes about the lovers, some of them funny, some of them poignant, that would have been in circulation when the poem was committed to writing.

100. R167/T221/M148/D183:

به دایه گفت دایه می تو بگسار　　　به رامین گفت رامین چنگ بر دار
سرودِ عاشقان بر چنگ بسرای　　　سخن کم گوی و شادی‌مان بیفزای

My foe knows nothing of my secret pain
And I'll deploy all the tricks that I have
Lest I reveal the pain in my heart to him
That's why I'm smashed and boozing, day and night
For I see no way out save in drunkenness
What joy there is in bibbing and booze
Through it, you allay my helplessness
I'm always in my cups, forever tipping
That I may never take heed of my grief
It seems my moon-faced one should know my secret well
For I burn so in my love for her
Though I seize my soul from savage lions
Love forever takes my life away
O God, helper of the helpless!
You know the cure for me and for others
Just as you bring the shining day out of night
You'll bring my joy out of this trial[101] (59.55–65)

Like the other songs we've discussed so far in this scene, it is helpful to move beyond the literal content of this piece and draw out its additional valences as a performance act. Though presented as an ode to wine, the theme of this song is secrecy: it is the wine that will restore the lover's pallid color and keep him from dwelling on the pain of his separation, ostensibly keeping his secret desire under wraps. Yet the wine, paradoxically, is also the vehicle of disclosure; just as a drunkard cannot hold back his tongue, so too Rāmin's ode to wine adopts a manner of speaking that cannot but reveal his inner state. The narrator tells his audience as much after the fact, when he says, "Though love was hidden within his heart, the signs of his concealment came forth" (*agar che dāsht mehr-e del nehāni · padid āmad nehāni rā neshān-i*, 59.68). A similar moment of disclosure through music occurs in the Andalusian story of *Bayāḍ*

101. R167/T221/M148/D184:

مرا از داغِ هجران زرد شد روی   به می زردی ز روی من فرو شوی
میِ گلگون کند گلگون رخانم   زداید زنگِ اندیشه ز جانم
چو باشد رنگِ رویم ارغوانی   نداند دشمنم دردِ نهانی
به هر چاره که بتوانم بکوشم   مگر دردِ دل از دشمن بپوشم
از آن رو روز و شب مست و خرابم   که جز مستی دگر چاره نیابم
چه خوشی باشد آن میخوارگی را   کزو درمان کنی بیچارگی را
همیسه مست باشم می گسارم   بدان تا از غم آگاهی ندارم
خبر دارد تو گویی ماه رویم   که من چونین به داغِ مهرِ اویم
اگر چه من ز شیران جان ستانم   همی بستاند از من عشقِ جانم
خدایا چارهٔ بیچارگانی   مرا و جز مرا چاره تو دانی
چنان کز شب بر آری روزِ روشن   ازین محنت بر آری شادیِ من

Figure 8: Bayāḍ performs for the ladies at the *majlis*. Source: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Maler_der_Geschichte_von_Bay%C3%A2d_und_Riy%C3%A2d_002.jpg; accessed 11 June 2015. The image has been cropped and modified.

and Riyāḍ (w. early thirteenth c. CE): the two lovers, who have fallen in love with one another through their eyes but have yet to divulge their secret, are seated together in a musical gathering (*majlis*), passing around the lute, singing songs of love, and discussing the effects of love on lovers. But then Riyāḍ, the slave-girl, picks up the lute, and, looking at Bayāḍ, sings the following song:

> Truly the fires of love have burned in my heart
> And melted my body from the pains of love—
> I was left without my soul, and I spent the night sleepless,
> Trying to contain the tears caused by the ardor of love.
> There is an amorous passion in my soul, whose flames never go out,
> And my patience has betrayed me, as did my good sense.
> Sorrows torment me with burning sighs,
> Together with a love lodged between my breast and my heart.[102]

And as she sings, tears start to roll down her face. The jig is up—she loves Bayāḍ—and with that, the gathering is ruined, the hostess furious. Though the words Riyāḍ sang were safely within the bounds of conventional love poetry, this unintended revelation of her emotions were enough to break protocol and cause a scandal. So too does the narrator speak of Rāmin's poem as he sings before Mobad:

102. Cynthia Robinson, *Medieval Andalusian Courtly Culture: Ḥadīth Bayāḍ wa-Riyāḍ* (London: Routledge, 2007), 34.

How could Rāmin's heart evince its patience, in such a place, in such a state?
Young, drunk, besotted, his harp in hand, his beloved sitting next to another lover?
It would not be a shock that some sign appeared of his love-lorn condition.
Just as when water accumulates, it cannot but seep below its own dam,
So too does love, when it grows excessive, reject all advice and wisdom.[103] (59.70–74)

Now that Rāmin has inadvertently revealed the charade he has been playing, Mobad's heart is once again filled with pain; drunk and annoyed, he leads Vis back to his chambers and scolds her for her brazen flirting with Rāmin, "sitting there before me as though you were alone!" (*neshasta rāst pish-e man chonān-id · ke pendārid tanhā har dovān-id*, 59.85).[104] Vis's heart wells in pity for the old man—"When she heard these words, a burning fire dropped into her heart" (*cho beshnid in sakhonhā Vis-e delkash · fetād andar del-ash suzanda ātash*, 59.106)—and she assures him that she loves him more than anyone else: "Never suppose that I'd be happy with a cheater like Rāmin" (*negar tā to napendāri ke hargez · be man khorram bovad Rāmin-e gorbez*, 59.111).[105] His anxieties dispelled for the moment, Mobad goes to bed and falls asleep.

Thus concludes the banquet, and it is worth taking a moment to reflect on the many insights that can be gleaned from reading the songs in this scene as a kind of imagined performance. As we have discussed, the performance context of medieval Persian poetry, with all the accompanying elements of vocal modulation, physical gesture, and musical performance, adds a critical dimension to the delivery and interpretation of the words on the page.[106] Such historical practices are here inscribed into a fictional world, creating a *mise-en-abîme* when the narrator performs Rāmin as Rāmin performs before Mobad. The songs are an ideal length to be recited or sung as such, perhaps accompanied by the same harps and tambours, the same melodies and modes, that the text tells us were used. Armed with these additional

103. R168/T222/M148/D184:

دلِ رامین صبوری چون نمودی　　به چونان جای چون بر جای بودی
جوان و مست عاشق چنگ در بر　　نشسته یار پیشِ یارِ دیگر
نباشد بس عجب گر زو نشانی　　پدید آید ز حالِ مهربانی
چنان آبی که گردد سخت بسیار　　بسنبد زیرِ بند خویش ناچار
همیدون مهر چون بسیار گردد　　به پیشش پند و دانش خوار گردد

104. He closes with a wonderful proverb: "Even if the King turns into an ass before you, don't be so bold to jump on his back!" (*agar gardad-at ruzi pādshā khar · makon gostākhi vo manshin bar u bar*, 59.91).

105. Iseut, incidentally, employs the same stratagem to conceal her love for Tristan before Marc: "That sycophant is always toadying at my side with his flattery, and protesting how much he esteems me." See Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, 225.

106. See Lewis, "Reading, Writing, and Recitation," 99–109, 293–94, 438–48; Brookshaw, "Palaces, Pavilions and Pleasure-gardens," 199–201, 209; Khan, "The Broken Spell," 66–75.

clues to imagine the performance, and "hearing" it through the mouth of Rāmin, we can see how even the most conventional language can produce pointed meaning specific to the context of its deployment. Rāmin's invocation of the tropes and symbols of the ghazal landscape invites both Mobad and *V&R*'s audience to interpret their meaning, demonstrating how the same words may be used to simultaneously express and conceal a communiqué, aided by the extratextual elements of gesture, phrasing, address, and mode. That such songs have power is evident in the impact they have on Mobad and the way they influence his choices; at the same time, we learn more about Mobad by the way he interprets the words, expanding and enriching his personality as a fictional character. Thus, the songs are not merely lyrical asides for ornamental beauty (although they certainly are aesthetically pleasing, and would lose their effectiveness if they were not), nor are they a pause button to give a character time to voice his inner sentiments; but they self-reflexively demonstrate the power of this mode of language to produce both affect and effect in its listeners.

We may forego following the second half as closely, as Rāmin's poems take on a different and by now more familiar function. They are not presented in the next as public performances, nor do they elicit reactions from the audience in the story. They are rather the classic inward-looking lyric delivered with the speaker's back turned to his audience, and do not immediately depend on the narrative to work as poems in and of themselves. Nonetheless, they do interface with the surrounding story in interesting ways, thus highlighting another aspect of the Gorgāni's craft we have not yet explored: the way he takes the conventional thematics of the lyric and works them into a narrative space such that they "spill over" the musical form that contains them.[107]

After Mobad goes to bed, neither Vis nor Rāmin can sleep. Vis lies abed, pondering her precarious options caught between a jealous husband and an illicit lover (*ze Rāmin o ze Mobad bar del-ash bār*, 59.123); Rāmin, meanwhile, has ventured out onto the roof of the palace, while snow falls heavy in the dark night. Framed by this backdrop, he performs another song:

> DO YOU THINK IT RIGHT, my idol
>   With you in bed, with me in the rain and snow
> Having taken your other lover in your embrace

107. Cf. the discussion of "Songs as Plot" in Boulton, *The Song in the Story*, 120–32.

Snuggled between the silks and furs?
I'm left out here, friendless, loveless
My two feet helpless in the mud of anguish
While you're asleep and cannot know
The bitter tears your lover sheds
Pour fire upon my soul, O clouds[108]
For all pains are sweet to the love-lorn
Were I to sigh, your vapors would burn away
And the world would blaze in everlasting fire
O wind, be fierce for a while
Turn the world over in your power
Shake her tresses from the pillow
And drive the sleep from her eyes
Bring my lonely plaint to her ears
Tell her how heartsore I am
Sitting alone, in such a state
Snow all around, to my enemies' delight
Perhaps her heart will burn for me a little
For even my rivals cannot but pity me
If a star came out from behind this cloud
It would weep more than I at my pain[109] (59.143–154)

This poem employs many of the conventional images found in the lovers' laments in Persian and Arabic lyrical poetry. The invocation of the faithless beloved, and the contrast of her comfort and luxury against the poet's wretchedness, is a common motif; so too is the insistence that she is oblivious to the poet's suffering. The poem operates in its own world and does not need the greater narrative context to work; indeed, it runs directly contrary to some of the details we know to be true. Vis is actually not asleep,

108. The critical editions all say "snow" (*barf*), but Gvaxaria suggests a revision that the original word was "cloud" (*abr*). See "Notes on the Persian Text of Gorgani's Vis o Ramin," 60. As an additional note, the image seems to me a little better in Morrison's rendering, "Fall, snow, on my soul full of fire," but I feel that the syntax suggests something closer to what I wrote.

109. R170/T226/M151/D189:

نگارینا روا داری بدین سان — تو در خانه من اندر برف و باران
تو دیگر دوست را در بر گرفته — میانِ قاقم و سنجاب خفته
من اینجا بی‌کس و بی‌یار مانده — دو پای اندر گلِ تیمار مانده
تو در خوابی و آگاهی نداری — که عاشق چون همی گرید به زاری
ببار ای برف بر جانِ من آتش — که بی‌دل را همه رنجی بوَد خوش
گر آهی بر زنم ابرت بسوزد — جهان همواره ز آتش بر فروزد
الا ای باد تندی کن زمانی — در آن تندی بهم بر زن جهانی
بجنبان گیسوانش را ز بالین — ز چشمش زاستر کن خوابِ نوشین
به گوشش در فگن آوازِ زارم — بگو با وی که من چون دل‌فگارم
به تنهایی نشسته بر چه حالم — به برف اندر به کامِ بدسگالم
مگر لَختی دلش بر من بسوزد — که بر من خود دلِ دشمن بسوزد
اگر زین ابر بیرون آید اختر — به دردِ من ز من گرید فزون‌تر

but lying awake and restless herself; nor has she taken Mobad into her embrace, as Rāmin accuses her of doing. It is very much like the incongruity we saw in *Varqa & Golshāh*, where Varqa asks Golshāh why she left him when she was clearly abducted against her will. But alone and with no one to contradict him, Rāmin can say whatever he wants; and so he turns to the elements, the wind and snow, challenging them to overcome him, begging them to send his message to his beloved.

Rāmin's message to the wind is the crux that links the poem back into the narrative world that surrounds it. The wind, along with other elements, is a frequent object of address in lyric poetry, but these tend to exist as an abstract interlocutor, a conceit that allows the poet to voice his message and send it away to its addressee. But the storm that buffets Rāmin is particular to this occasion, and bears a stronger "personality" as an active agent; it is violent, fierce, and laden with snow, specifics that tie the poem back into the narrative. Thus, this lyric poem is a bit of a hybrid creation: it works on its own as a poem to be recited or sung in isolation, but at the same time, it is given additional presence, buttressed by the story that frames it. Performed within this context, it gains a dramatic immediacy that lessens the distance between the audience and the story. As the narrator performs Rāmin's direct speech, the audience can no longer see him as a purely fictional character who only lives and acts in the mind's eye: there he is, standing before us in the figure of the narrator, singing the lament of his love and begging the wind to wake Vis and bring her to him. This, indeed, is what happens. The lover's lament does not end with the conclusion of the song, unlike a ghazal that necessarily ends when the speaker stops speaking, but flows back into the narrative.

> When Vis perceived the movement on the roof, Rāmin's plaintive wails reached her ears.
> The frenzy of love descended upon her soul, and at that instant she sent the Nurse to him.[110]
> (59.155–56)

The Nurse soon comes back with Rāmin's message, another lyric poem that describes his suffering in much the same terms as in the previous poem. "O idol, O moon-face, O easily sated," (*negārā, māhruyā, zudsirā*, 59.159) it begins, showing again the extent to which Rāmin's language of love depends on the logic of the lyric to function.

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110. R171/T226/M152/D189:

چو ویس آگاه شد از جنبشِ بام — به گوش آمد مرو را زاریِ رام
شتابِ دوستی در جانش افتاد — همان دم دایه را پیشش فرستاد

O Idol, O Moon-Face, O Easily Sated
Why are you so haughty over me? What have you eaten to be sated of my love?
My love and loyalty is as you ever saw; why are you no longer so?
My blanket is snow, yours silk and ermine; I'm bursting with passion, while you have none.
Your life is blissful, mine is a burden; your lot is delight, mine is distress.
Perhaps our Creator created us thus: he gave you contentment and gave me suffering.
. . . .
My lot is to always be your slave, to always live in misery;
You must be joyful, for joy you befits; fulfill your desires, for you are my queen.
You know that I'm like one drunk, my heart bound by those musky locks.
I've no patience or pleasure this dark night; sleep has fled my eyes and patience my heart,
Climbing wall and roof like a madman, the world grown dark before my eyes;
My hopes are pinned on beholding you—don't burn this hopeful heart of mine!
Turn my dark night into day; turn me into a shelter by your side.
The only refuge in such burning cold is a lover's embrace.[111] (59.160–64, 167–74)

Rāmin's message operates within the rhetorical and logical world of the lyric, alighting upon a range of well-trodden topoi for a discourse on separation from the beloved. First accusing Vis of disloyalty, disinterest, and neglect for her lover, it then reaffirms the lover's ceaseless suffering, his worthlessness compared to his beloved, and willing self-abnegation for her sake, and concludes—inverting the claims of the previous trope—with a plea that she show him the smallest of favors and allow him to see her. Left on its own, it would be a rather uninteresting lover's plaint; but when read in the context of the narrative, it aids the reader in developing a sense of Rāmin as an active literary character. Most importantly, this message reveals that Rāmin's viewpoint, at least as he expresses it in lyric form, is not capable of taking in Vis as an independent actor, but rather frozen in her archetypal role as the poet's merciless beloved. However, as we then step out of this lyrical form and get a chance to see how Vis reacts to this language,

111. R171/T227/M152/D190:

چرا یکباره بر من چیر گشتی   چه خوردی تا ز مهرم سیر گشتی
من آنم در وفا و مهربانی   که تو دیدی چرا پس تو نه آنی
من اندر برف و تو در خزّ و دیبا   من از تو ناشکیبا تو شکیبا
تو در شادی و من در رنج و تیمار   تو با خوشی و من با درد و آزار
مگر دادارمان قسمت چنین کرد   مرا باید همیشه اندهان خورد
تو شادی کن که شادی را سزایی   بران کامت که بر من پادشایی
همی‌دانی که من چون مستمندم   به دل دربندِ آن مشکین کمندم
شبِ تاریک و من بی‌صبر و بی‌کام   ز دیده خواب رفته وز دل آرام
چو دیوانه دوان بر بام و دیوار   شده جمله جهان بر چشمِ من تار
به دیدارت همی امید دارم   مسوزان این دلِ امیدوارم
شبِ تاریک بر من روز گردان   کنارِتو مرا جان‌بوز گردان
به سرمای چنین سختِ جهان‌سوز   نشاید جز کنارِ دوست جان‌بوز

we can realize that Rāmin's is a closed worldview that does not entirely line up with the story the narrator has given us, nor with the viewpoint of Vis, who of course is not at all "sated." Upon receiving Rāmin's message from the Nurse, she devises a trick to keep her husband occupied while she goes out to visit her lover.

> You must lie with him as lovers lie:
> Give him your back and turn your face away, for he is drunk and drunkards are fools.
> Your body is quite like mine; if he should press against you, what would he notice?
> As drunk and senseless as he is, how could he tell skin from skin?[112] (59.186–89)

This is of course the famous bed-trick, another fabliau motif, that has elicited so many comparisons with *Tristan & Iseut*. As the Nurse keeps the bed warm and Vis and Rāmin cavort on the rooftop, Mobad wakes up and immediately senses something is different—"How could a bow be mistaken for an arrow?" (*kojā bāshad kamān mānanda-ye tir*, 59.208) the narrator asks in an aside, referring to Vis's straight height against the bent back of her Nurse—and leaps from his bed, thinking that a demon (*div*) has taken Vis's place. His angry shouts stir Rāmin, who realizes that the game is up and it is time to go. This elicits the final occasion for a song in this sequence, an address to the fading night:

> O Night So Fair And Fetching
>   You are night to all and day to us
> When shining day dawns on others
>   The darkness of my night descends
> The dark-dispelling dawn is now arrived
>   O heart of mine, prepare to receive an arrow
> What a happy thing union would be
>   If there wasn't separation in the end
> O world, you do nothing but evil deeds
>   You dole out joy and take it right back
> If once you give me a mouthful of nectar
>   You follow it up with a chaser of poison
> What an evil day, so long ago,
>   When love became sweet within my heart
> That day, I sailed out upon the open seas

112. R172/T228/M153/D191:

ترا با وی بباید خفت ناچار	برآیینی که خسپد یار با یار
بدو کن پشت و رو از وی بگردان	که او مستست و باشد مست نادان
تنِ تو بر تنِ من نیک ماند	اگر بپسایدت کی باز داند
بدان مستی و بیهوشی همی کاوست	چگونه باز داند پست از پست

Contenting my heart with every evil that befell
My evil fortune cast me into a love
That trumps a love for mother or child
What pain is this, that cannot be spoken?
Whom do I beg to come to my aid?
When I am close, I fear separation
When I am far, I cannot bear the distance
I know no captive like myself
Nor none to aid me like the Creator
O God, heed my heart's complaint
For I have no one in the world but you[113] (59.220–32)

This poem is another borrowing from a familiar lyrical topos, the *alba* scene in which the poet addresses the fading night. Again, in comparison with the later ghazal tradition in Persian (or the troubadours of far-off Occitania), the poem does not strictly adhere to the formal expectations of the topos: it does not combine narrative with direct speech, nor does a third party (the watchman, the muezzin, the nurse) interrupt the blissful repose and tell the lovers it is time to go. Both functions, however, are fulfilled by the narrative context in which the poem is situated, leaving Rāmin free to explore the thematics of the *alba* moment in the open-ended form of the masnavi. In this regard, there is indeed some overlap with the short-form model; among the examples he collated in his discussion of this topos in Persian poetry, Franklin Lewis cites this line by Sanāʾi (d. 525/1131 or 535/1141), repeating Rāmin's wish that his happy night never end:

Bā hejr-e to har shab ze pay-e vaṣl-e to guyam
Yā rab to shab-e ʿāsheq o maʿshuq makon ruz

113. R173/T230/M154/D193:

شبا بس خرّمی بس دلفروزی   همه کسی را شبی ما را چو روزی
چو هر کس را بر آید روزِ روشن   ز تاریکی پدید آمد شب من
به نزدیک آمد اینک بام شبگیر   دلا بپسیچ تا بر دل خوری تیر
خوشا کارا که بودی آشنایی   اگر با وی نبودستی جدایی
جهانا جز بدی کردن ندانی   دهی شادی و بازش می ستانی
گر از نوشم دهی یک‌بار کامی   به پایانش دهی از زهر جامی
بدا روزا که بود آن روز پیشین   که عشق اندر دلِ من گشت شیرین
من آنگه کشتی اندر موج بردم   که دل بر هر بدی خرسند کردم
قصای بد مرا در مهری افگند   فزون از مهرِ مام و مهرِ فرزند
چه دردست اینکه نتوان گفت با کس   کرا گویم که تو فریادِ من رس
چو نزدیکم همی ترسم ز دوری   چو دورم نیست بر دردم صبوری
نه همچون خویشتن دانم اسیری   نه جز دادار دانم دستگیری
خدایا هم تو فریادِ دلم رس   که جز تو نیست در گیتی مرا کس

In your absence every night,
in search of union
I proclaim:
O Lord,
do not turn
the night of
the lover and beloved
to
day.[114]

With this farewell address, the episode of the bed-trick has run its course, and the narrator, who had been largely absent—or rather occupied by playing the role of Rāmin—steps back in to guide it to a successful ending. Though Rāmin is ready to murder his brother on the spot, Vis counsels him to be patient, saying, "Your toil will come to an end some day; you shall attain your desire without shedding blood" (*cho ranj-at rā sar āyad ruz hangām · abi khun khwad bar āyad mar torā kām*, 59.246)—a brilliant foreshadowing on the narrator's part. As Rāmin scampers away, the narrator regales his audience with the audacity of Vis's (in)fidelity: "Behold what a clever trick Vis pulled!" (*negah kon tā che niku sākht dastān*, 59.248), he says, as he proceeds to relate how Vis crept back into the bedchamber, slipped into bed, and convinced Mobad that he was drunk and wasn't perceiving things properly, chastising him to boot for his suspicious and shameful ways. Lulled by her words, Mobad apologizes, "I ask forgiveness if I have done any wrong" (*bekhwāham ʿoẕr agar kardam gonāh-i*, 59.266); and thus the tale is brought to a close, fences are mended, and the *status quo* restored. However, the narrator is unable to forbear passing judgement on this scene: Vis he names a "sinner" (*gonahkār*, 55.269) and the Nurse a "shameful whore," (*rosvāy-i balāya*, 59.253), while Mobad is cast as a poor and helpless king, unable to fathom the depth of betrayal that has engulfed him. This ambivalent ending offers the narrator and his audience a moment to reflect on the moral of the story, such as it is:

As the King of Kings begged her pardon, Vis, the sinner, was satisfied.
When love runs abundant to such a degree, the man who loves is always humiliated.
He apologizes for his beloved's sins, and when she doesn't accept, he apologizes more.
I've seen many a doe graze in the field as a hunting lion whimpers before it;
I've seen many a heart-smitten lord enslave his heart for love of a slave.

114. Franklin D. Lewis, "The Semiotic Horizons of Dawn in the Poetry of Ḥāfiẓ," in *Hafiz and the Religion of Love in Classical Persian Poetry*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), 258.

If a fierce lion were to fall in love, his nature would turn to that of a fox,
Once temerous, now timid; in love, he dares not confront his beloved.
Anyone who does not know love calls its prisoners mad;
May none plant its sapling in their hearts, for soon it bears disastrous fruit![115] (59.270–78)

The Devils' Cavern

The story of the Devils' Cavern, the third of the four cycles, begins on a grimmer note than the innocuous "one day" formula of the previous two, inaugurating a different approach to the pattern of stasis–destabilization–restitution and signaling that perhaps the *status quo* is starting to unravel at the seams. The fabula—that is, the unadorned plot—is extremely simple, but as if to compensate for this, the characters fill up the space with enough songs and lyrical passages to make it by far the longest of the four tales. This is all the more significant because, unlike the banquet scene where the setting made a natural backdrop on which to stage sung performances, the majority of Rāmin's songs and Vis's speeches are recited for the benefit of no one but their speaker and the audience as it listens from behind the fourth wall. But even as these soliloquies slow down the narrative, they invest it with a heightened emotional intensity that guides the characters towards an explosive confrontation; in the aftermath, they are left exhausted, battered, and unable to ignore the hopeless impasse of their situation. The narrator seeds these themes in his introduction, a bleak portrait of the world that would not be out of place in the *Shāhnāma*:

The world hates all worldly things; such is its nature and custom.
It dismisses all it summons, it takes back all it gives.
Its bitterness always accompanies the sweet, just as its curse accompanies its blessings.
Night comes with day, toil with tenderness, calamity with joy, meanness with riches.
Joy cannot be without despair, nor victory without drunkenness.
Read this story of Vis and Rāmin! Behold in it the world's ups and downs:

115. R175/T233/M156/D196:

به عشق اندر چنین بسیار باشد   همیشه مردِ عاشق خوار باشد
گناهِ دوست را پوزش نماید   چو نپذیرد به پوزش در فزاید
بسا آهو که دیدم مرغزاری   خروشان پیشِ وی شیرِ شکاری
بسا دل‌سوخته دیدم خداوند   فگنده مهرِ بنده بر دلش بند
اگر عاشق شود شیرِ دُژ آگاه   به عشق اندر شود هم طبعِ روباه
ز مهرِ دل شود تیزیش کندی   نیارد کرد با معشوق تندی
هر آن کاو عشق را نیکو نداند   اسیرِ عشق را دیوانه خواند
مکاراد ایچ کس در دل نهالش   که زود آن کشته بار آرد وبالش

At times joyous, at times sorrowful, sometimes your friend, sometimes your foe.[116] (60.1–7)

Furnished thus with this cautionary note, we begin the story. No sooner are Vis and Mobad reconciled than word arrives that the Roman emperor has crossed the border and is laying waste to Mobad's western territories. Anxious to keep his domestic affairs under control, the king entrusts his brother Zard to guard Vis in the fortress of the "Devils' Cavern" while he and his brother go out meet the enemy (see page 282). As he departs from Marv, Rāmin recites a set of four lyrical monologues. These performances are quite different from the *in situ* songs we heard at the banquet scene, or even during the night of the bed-trick where Rāmin addressed the elements of his surroundings. The form of delivery here is ambiguous and varied: some poems are described as hidden speech within his heart, some are described as "songs" (*sorud*) that he recites to himself, and some are sung openly as he gallops away from the army camp. Their primary function seems to be to provide a window into Rāmin's psychological struggles as he decides what to do; as such, they reveal some important clues about his personality, allowing us to think of him a little less as a stock figure and a little more as a character with a distinctive manner of speaking and doing. In this light, the hyper-conventional content of his lyrics is all the more significant.

As a rule, Rāmin cannot stop talking to and about himself. He speaks his first monologue in secret, addressing his own heart (*hami gofti nehāni bā del-e khwish* 61.21), posing the questions that will guide the subsequent turns of his mind. The theme of course is love, but more specifically the question of what he ought to do as a lover separated from his beloved.

> What Is This Love That Never Lessens? My heart is never glad of it.
> As long as I have known love, my eyes have never seen good fortune.
> Though it lanced my heart with thorns, it's struck it now with white poplar arrows, poison-tipped;
> My beloved has disappeared before me, without whom I have no rest or recourse.

116. R175/T233/M156/D197:

جهان را گوهر و آیین چنین است	که با هم‌گوهرانِ خود به کین است
هر آن کس را که او خواند براند	هر آن چیزی که او بخشد ستاند
بوَد تلخش همیشه جفتِ شیرین	چنان چون آفرینش جفتِ نفرین
شبش با روز باشد ناز با رنج	بلا با خرّمی بدخواه با گنج
نباسد شادمانی بی نژندی	نه پیروزی بوَد بی مستمندی
بخوان این داستانِ ویس و رامین	بدو در گونه‌گون کارِ جهان بین
گهی اندوه و گه شادی نموده	گهی بدخواه و گاهی دوست بوده

I was not faithful in my love, for I did not die the day I was separated from her.
What heart of flint and iron is mine, that I can behold the world without her?
. . . .
O my friend, do you know a state worse than this, that death to me seems sweeter than life?
If my dearest cannot be with me,
it's better my dear soul be bereft of body.[117] (61.22–27, 29–30)

This lover's guilt is unusual in Rāmin, who is usually all too eager to portray himself as the jilted lover we saw in his previous songs. However, the question he poses is a classic dilemma faced by many a romantic lover: what does one do, when separated from the beloved? As we know from the Greek and Arabic tradition, and as Rāmin himself confirms, death by grief is a standard route to take. He explores this theme in the next two songs: "O Heart, If You're A Lover" concentrates on Rāmin's right to weep a flood of bloody tears on this sad day of separation: "Though weeping is never good in men, it's right for me, having lost such a treasure" (*geristan gar che az mardān na niku-st · ze man niku-st dar hejr-e chonān dust*, 61.43). Following this, "I'm That Broken-Hearted One" performs a classic reversal of images: while the lover is ostensibly free, it is really he who is captive, for his heart is locked along with his beloved within the iron walls of the Devils' Cavern. The song includes another address to the breeze, whom Rāmin begs to pass on word of his suffering, and concludes on the familiar refrain that "death to me is sweeter than life" (*ke marg-am khwashtar ast az zendegāni*, 61.55). There is little in this message that actually speaks to Vis, ostensibly the addressee of these lines; within the poetic confines of the lyric, a world that originates from and is directed to the self, the only real interlocutor for Rāmin is his own heart; the beloved is reduced to a shadow and a memory, unable to hear or respond to his pleas.

Lamenting in this manner, Rāmin's health fails and he begins to waste away. The other nobles in Mobad's camp finally intervene and persuade him to let his brother return to Marv, saying, "Traveling

117. R180/T239/M161/D203:

چه عشقست اینکه هرگز کم نگردد — دلم روزی ازو خرّم نگردد
مرا تا هست با عشق آشنایی — نبیند چشمِ بختم روشنایی
اگر هر بار می‌زد بر دلم خار — خدنگِ زهر پیکان زد ازین بار
برفت از پیشِ چشمم آن دلارام — که بی او نیست در تن صبر و آرام
به عشق اندر وفاداری نکردم — چو روزِ هجرِ او دیدم نمُردم
چو سنگینه دلم چه آهنینم — که گیتی را همی بی او ببینم
رفیقا حال ازین بتّر چه دانی — که مرگم خوشترست از زندگانی
اگر جانانِ من با من نباشد — همان خوشتر که جان در تن نباشد

is not easy even for the hale and hearty; see how it is for the weak and sickly!" (*safar khwad khwash nabāshad bā dorosti · negar tā chun bovad bā dard o sosti*, 61.72).[118] This is the chance that Rāmin has been waiting for; he rides like the wind towards the Devils' Cavern, singing as he goes:

> WITHOUT YOU, MY LOVE, I DON'T DESIRE LIFE
> Nor ease nor pleasure in this world
> I shall fear nothing as I seek you from the enemy
> Even if the whole world opposes me
> Nor if my road is paved with snakes
> Nor if it's blocked by a hundred iron walls
> Nor if its waters teem with crocodiles
> Nor if leopards prowl amongst its peaks
> . . . .
> I swear I shall not wander from this road
> For if I do, I'm not a man[119] (61.82–85, 89)

Rāmin's chief preoccupation in this ballad continues to be his own death, bolstered by considerations of his manliness. The two are not so distant from one another: the lengthy description of the perils of Rāmin's road (of which this excerpt is only a small portion) ensures that he will either die a martyr to love or that the glory due to him will be all the greater upon the journey's end. The songs continue when he arrives to the castle; thwarted by its foreboding walls, he sings a lay addressing the palace itself; an inventive conceit, but one that fits within his general pattern of addressing inanimate, unspeaking, or impossibly distant interlocutors to provide a sounding-board for his own thoughts. The fixation on the self is carried out here by a very nice *ubi sunt* introit in which the singer reminisces how the castle was once filled with sweet scents and music, beautiful women and great men, a reverie that concludes, "You're not the place I saw before—you're just like Rāmin!" (*na ān-i ānke man didam na ān-i · k-az in giti be rāmin khwad to māni*, 63.18), leaving the rest of the poem open for him to dwell upon his nostalgia and melancholy. Throughout these lyrics, it is clear that the hero of Rāmin's world is none but Rāmin.

118. This is another line that made it into Jāmi's *Bahārestān*; see Appendix B.

119. R182/T242/M163/D206:

نخواهم بی تو یارا زندگانی　　نه آسانی نه کامِ این جهانی
نترسم چون ترا جویم ز دشمن　　اگر باشد جهانی دشمنِ من
وگر راهم سراسر مار باشد　　برو صد آهنین دیوار باشد
به جانِ تو کز آن ره بر نگردم　　وگر چونانکه بر گردم نه مردم
همه آبش بوَد جای نهنگان　　همه کوهش بوَد جای پلنگان

At this point, we are treated to a charming mélange of motifs that could have come right out of *The Golden Book of Fairy Tales*: Rāmin shoots an arrow into Vis's chamber; Vis and the Nurse discover the arrow and realize that Rāmin is outside, and open the great doors of the bathhouse, giving him light enough to scale the wall; Vis then lowers a rope fashioned of her silk garments to haul him up to her bedroom. Now united with his beloved, Rāmin celebrates his success with a number of wine-songs similar to the ones we have already encountered, a combination of Bacchic revelry and Khayyámian disdain for the morrow (63.131–42, 161–77, 179–89). Standing out in this suite is one congratulatory ode that deserves a closer look, both for its contents and the reaction elicited by it. Although this ode is ostensibly performed in front of Vis to entertain her, the object of Rāmin's address is, again, himself.[120]

O Lover, What Does It Matter that you've suffered
    Toil, calamity, and frustrated desire?
Desires are not easily attained
    Nor is a good name won without effort
Though you swam a sea in separation
    You've acquired a pearl in union with your love
O Heart, though you suffered in separation
    You now see the reward for your troubles
Did I not tell you to be patient
    For closeness is the end of distance
New Year's spring lies at the end of winter
    Just as day follows night's darkness
The longer you remain in separation's grip
    Your joy will be all the more at the time of union
And for every deed you do for its sake
    You'll find even more delight when you've acquired your desire
The flames of Hell that roasted me
    Have changed into Paradise with houris around me
I have a home in your face, a springtime garden
    That scatters flowers in the winter
There I planted fidelity, and it bore me joyous fruit
    The months of burning have delivered me my love
I kept myself faithful in every deed
    And thus the world has been faithful to me[121] (63.131–42)

120. These are an interesting case; on the surface, one they would seem to fit well into Boulton's discussion of the "Song as Message," particularly those that are sung by lovers to celebrate their union. However, as the example below will show, Rāmin's songs in this scene are not particularly communicative, at least not as far as Vis is concerned; but, as Boulton writes, they are "of prime importance in embodying the love theme," such as it is for this character. See Boulton, *The Song in the Story*, 170–80.

121. R190/T254/M171/D218:

This song demonstrates most vividly the theme we have seen developing up to this point: the degree to which Rāmin's lyrical passages, rooted in the conventional tropes of the lyric, define him as a lover and the kind of relationship it assumes with the beloved. Vis's agency or mutability is not even within the bounds of consideration in Rāmin's poetic language; she has been abstracted into a valuable object, whose reciprocal love for Rāmin is as certain and eternal as the pearl to which he compares her. Rāmin assigns himself both the toils of loverhood and the joy of its realization: it is to his credit that he endured the pains of separation, mastered his impatient heart, and traversed fire and water to reach his beloved; now that he has overcome these obstacles, he has acquired the prize that is his due. His use of the words "fidelity" and "faithful" (*vafā* and *vafādār*) in this context is striking: fidelity to the beloved is like sowing a plant, and the reward lies in plucking the fruit that grows after the patience and labor that goes into its nurturing. In such a scheme, Vis has little to say in the matter, for in the end it is not she who rewards him for his fidelity, but the world itself.

That fidelity is of central importance for both lovers is confirmed when Vis responds using the same term *vafā*, but with a slightly different connotation. As Rāmin concludes his song, she picks up the cup, saying, "I drink this wine to your memory, O Rāmin, faithful, staunch, and constant . . . I shall be entangled in loving him till death, for I revere his constancy" (*begoft in bāda kardam yād-e Rāmin · vafādār o vafājuy o vafābin / . . . / bovam tā marg dar mehr-ash gereftār · vafādāri-sh rā bāsham parastār*, 63.145, 48). This comment reminds us of the terrible struggle that Vis underwent in choosing to become Rāmin's lover, and how she insisted at the time of their union that they take an oath of mutual fidelity and con-

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چه باشد عاشقا گر رنج دیدی / بلا بردی و ناکامی کشیدی
به آسانی نیابی شادکامی / به بی رنجی نیابی نیکنامی
به هجرِ دوست گر دریا بریدی / ز وصلِ دوست بر گوهر رسیدی
دلا گر در جدایی رنج بردی / ز رنجِ خویش اکنون بر بخوردی
ترا گفتم به جا آور صبوری / که نزدیکی بوَد فرجام دوری
زمستان را بوَد فرجام نوروز / چنان‌چون تیره شب را عاقبت روز
چو در دستِ جدایی بیش مانی / ز وصلت بیش باشد شادمانی
هر آن کاری که چارش بیش سازی / چو کامِ دل بیابی بیش نازی
منم از آتشِ دوزخ برسته / بهشتی گشته با حوران نشسته
مرا خانه ز رویت بوستانست / به دی مه از رخانت گلفشانست
وفا کِشتم مرا شادی بر آورد / مهِ تابان به مهرم سر در آورد
وفاداری پسندیدم به هر کار / ازیرا شد جهان با من وفادار

stancy; only that would justify her adultery and alleviate her feelings of shame and sin.[122] Thus two separate viewpoints revolve around the axis of *vafā*, a shared term that nonetheless connotes very different ideas about how love works. Rāmin's poems, which are addressed by and large to himself or a mute interlocutor, reflect a lyrical construction of love that is wholly centered on the poet-lover; the desires, actions, and even reality of the beloved has no place in this world's perimeters.[123] Vis is abstracted into a being that automatically returns and rewards the poet's love and constancy with her own in equal measure; as such, she is little more than any other trophy that brings immediate renown and gratification the moment she is acquired, a sentiment that Rāmin articulates when he sings, "As long as sweet life is my friend, keeping faith with Vis will be my quest" (*marā tā jān-e shirin yār bāshad · vafā-ye Vis jostan kār bāshad*, 63.70). In contrast, Vis's love for Rāmin, although unconditional in practice, was founded on condition, for faithfulness is the prerequisite that ensures that their love is a licit and praiseworthy affair, even as it violates the social norms that exert so much pressure on her. It raises the difficult possibility, unthinkable in Rāmin's lyrical world, that Vis's love may not be so like a timeless pearl as he says; should he make the wrong choices, not only should he suffer a temporary separation from his prize, but it might not be waiting there for him when he finally arrives.

As we know, Mobad eventually returns from his campaign, victorious in every respect except in his ability to contain his wife and brother. As the news arrives of his furious descent upon the Devils' Cavern, Rāmin makes a hasty getaway, lowered back down the walls with the same silken ropes by which he first gained access. Once safe in the wilderness, he recites two more songs. The first is the common protest against the cruelty of fate, which has once again driven Rāmin from Vis's side. The song seems strangely incongruous in the context of the story, for though Rāmin has been living it up with Vis for the last nine months, the first thing he says is, "O Fate, what do you want of me? What do you want? You bring nothing but ruin upon me!" (*che khwāhi ay qażā az man che khwāhi · ke kār-am rā nayāri joz tabāhi*, 64.83). The second song is even more difficult to swallow, knowing the bloody fate in store for Vis and the Nurse.

122. See Chapter 3.

123. See Zumthor, *Toward a Medieval Poetics*, 131–32: "The *I* addresses a *Thou*, which not only never says anything, but which alternates wth a *She*, and is thus relegated to the third-person status of things and removedto a distance, which, in this solitude, nothing can bridge. . . . Instead of saying 'my lady will come to me,' the text says "I shall see my lady come to me.' When the *I* is followed by a verb of perception it transposes the impersonal narrative onto a personal plane and absorbs it into the enunciatory process, which thus functions at its very source as a mirror of the world."

You Cannot Know My State, my love
    How bitter my life is without you
O my heart's comfort, when I'm apart from you
    A partridge caught in a trap would weep for me
For I'm in such a frenzy of dejection
    Having no news of you
I don't know what terror has come upon you
    Or what hardship your loving soul has seen
Such pain and woe is right for me
    But let there be no sorrow on you[124] (64.104–8)

For Rāmin to sing these lines at the same moment that Mobad is whipping Vis and the Nurse out of their senses produces a kind of disconnect that is only possible when the lyric voice is nested within a broader narrative context. We have discussed at length how the lyrical passages, particularly in a work like *Varqa & Golshāh*, do not necessarily correspond with the "facts on the ground" as provided by the story, but there are a few considerations here that compel me to think more critically about this passage: first, we have seen that Gorgāni can, when he wants, integrate the lyrics into the story such that they acknowledge and comment on the broader context of the narrative that surrounds them. Second, we have seen how other characters, both Vis and Mobad, display a "memory" of this broader narrative, such that their words may speak to moments far outside the borders of the particular episode they are currently in. The abrupt juxtaposition of Rāmin's songs against Mobad's violence, then, reveal the consciousness of their speaking persona as profoundly limited. His immediate self-pity upon fleeing Mobad make the narcissism of the previous odes all the more apparent, and his address to Vis, complaining how she doesn't know the pain of his separation while she is literally suffering real pain, effectively produces a rupture between his thought-world and the world of the story. One can only speculate how Gorgāni's audience would have responded to this moment, but I am tempted to say that, at least in terms of the narrative, this is one of the psychological peaks of the long-form story, in which we witness the preoccupations of the individual characters that have been slowly developed—Vis's despair at her self-sacrifice, Mobad's futile

124. R197/T265/M178/D229:

همانا دلبرا حالم ندانی — که چون تلخست بی تو زندگانی
چنانم در فراقت ای دلارام — که بر من می‌بگرید کبگ در دام
که زیرا مستمند و دل‌فگارم — وز احوالِ تو آگاهی ندارم
ندانم چه نهیب آمد به رویت — چو سختی دید جان مهرجویت
مرا شاید که باشد درد و آزار — مبادا مر ترا خود هیچ تیمار

anger at his helplessness, Rāmin's fixation on himself—begin to intersect and propel the story along at an escalating speed, coming to a head in this explosive and painful climax. It is a fair example of how Gorgāni, in recasting his oral or written sources, can interweave discrete episodes into a narrative that produces tension, drama, and individual psychology through the very conventions that label them as generic.

Indeed, with such compelling characters to hold our attention, the narrator has almost fallen out of the story; he only steps back onto the stage at the end of this tale, guiding the cathartic moment down to its landing. Vis is ultimately rescued not by her lover but by her mother; when Shahru hears the news that her daughter has been beaten and imprisoned, she threatens to bring war and ruin on Mobad, until he capitulates and restores her to his court. The cyclicity of this ending, reinforced through the familiar formula "once again," is counterbalanced by the narrator's weary tone as Vis, Mobad, and Rāmin resume their places at court, bruised in body and wounded in spirit; it is clear that the situation cannot endure forever.

> Once again, the king pardoned Rāmin; he mended Rāmin's torn allotment.
> Once again, the demon of spite hid his face, and the flower of joy bloomed in the garden.
> Once again, the face of that Moon of Moons shone in the palace of the King of Kings.
> . . . .
> Neither grief nor joy remain in this world; in the end, the fate of both is extinction.
> Keep joy in your heart, to the extent that you can, that you may increase the joy you see in the world.
> Since our time does not last, why must we suffer in vain?[125] (66.29–31, 37–39)

5.4 Vis's laments

At this juncture, I would like to turn our attention to Vis and see what she has been doing while Rāmin weeps and wanders. We should begin by taking note of some circumstantial details that differentiate her

125. R206/T279/M188/D243:

دگر ره شاه رامین را عفو کرد   دریده بختِ رامین را رفو کرد
دگر ره دیوِ کینه روی بنهفت   گلِ شادی به باغِ مهر بشکفت
دگر ره در سرای شاهِ شاهان   فروزان گشت روی ماهِ ماهان
نه غم ماند نه شادی این جهان را   فنا فرجام باشد هردوان را
به شادی دار دل را تا توانی   که بفزاید ز شادی زندگانی
چو روزِ ما همی بر ما نپاید   درو بیهوده غم خوردن چه باید

from her male counterpart and accompany her status as the female lead in the story. First, she is rarely at liberty to go where she likes, and indeed is locked in her chambers for a good part of the story. Second, owing to her confinement, she is rarely alone; the Nurse is her constant companion and interlocutor. These two fixtures of her life have a noticeable impact on her lyrical asides, which further distinguish her from Rāmin and help establish her voice as a female perspective on the events of her life.

We recall that when Mobad separated Vis from Rāmin, locking the former in the Devils' Cavern and taking the latter in his campaign, Rāmin launched into a series of short performances that do much to identify him as the lover, the minstrel, and the singer of lyrics. During this time, Vis, too, performs a soliloquy, identified as a chapter heading as "The Lamentation of Vis at Rāmin's Parting" (*zāri kardan Vis az raftan-e Rāmin*, 62). Through this title, we can guess that her chosen "form," so to speak, is a lament, and not a song; later on, she will perform a similar piece under the caption, "Vis Mourns Her Separation From Rāmin" (*muya kardan-e Vis bar jodā'i-ye Rāmin*, 83). In these scenes, she recites what seem like lyrical interludes, giving us a chance to see what her character is going through the same way Rāmin's songs had intended. However, there is no hint from the text that the words are sung; the pieces are much longer than the ghazal-like performances by Rāmin, and their imagery is also quite distinctive. What's more, she does not say these lines to herself in solitude or with her back to the audience, but has an in-text interlocutor in the Nurse, to whom she pours out her grief. Thus begins her first lament:

> She moaned in longing for her mate, and crying bitterly she said to her Nurse:
> "I've sacrificed my youth for love, I've sacrificed my life for a lover!
> I thought that we'd remain together and fulfill our every desire,
> But Fate has broken our bond, separation has rent the veil of my secret.
> My idol! While you were in my embrace, my bed was sweet with wholesome sleep;
> My bed is now a bed of thorns, you've driven off my pleasant dreams.
> When you made me sleepless out of care, you made the blood rush through my sides;
> My heart is troubled now and ever that you'll seek war with the enemy;
> The sun will beat upon your moon-like face, and dust will fall on your ebony locks.
> You'll place a helmet where a crown belongs, drop your harp and flagon and pick up a bow.
> You'll don a suit of mail instead of silk brocade and chafe your lovely limbs.
> Just as your eyes have shed my blood, so too your blade will treat your foes.
> Why did I not heed your words? Why did I not go with you?
> Perhaps the dust of your journey would have fallen on me, scented by your musky locks.
> My heart is with you out there on the road, wounded in separation, drowning in blood.
> Take care of your companion! Don't wound it more than you already have!

It is right for good people to do good, for lovers to show love to each other.
O you of sunlike mien, treat me as befits your shining face:
Remember me, consider my state; the powerful should not forget the poor.
You beheld me in the smoke of my love; now a fire has sprung from that smoke.
From this separation, so dreadful and distant, all other pains seem like games to me.
What storm is this, that's in my soul? It drives an Oxus from my eyes.
My heart is like a letter, filled with pain and toil, and at its head is my bloodless face.
Behold what suffering is in that letter, whose title is a sea of blood."[126] (62.8–31)

The passage has been quoted in full, first to highlight the significant difference in length between Rāmin's songs and Vis's soliloquies (her "Ten Letters" are much longer still), and then to establish out the general thematics of her voice. It is not a coincidence that the lament begins with an invocation of sacrifice, for her lost virtue is an issue that preoccupies Vis from the start of her affair, and many of her subsequent speeches return to contemplate it. Thus it is that after she is done speaking, the Nurse attempts to console her by reminding her of the virtues of patience: furious, Vis responds that it was the Nurse who cast her into this pit in the first place, and cites a proverb evoking of the irrevocable fact of her lost virginity: "Throwing felt into water is easy, but pulling it back out isn't so simple!" (*namad*

126. R183/T244/M164/D207:

همی نالید بر تنهایی از جفت   خروشان زار با دایه همی گفت
فدای عاشقی کردم جوانی   فدای مهرِ جانان زندگانی
گمان کردم که ما با هم بمانیم   هر آن کامی که دل خواهد برانیم
قضا پیوندِ ما از هم ببرّید   خدایی پردهٔ رازم بدرّید
نگارا تا تو بودی در برِ من   به نوشین خواب خوش بُد بسترِ من
کنون تا بسترم پر خار کردی   مرا زان خوابِ خوش بیزار کردی
چو چشمم را ز غم بی‌خواب کردی   کنارم را پر از خوناب کردی
ازان ترسد دلِ من گاه و بیگاه   که تو ناچار جویی جنگِ بدخواه
بتابد مهر بر روی چو ماهت   نشیند گرد بر زلفِ سیاهت
نهی بر جای افسر خُود بر سر   کمان گیری به جای رود و ساغر
زره پوشی به جای خزّ و دیبا   بفرسایدت آن اندامِ زیبا
چنان چون ریختی خونم به عبهر   بریزی خونِ بدخواهان به خنجر
چرا نشنیدم از تو هر چه گفتی   چرا با تو نرفتم چون تو رفتی
مگر بر من نشستی گردِ راهت   شدی مشکین از آن زلفِ سیاهت
دلم با تو به راه اندر رفیق است   ز هجرت خسته و در خون غریق است
رفیقت را به راه اندر نگه دار   فزونتر زین که آزردی میازار
نکو باشد ز خوبان خوب‌کاری   نمودن دوستان را دوستداری
تو آن کن با من ای با روی چون خور   که باشد با خورِ روی تو در خور
مرا یاد آر از حالم بیندیش   توانگر هم بیندیشد ز درویش
مرا دیدی که دودِ عشق چون بود   کنون آتش پدید آمد از آن دود
از این هجرت بدین هول و درازی   همه دردی به چشمم گشت بازی
چه طوفانست گویی بر روانم   که جیحون می‌رود از دیدگانم
دلم چون نامهٔ پر رنج و دردست   که بر عنوانِ او این روی زردست
نگر تا زاری اندر نامه چونست   که بر عنوانِ او دریای خونست

bāshad dar āb afgandan āsān · nabāshad z-u bar āvardan-sh az ān sān, 62.60).[127] Costly though they were, her sacrifices did not secure the happiness she had longed for, but only more suffering; and now that her lover is off to war, she fears that their separation will be a permanent one. This leads her to the second part of her reverie, where she wonders how Rāmin fares and prays for his safe return. Though war motifs fly thick and fast in the lyric tradition, usually as the love-is-war conceit, this seems a distinctly "female" treatment of the topos: as Olga Davidson notes, the lament in both Greek and Iranian society has tended to be gender-specific, and we know too that the major poetesses of the Arabic classical tradition established their fame singing eulogies over for their fallen kinsmen and lamenting the inequities of fate.[128] So too can we find an inflection of the lament in this love poem in which the Abbasid poetess Umm Khālid reflects on her lover's mobility while she is unable to join him:

> O who will help my eyes, from which the tears flow down,
> my captive heart, distressed, ablaze with love,
> My soul, with burning thirst so hard to slake,
> I can no longer bear it, after all this time!
> My love is truly visible, although I never spoke a word
> to anyone whenever his name was dropped.
> I say, while tears from my sore eyes are streaming like
> a brook in which the water gushes forth:
> I wish I were the baby daughter of al-Ḥājibī's,
> I wish I were his shadow or his shade, whenever he appears,
> I wish I were his coat when he protects himself against
> the cold east wind, or else his shoes for his cold feet.[129]

The most important conceit, however, is found in the closing lines of Vis's lament: *My heart is like a letter; behold what is written there*. This is one of the most enduring and significant themes of Vis's self-presentation, in which she and the story of her suffering become a text for others to read. This alone is a crucial factor that plays into her desire to establish a biography that counteracts the broad portrayal of her in the text as a faithless woman—an image not least supported by Rāmin's lyrics.

127. This line also made it into Ṣā'eb's anthology; see Appendix B.

128. Olga M. Davidson, "Women's Lamentations as Protest in the 'Shāhnāma'," in *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage, and Piety*, ed. Gavin R. G. Hambly (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 131; for a discussion of the connection between women and threnody (*marthīya*) in Arabic poetry, see Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 61–205.

129. Geert Jan van Gelder, trans., *Classical Arabic Literature* (New York University Press, 2013), 33.

Vis in the garden

Vis's drive to tell her own story is vividly enacted in the fourth and final story cycle. In its outlines, the tale is basically a condensed version of the previous episode: Mobad again goes to war and locks Vis in his palace while he's gone, charging the Nurse instead of Zard to be her warden; Rāmin again sneaks away from the army camp to rejoin her, but cannot gain access to her room; and with the Nurse unwilling to help, Vis gets out herself and joins Rāmin in the courtyard. Mobad arrives the next morning, with Rāmin having already flown the coop, and Vis manages to persuade him that she had been carried down to the garden in her sleep by an angel. There are some beautiful passages in this short piece, but its most distinguishing characteristic from a narrative angle is that the story is largely about Vis and is told from her perspective. Rāmin has only one poem in this cycle, and it does not depart from the self-regarding language we have encountered in the previous episodes; otherwise it is Vis who takes the initiative, does the talking, and controls the story.

Let us cut straight to the relevant scene. Rāmin has deserted the army and doubled back to Marv the same evening that he set out, and he is soon at the palace gate. With his usual dexterity, he scales the wall and jumps into the garden, but at this point he cannot get any further; and as he paces the garden he recites a song, "Since They Sundered Me From You," a familiar tune which revisits the usual topoi of his other lyrics: his enemies delight in his misery, he's drowning in the unjust sea of love, and he weeps endless tears: "But for what do I weep so wretchedly? For you are not aware of my state" (*che sud ar man hami geryam be rāzi · ke az ḥāl-am to āgāhi nadāri*, 67.34). Having finished his piece, and with nothing left to do, Rāmin falls asleep amidst the flowers. Meanwhile, Vis scores her face and rushes about the room like one gone mad. Desperate to get out, she implores the Nurse to aid her, but the Nurse, inflated by Mobad's trust in her (67.63–66) or perhaps fearing a trap (67.69–72), refuses to release her. Vis takes matters into her own hands:

> The Nurse left and the moon remained, pacing the room and beating her breast,
> Not crack nor crevice could give her purchase, nor could she attain the roof.
> With the heat of love burning her soul, she figured a way out for herself:
> There was a pavilion in front of the hall, reaching from floor to heaven
> With many ropes tied to it, each one a comfort to Vis's woes.

Like a falcon in flight, she cast off her shoes and leapt on the ropes
Airborne now, she swung onto the roof. The wind tore away her scarlet veil
And left her head as bare as her feet. Her necklaces broke, the pearls scattered,
The crystal rings below her ears were shattered. Her lovely face now free of dress,
She rushed out to the garden's edge, her spirit in a frenzy, her heart blazing,
Tied her linen chador to a niche, held tight, and jumped down.
The hem snagged on the pitted bricks, and her robe fell shredded from her body.
Although her landing-place was soft and easy, her two feet stung from the jump.
The sash around her waist was loosed, like the shredded pants upon her legs.
With neither dress nor ornament on her body, all torn or lost in an instant,
Her naked feet tore up the garden floor in search of her beloved.[130] (67.81–93)

One of the remarkable features of this remarkable scene is that the usual roles of (active male) lover and (passive female) beloved have been inverted. As Rāmin lies still in the flowerbeds, Vis shimmies up the ropes of her pavilion, climbs over the roof, and leaps down on the other side in her efforts to find him. One is reminded of the scene in *Varqa & Golshāh* when Golshāh slays her own captor and rescues her would-be rescuer; further afield, another parallel is found in *Aucassin & Nicolette*: while Aucassin lies weeping in his father's dungeon, Nicolette ties her clothes into a rope and rappels from her tower window down to the garden to join him.[131] At the same time, this is not a simple substitution of one for the other, in the sense that their identities blend or are interchangeable; the shift rather occurs in such as way as to bring out an irreducible difference between the two. As she makes her escape, Vis is gradually disrobed by the elements, emphasizing rather than minimizing her femininity—in other words, this is not an

130. R210/T284/M192/D249:

بشد دایه نشد آن ماه‌پیکر   همی گفت و همی زد دست بر بر
نه روزن دید و رخنه جایگاهی   نه بر بامِ سرایش دید راهی
چو تابِ مهر جانش را همی تافت   ز دانش خویشتن را چاره‌ای یافت
سراپرده که بود از پیشِ ایوان   یکی سر بر زمین دیگر به کیوان
برو بسته طنابِ سخت بسیار   یکایک ویس را درمان و تیمار
فگند از پای کفش آن کوه سیمین   بدو بر رفت چون پرّنده شاهین
چو پرّان شد ز پرده جَست بر بام   ربودش باد از سر لعل واشام
برهنه سر برهنه پای مانده   گسسته عقد و درّش بر فشانده
شکسته گوشوارش پاک در گوش   ابی زیور بمانده روی نیکوش
پس آنگه شد شتابان تا لبِ باغ   روانش پر شتاب و دل پر از داغ
قصب چادرش را در گوشه‌ای بست   درو زد دست و از باره فرو جست
گرفتش دامن اندر خشت پاره   قبا شد بر تنش بر پاره پاره
اگرچه نرم و آسان بود جایش   به درد آمد ز جستن هر دو پایش
گسسته بند کُستی بر میانش   چو شلوارش دریده بر دو رانش
نه جامه بر تنش مانده نه زیور   دریده بود یا افتاده یکسر
برهنده پای گردِ باغ گردان   به هر مرزی دوان و دوست جویان

131. ʿAyyūqī, *Varqa va Gulshāh*, 36; Pensom, *Aucassin et Nicolete*, 43–49; Dufournet, *Aucassin et Nicolette*, xii.12, p. 78.

instance of the heroine dressing up in men's clothes and passing as male, which occurs with heroines like Gordāfarid in the *Shāhnāma*, Golshāh, ʿAẕrā, and Nicolette. The text is as attentive to Vis's state of mind as it is to her physical body: though narrated from the third person, we are guided through her movements in a step-by-step account through which action and gesture are as eloquent witnesses to her intentions as words, where the story is as much to be experienced and felt as it is to be watched; the pain that courses through her legs upon landing is an especially powerful example of the use of detail to draw the audience into her psychology. Thus, though she takes the lead in this scene, Vis is not portrayed as a female version of Rāmin; her performance of "lover" does not map onto his. This is evident in the lyrical interlude that follows: though she was sure that she would find Rāmin waiting for her in the garden when she arrived, he is nowhere to be found (the narrator tells us that his cheeks and hair are camouflaged by the violets and white roses that make up his pillow, 67.141). It seems he has failed to appear, and at this thought, Vis recites a long lament.

> As blood ran freely from her eyes and feet, Vis cried out *alas!* at her adverse fate:
> "Where shall I find my fair-faced idol? Where shall I find my lovely spring?
> Perhaps it's better not to run in vain, to seek the shining sun at night.
> For the sake of love, O wind of morning's light, spare a moment's trouble for me,
> If you look kindly on the desperate—I am desperate, have mercy!
> For though your feet may tread the world, they do not bleed as do mine.
> You need not travel far, nor take up unpleasant burdens;
> Just pass over two wild blooming roses, one in plain sight and the other hidden from me,
> And see where you can find someone who has dishonored many like me,
> Who tore the veil from thousands of virgins, stole them away, and left them by the wayside,
> Who stirred a thousand hearts in hatred, left them, and cast them in the fire,
> Look at me in my pursuit of love! Look at this hardship, this shame, this misery!
> Dazed and frustrated, restled and tormented
> by a hundred kinds of cruel misfortune."[132] (67.96–107)

132. R211/T285/M192/D250:

هم از چشمش روانِ خون و هم از پای	همی گفتی ازین بختِ نگون وای
کجا جویم نگار سعتری را	کجا جویم بهار دلبری را
همان بهتر که بیهوده نپویم	به شب خورشید تابان را نجویم
به حق دوستی ای باد شبگیر	برای من زمانی رنج بر گیر
اگر با بیدلان هستی نکورای	منم بیدل یکی بر من ببخشای
که پایت گر جهانی بر نوردد	چو نازك پای من خونین نگردد
نه راهی دور می بایدت رفتی	نه رنجی سخت ناخوش بر گرفتن
گغر کن بر دو نسرین شکفته	یکی پیدا یکی از من نهفته
نگه کن تا کجا یابی کسی را	که رسول کرد همچون من بسی را

Part of the rhetorical power of this lament lies in the way it adopts the motifs of lyric verse and uses them for its own purposes; just as Vis's performance of "lover" alter the conventions of the figure in significant ways, so to does her performance of lyric invert Rāmin's ghazals even she alights upon the same literary topoi. Her opening conceit immediately recalls the "address to the wind" that Rāmin has performed a number of times, but she is able to take it in unexpected ways by drawing from her specific circumstances, comparing her bleeding feet to the wind's that do not tire. Having found a suitable addressee to voice her complaint, she launches into a list of Rāmin's failings that could only have been articulated from the standpoint of the hero's disgraced mistress. In lieu of the usual litany of accusations we hear from Rāmin—that his beloved is heartless, that she doesn't care, that she treats him cruelly in the face of his loyalty—Vis zeroes in on his reputation and conduct as a faithless womanizer, recalling her still-smouldering anger at having lost her honor and virginity for him, and allowing her to reflect on her own unresolved feelings of shame. This, I think, is partly why her body is so important to this passage and others like it: it is not merely to emphasize the fact that she is a woman, but that it is her body that gives testament to Rāmin's faithlessness. Just as she last described her heart as a letter to be read, now too her nude, wounded body is the message that must be heard, a demand that she be witnessed ("Look at me in my pursuit of love!") as much as a piteous sob of grief. Such is the theme of the message she bids the wind carry:

> Tell Rāmin: "O enchanting sun, O commander of hearts in your beauty,
> Who spread fire in my soul, who cast me upon this roof and wall on a dark night,
> You have not been fair, you have not cared for me in my weakness!
> I'm misfortune's exile, the whole world sleeps while I am sleepless;
> If I'm among the folk of this world, why am I never like the others?
> I cry against my lot and misery; perhaps my mother bore me without luck, without joy!
> You said to me, 'Why don't you come?' Well, here I am—and where are *you?*
> Why don't you come? Whom do you fear?
> Why don't you seek one sick by your absence?"[133] (67.111–18)

هزاران پردگی را پرده برداشت   ببرد و در میان راه بگذاشت
هزاران دل بخشم از جای بر کند   به هجران داد تا بر آتش افگند
ببین حال مرا در مهر کاری   بدین سختی و رسوایی و زاری
به صد گونه بلا بی هوش و بی کام   به صد گونه جفا بی صبر و آرام

133. R211/T286/M193/D251:

بگو ای آفتابِ دلربایی   به خوبی یافته فرمان روایی

This section of Vis's lament, couched in the classic device as a message to the wind, remains both like and unlike the kinds of discourse found in Rāmin's songs. The accusation that the beloved has not been fair; that the lover feels isolated and exiled from her community; that she feels as though her luck has always been against her: any one of these lines, taken by itself, would not seem out of place in a lyric poem. Yet their cumulative effect produces something that sounds like a more personal rendering of these tropes, for Vis's complaints are grounded in the literal situation in which that the narrative has placed her: her reference to her mother's ill-fated choices before her own birth resonate deep within the story's grounding structure; her social exile and alienation is concretized by her constant imprisonment; her charge that Rāmin has not protected her is demonstrably true. In this sense, we might read her lament, as Davidson does for Tahmina in the *Shāhnāma*, as a kind of protest poetry.[134] Her lament seems to be positioned as a direct response to the many accusations that Rāmin has directed her way in his songs: quoting his own speech back at him, she points out that she *has* been there for him, through thick and thin; now where is he, to uphold his end of the bargain? The continuous reiteration of the question *Where are you?* adds a fresh layer of emotion every time it is uttered; in spite of everything else that has happened, Rāmin's absence is the root cause of Vis's anger and anxiety.

Vis has very few long soliloquies like the ones discussed above; while more verses in *Vis & Rāmin* are delivered in her voice than in any other character's, the bulk of her speeches (and letters) are directed towards others, crafted as rhetorical acts intended to persuade and affect others rather than to look inwards and contemplate herself. But in these laments we have the closest equivalent to the "I-Thou" moment in Vis, and the differences and similarities they have with Rāmin's lyrical asides strike me as a crucial site to explore the way Gorgāni develops his characters and individuates their thought-world.[135] While Vis's

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مرا آتش به جان اندر فگنده   به تاری شب به بام و در فگنده
نکرده با منِ بی‌دل مواسا   نجسته با منِ مسکین مدارا
مرا بختِ بد از گیتی برانده   جهان در خواب و من بی‌خواب مانده
اگر من مردمم یا زین جهانم   چرا هرگز نه همچون مردمانم
کنم از بی‌دلی و بخت فریاد   مگر مادر مرا بی بخت و دل زاد
مرا گفتی چرا ایدر نیایی   من اینک آمدستم تو کجایی
چرا پیشم نیایی از که ترسی   چرا بیمارِ هجران را نپرسی

134. Davidson, "Women's Lamentations as Protest in the 'Shāhnāma'."

135. Bakhtin's "image of language" is again pertinent here; the point is that the worlds *imagined* by speech acts that are ostensibly "free" of narrative contexts can be drawn out, amplified, and concretized through narrative; see also Zumthor's

laments draw from the same stock of images, tropes, and themes as Rāmin's poetry, they are arranged and deployed in such a manner that every line reaches out beyond the closed system of the lyric as a stand-alone performance event and makes connections with the broad contours of the plot, contributing to the overarching story of her character. Vis thus articulates her story in a way that is both specific to her personal experience and expressive of the female voice that is generally excluded from Rāmin's songs. The theme of her story, as we have seen, is the many sacrifices and sufferings she has undergone for the sake of her illicit affair, and the fear that should he fail to uphold his end of the bargain, all will have been for naught. Fortunately, the heavens heed her prayers and the moon shines upon the garden, allowing her to find Rāmin. The couple renew their troth and spend the night together, and in the morning, as Vis gets word of Mobad's arrival, she bids her lover farewell: "You must flee and find safety; I must stay and receive his blows" (*torā bāyad ke bāshad rastgāri · marā shāyad ke bāshad zakhm-khwāri*, 68.54). As Rāmin scuttles off, Vis turns to face her husband, prepared to meet her death and confident that she is on the winning side of history:

> Why should I care that you show me such cruelty, for God thinks well of me.
> He delivers me from your sword, he takes my due from your soul.
> God will replenish what you diminish; you clap me in irons, God sets me free.
> Why do you call me your enemy and foe? God is your enemy, not me![136] (68.148–51)

It is clear that for Vis, it is the virtues of loyalty and fidelity that act as the final arbiter between good and bad; thus, as she says, her faithfulness to Rāmin through thick and thin is proof of her good intentions, and it makes Rāmin's subsequent betrayal all the more painful to bear. But even when this happens, Vis remains determined that her story be heard; just as they exonerate her of wrongdoing, her laments are also the vehicle by which she voices her outrage and demands justice. Her last long soliloquy, "Vis Mourns Her Separation From Rāmin," which is recited after Rāmin has married Gol, begins on the same motif we observed in the previous passage, calling out for the whereabouts of the beloved: "Where have

discussion of the romance as the expansion of established motifs and their temporal projection into the the future; *Toward a Medieval Poetics*, 291, 293, cf. Boulton, *The Song in the Story*, 24.

136. R218/T297/M201/D262:

چه باشد گر توم زشتی نمایی   چه یزدانم نماید نیک‌رایی
گهی جانِ من از تیغت رهاند   گهی دادِ من از جانت ستاند
توم کاهی و یزدان فزاید   توم بندی و دادار گشاید
چرا خوانی مرا بدخواه و دشمن   تو با زیدان همی کوشی نه با من

my bright days gone, when the sunlight was at my side?" (*kojā shod ān khojasta ruzgār-am · ke budi āftāb andar kenār-am*, 83.3). These are interspersed with frequent protestations of innocence: "I did no evil to anyone, so that I would not see evil in return; why then is my fortune so bleak?" (*nakardam bad be kas tā bad nabinam · cherā aknun ze badruzi chonin-am*, 83.8), and again, "What have I done wrong, that it treats me so?" (*che bad kardam ke u bā man chonin ast*, 83.72). The real culprit, of course, is Rāmin: "I put my heart in your hand as a token of faith, but it's seen nothing but oath-breaking" (*del-i dāram be dast-at zinhāri · nadid az to magar zenhār-khwāri*, 73.28). Vis ends this, the last of her laments, with another gesture to the message she has sent out, wondering if Rāmin will ever read it.

> I've sent a letter to my beloved, wrapped in a blood-stained garment.
> Will he read my letter, or no? Will he know my suffering, or no?
> Will he be merciful on me with words of love? Will he seek my love in a reply?
> There's nothing worse for lovers than the day they must wait for letters every day.
> The days of union and joy are gone, when I flirted and loved my love.
> Now our speech has become letters; I only see him in my dreams.[137] (83.59–64)

5.5 Ramin's rage

In the remainder of this chapter, we will shift our focus from the songs and laments to talk about the second major form of embedded "citations" in *Vis & Rāmin*: written letters. If Rāmin was the dominant voice in the first category, then Vis is without a doubt the champion of the second. There are a number of letters exchanged in the first half of the story, but their function is more or less limited to effecting some development in the plot: some examples of this include the Nurse's letter to Shahru (ch. 13), which leads to Vis getting summoned to the court of Media and her wedding to Viru; Mobad's letter to Shahru, (ch.

137. R286/T400/M267/D369:

بنال ای دل که ارزانی بدینی — که هم در این جهان دوزخ ببینی
قصا ما را چنین کردست روزی — که من گریم همه ساله تو سوزی
بدین سان زندگانی چون بوَد خوش — که من باشد در آب و تو در آتش
فرستادم به نزدِ دوست نامه — برو پیچیده خون‌آلوده جامه
بخواند نامهٔ من یا نخواند — بداند زاری من یا نداند
ببخشاید مرا از مهرگوی — کند با من به پاسخ مهرجویی
نباشد عاشقان را زین بتر روز — که چشمِ نامه‌ای دارند هر روز
بشد روزِ وصال و روزِ خوشّی — که من با دوست کردم ناز و گشّی
کنون با او به نامه گشت گفتار — و گر خسپم بوَد در خواب دیدار

27), which induces her to surrender Vis to him; Viru's letter to Mobad (ch. 53) that ends the war between them; and the exchange of letters between Rāmin, Mobad, and their mother that allows the exiled lovers to return to court (chs. 57–58). At this point—basically the moment when the story cycles kick into full gear—Rāmin's songs becomes the predominant rhetorical form for performance, supplemented by Vis's occasional lament. As the cycles wind down and the story moves into its next stage (Table 9), the letter takes over as the clear winner in the contest of rhetorical form, largely through the masterful performance of Vis's "Ten Letters" that take up a significant portion of the latter portion of *V&R*. As discussed in Chapter 1, this was long remembered as the artistic apogee of *Vis & Rāmin*, cited in anthologies long after the rest of the story had fallen out of circulation; it even spun off into an independent genre of its own.[138] The fact that Vis's discourse, already rendered distinct from Rāmin's by virtue of the form it takes and the objects of its address, is further differentiated by being cast as a memorably "written" form of communication, bears fascinating implications of the way male and female voices are constructed and contest each other in *V&R*; differences of opinion are about to emerge.

Very few love-stories in the archaic romance tradition allow love to fizzle out. Whether we look at the Greek novels, the romances of Laylā and Majnūn and other Arabian stories, or the ancient Iranian love-tales preserved in Greek, Arabic, and Middle Persian texts, the lovers remain faithful to one another to the bitter end. The closest thing to a "break-up" that I can think of is found in Béroul's rendition of *Tristan & Iseut*, when the love between the protagonists is cut short, at least for a while. In *T&I*, of course, there is an easy explanation for this: the cause of love was a magic potion whose effects would only last for three years. Thus, in the middle of a hunt, Tristan suddenly stops and says to himself,

> Oh, God, I am suffering so much;
> for three years to the day, without respite,
> I have never been without pain—
> on feast days and others alike.
> I have forgotten chivalry,
> the court, and the knightly life.[139] (2161–66)

Iseut, back in her bower, comes to the same realization, and the next day she and Tristan head to Ogrin the hermit to confess their sins and declare their repentance:

138. Lewis, "Reading, Writing, and Recitation," 48–49; cf. section 1.4.
139. Béroul, *Tristran*, 102–3.

Table 9: Part IV: The broken vows of Rāmin (70–85)

A. Exhaustion.	Rāmin, exhausted by his struggle with Mobad, takes counsel with Behguy, who advises him to give up love and seek a new life in other lands (70); meanwhile, Mobad attempts a rapprochement with Vis (71), which Vis accepts (72). Vis and Rāmin have an altercation, and Rāmin resolves to go; before he leaves, however, the two renew their vows of loyalty, though Vis doubts Rāmin's strength of will (73).
B. Rāmin and Gol.	Rāmin travels west to Gurab, in Media, where he beholds Gol, daughter of the margrave of Azerbaijan, and falls in love with her; Gol is at first hesitant to accept his proposal to marry (Rāmin's reputation has preceded him), but after many insisted oaths, she finally consents (74), and the couple get married (75). The post-marital bliss is abruptly broken, however, when Rāmin tells her he loves her because she looks like Vis (76); after receiving a thorough dressing-down from his wife, Rāmin writes an angry letter to Vis, blaming her for his troubles and repudiating his love for her (77).
C. Vis's response.	When Vis receives Rāmin's letter, she pretends not to be affected, but weeps bitterly in private, hoping only that he might be paid in kind for his treachery; she then sends him a letter chastising him and begging him not to relinquish his love for her, even if he has married (78). The Nurse attempts to deliver the letter to Rāmin, but he turns her away, saying that they both need to move on: he will only pursue her if he has a legitimate claim to her as King (79). Learning that she has been rebuffed, Vis falls ill, and summons her scribe to compose the ten letters (80).
D. The "Ten Letters."	Exordium; on hope and separation; on keeping the beloved in one's thoughts; on finding a substitute beloved [on fidelity]; on resignation and waiting; on suffering at the beloved's hands; on reaching out to the beloved; on weeping in isolation; on seeking news of the beloved; on describing one's suffering; on prayer and wishing to see the beloved; peroration and salutations (81). When the letters are finished, Vis sends her page Azin to deliver the letters (82), while she recites another long lament of separation (83).
E. Rāmin abandons Gol comes back to Vis.	Meanwhile, Rāmin has grown tired of Gol's affections, and one day, while out riding, he comes upon a little girl who gives him a bouquet of violets, reminding him of the violets he had given Vis when he had first sworn fidelity to her; confused and aggrieved, he reproaches his heart for its inconstancy, then confesses his state to Gol's father, Rafidā, telling him how he misses the painful delight of courting Vis (84). Rafidā is none too pleased to hear this and informs his daughter of Rāmin's wavering. That evening, while sitting at banquet and ignoring Gol, Rāmin conducts a lengthy debate within himself, trying to decide what to do; unable to bear it any longer, he suddenly rushes out the hall, mounts his horse, and rides furiously towards Khorasan (85).

Never in my life will I again
have any sinful desires.
Please understand that I am not saying
that I regret my relationship with Tristan
or that I do not love him properly
and honorably, as a friend.
But he is entirely free of any carnal desire for me,
and I for him.[140] (2323–30)

While Vis and Rāmin cannot pin their actions to a love-potion, they experience a mutual falling out in much the same abrupt manner. It may be sheer fatigue setting in; after the confrontation with the minstrel and Mobad's humiliation, a wise sage named Behguy ("Good-speech") perceives Rāmin's long face and asks him what is the matter. Rāmin complains,

A man's hard is not made of stone or steel; if it feels joy, it too can suffer.
How long can a body manage? How long can a heart endure?
The world's evil is beyond our capacity, strength, and fortitude to bear.
Indeed Fate rains upon everyone, but it has laid a tempest against my heart.[141] (70.18–21)

Behguy's advice to Rāmin is simple and to the point: be a man and take charge of your life. In a long speech, he passes on the following tenets: love cannot be bought without much grief and suffering (70.39–61); Rāmin cannot expect to escape Mobad's wrath forever, nor the certainty of damnation for his sins (70.62–66); true manliness lies in patience, self-mastery, and loyalty to one's liege (70.67–90); and that the root cause of Rāmin's suffering is his lack of experience—if only he got out there and tasted the fruits of other lands, Vis would no longer capture his heart (70.91–104). In an echo of Tristan's statements, he reminds Rāmin that his proper place is at court, gaining honor and preparing for his time on the throne.

How long will you sit and weep? How long will you let your sweet soul suffer?
The time has come to have shame before the nobles and honor your brother!
The time has come to seek the pleasures of youth, to seek a name in feasting and fighting!

140. Béroul, *Tristran*, 110–11.
141. R223/T304/M204/D269:

دلِ مردم نه از سنگست و پولاد — که گر غمگین شود باشد ازو شاد
تنی را چند باشد سازگاری — دلی را چند باشد بردباری
جهان را زشت کاری بیش از آنست — که ما را کوشش و صبر و توان است
قضا بر هر کسی بارید باران — ولیکن بر دلم بارید طوفان

The time has come to think of greatness, to take the auspicious way of justice.
You must start seeking kingship, for you are worth nothing less;
Why do you linger in the dust of Vis and the Nurse,
who have soiled your noble face?[142] (70.105–10)

The narrator repeats these lines with approval, telling his audience, “If you too must give an answer, answer thus” (*to niz ar pāsokh-i gu'i chenān guy*, 70.35). Delivered in the manner of a father to his son or a counsellor to his prince, Behguy's advice recalls the admonitions about love found in the many works of advice literature from Gorgāni's time and beyond, where control and moderation is always the key.[143] In the *Qābusnāma*, Kaykāvus writes: “When you have taken a young bride, even if you're madly in love with her, don't sleep with her every night, lest she get bored of you; let her think that everyone is like this, so that when you have some business or errand, your wife will be patient while you're away.”[144] Ghazālī maintains that love for women prevents distractable men from fulfilling their religious obligations, and Naṣiroddin Ṭusi warns against excessive love even for one's wife, for “it necessarily follows that the wife will become dominant and that her fancy will be preferred to his own best interests.”[145] These conceptions are furthermore predicated on the idea that women are both static and interchangeable, as Behguy says:

You've had your fun with Vis, you've tasted the fruit of love from her tree;
If you stay with her a hundred years, she'll be the same; she's not a houri, nor the moon!
There are thousands better if you go looking, more beautiful and more pure;
. . . .
Review them all until you find one fairer than the moon,

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142. R226/T309/M208/D274:

بدینِ غمخوارگی تا کی نشینی — نهیبِ جانِ شیرین چند بینی
گه آمد کز بزرگان شرم داری — برادر را تو نیز آزرم داری
گه آمد کز جوانی کام جویی — ز بزم و زرم کردن نام جویی
گه آمد کز بزرگی یاد گیری — به فالِ نیک راهِ داد گیری
تو اکنون پادشایی جست بایی — کجا جز پادشاهی را نشایی
به گردِ دایه و ویسه چه گردی — کزیشان آبِ روی خود ببردی

143. My reading here differs somewhat from that of Meisami's, who describes Behguy as “ironically named” and his take on love as “the satisfaction of concupiscent passion”; cf. *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 185–87.

144. Kaykāvūs ibn Iskandar ibn Qābūs, *Qābūs nāmah*, 131; cf. *Qābūs nāmah* (*tr. Levy*), 119.

چون زنِ دوشیزه خواستی اگرچه به وی مولَع باشی هر شب با وی بازی مکن که وی از تو بدان نیازارد، پندارد که خود همه خلق چنانند تا اگر وقتی ترا عذری یا سفری باشد این زن را بی تو صبر بوَد.

145. al-Ṭūsī, *The Nasirean Ethics*, 164, cf. *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*, 319; Ghazzālī, *Marriage and Sexuality in Islam*, 73–74 and *The Alchemy of Happiness*, 50. See also Southgate, “Conflict,” 24–25.

A belle whose lovely face will drive all thoughts of Vis from your mind.[146] (70.91–93, 102–3)

Such an attitude is of course anathema to the fundamental premises of romantic or erotic love that has molded the relationship between Vis and Rāmin from the outset, but it seems that Rāmin is now willing to consider a change in his ways. "What you've said is true," he replies, "my heart is at war with my soul. I've heard your sound advice, and now I'm cutting off my foolish heart once and for all" (*bedu goft in ke to gu'i chonin ast · del-e man bā ravān-e man be kin ast / shenidam pand-e khub-at rā shenidam · boridam z-in del-e nādān boridam*, 70.124–25). Meanwhile, Mobad is offering similar "wise counsel" to Vis (*be hoshyāri sakhonhā-ye niku goft*, 71.2): he reminds her that, though he has suffered tremendously, he still loves her, and asks if she will not reconsider her stance and reconcile with him. The terms of the offer, peace and order in exchange for Rāmin, are perhaps more appealing to Vis than they once were; at this stage in the game, giving up an affair that has cost her everything doesn't sound so bad: "When she heard these words, winsome Vis shook in her place like a garden cypress" (*cho beshnid in sakhon Vis-e delārāy · cho sarv-e bustān-i jast az jāy*, 72.1). It is noteworthy, however, that she sees herself pitted against a different kind of foe: while Rāmin has been struggling against his own heart, Vis sees herself as cursed by a blight of evil fortune. Like Iseut, she does not apologize for her past behavior, which she still believes was justified, but admits that the situation is simply no longer tenable.

> However pure or foul is my nature, that is how God created it.
> Since I was first given existence, I have been given this measure.
> Just as God made you victorious, did he not make my life unfortunate?
> I am innocent of both good and evil, for I never wished evil for myself.
> I never said, "I refuse good health, I only want grief, trouble, and blame";
> They created me to suffer, and raised me to be humiliated.
> . . . .
> With such hardship, why should one practice love? With such humiliation, why be a lover?
> So much scorn has reached my ears, I've become a byword across the world.
> But they've opened a door in my dark soul; they've placed a light in there.
> A light has come into my heart;

146. R225/T308/M207/D273:

تو کامِ دل ز ویسه بر گرفتی · ز شاخِ مهربانی بر گرفتی
اگر صدسال بینی او همانست · نه حورالعین و ماهِ آسمانست
ازو بهتر به پاکی و نکویی · هزاران بیش یابی گر بجویی
همی بین دلبران را تا بدان گاه · که یابی دلبری نیکوتر از ماه
نگارینی که با آن روی نیکوش · شود ویسه ز یادِ تو فراموش

wisdom has sought to be close to my soul.[147] (72.17–22, 35–38)

The lovers have independently come to the same conclusion that their relationship needs to end. Unsurprisingly, this leads them to their first quarrel: Rāmin goes to Vis to bid her farewell, but when he sits on the throne, she lets out an unexpected rebuke: “Don’t sit in the King’s place! You’re of lesser rank: keep away from the seats of the great!” (*begoft az jāy-e shāhanshāh bar khiz · cho keh bāshi ze jāy-e meh beparhiz* 73.21). Furious, Rāmin draws away, cursing himself:

> You Foolish, Misguided Heart! Look at what calamity has befallen you!
> You’ve suffered so much for Vis, and now look at what she said!
> May no one seek a woman’s love, for roses don’t grow in the salt-marsh.
> . . . .
> Since I wish to cut my heart off from her, why do I moan from her rebukes?
> Now that she’s given me my fortune for free, flee from hardship, O heart, while you can!
> Flee, O heart, from the privations of time! Flee, O heart, from shame eternal!
> Flee, O heart, lest you shed my blood!
> If you flee not now, when will you flee?[148] (73.25–27, 38–41)

Though Vis soon repents of her rebuke and begs Rāmin to stay, reminding him of his oaths to her and her constancy to him; furthermore, she doubts his promises to stay loyal to her: “I fear that one day you’ll see a girl in Gurab like a shining pearl . . . and then you’ll forget being faithful with me” (*azān tarsam ke to*

147. R229/T313/M211/D278:

اگر پاکست طبعم یا پلیدست چنانست او که یزدان آفریدست
چو از آغاز گشتم آفریده بدان اندازه گشتم پروریده
چو یزدان مر ترا پیروز کردست مگر جانِ مرا بدروز کردست
من از خوبی و زشتی بی‌گناهم کجا من خویشتن را بد نخواهم
نه من گفتم که نپذیرم سلامت همه غم خواهم و رنج و ملامت
مرا از بهرِ سختی آفریدند چنان کز بهرِ خواری پروریدند
بدین سختی چه باید مهرْکاری بدین خواری چه باید دوستداری
ز بس کامد به گوشِ من ملامت شدم یکباره در گیتی علامت
دری در جانِ تاریکم گشادند چراغی اندر آن درگه نهادند
فتاد اندر دلِ من روشنایی خرد از جانِ من جُست آشنایی

148. R232/T317/M213/D282:

همی گفت ای دلِ نادان و ناراست نگه کن تا نهیبت از کجا خاست
ز مهرِ ویس چندان رنج دیدی کنون بنگر که از وی چه شنیدی
مبادا کس که از زن مهر جوید که از شوره بیابان گل نروید
چو من زو دل همی خواهم بریدن چرا نالم ز بیغاره شنیدن
کنون کِم داد دولت رایگانی گریز ای دل ز سختی تا توانی
گریز ای دل ز آسیبِ زمانه گریز ای دل ز ننگِ جاودانه
دلا بگریز تا خونم نریزی گر اکنون نه گریزی کی گریزی

ruzi be Gurāb · bebini dokhtari chun dorr-e khwashāb / . . . / pas āzarm-e vafā-ye man nadāri, 73.104, 106), it is too late and Rāmin is resolved to leave. Vis's fears are more than justified; it is not long after Rāmin has arrived in Gurab that he comes upon a girl that takes his breath away. Without a thought for Vis, he asks her her name and if she's available. The girl replies that her name is Gol ("Rose"), and that she is not interested in one whose name has become a byword for illicit love (*az bideli gasht u ʿalāmat*, 74.104). Her advice is to stick with what works—or doesn't, as the case may be:

> You can't turn away from her, or find a mate in another love,
> Since you can't get away, stay with her alone: let you two be the other's disgrace![149]
> (74.100–101)

Hearing this, Rāmin again curses his heart for making his life so miserable (*be del mar bideli rā kard nafrin*, 74.103) and, with seductive words "that led her heart astray" (*sakhonhā-ʾi ke bord u rā del az rāh*, 74.105), attempts to convince Gol that he has reformed, swearing that he has given up Vis for good. Gol replies that she's not one to fall so easily into his traps (*na ān-am man ke dar dām-e to āyam*, 74.129), but that if he wants to have her, he must declare his love for her and remain loyal to her; if he can do this, she will be his, "loyal, constant, and steadfast" (*vafāvarz o vafājuy o vafādār*, 74.135)—an echo of the same request that Vis made of him (63.48). Rāmin gladly accedes to this, and the wedding is soon carried out. However, it is clear that his marriage to Gol did not solve his woes; if anything, he seems to be getting more and more volatile. Their honeymoon is rudely cut short about a month after their wedding, after all the guests have left and they have retired to their castle in Gurab. Gol arrays herself so splendidly that Rāmin, gazing upon her in admiration, puts his foot in his mouth:

> He said to her, "O Moon of Gurab, whose beauty shames the moon itself!
> Today, you are my soul's cure, for you fair resemble Vis who steals hearts!
> Your sweet lips and silver breast are just like hers; it's like you two were two halves of an apple![150]
> (76.19–21)

149. R240/T330/M222/D295:

تو نتوانی که از وی باز گردی — و با یارِ دگر انباز گردی
چو زو نشکیبی او را باش تنها — تو زو رسوا و او نیز او تو رسوا

150. R244/T337/M227/D303:

بدو گفت ای به خوبی ماِ گوراب — ببرده ماهِ رویت ماه را آب
مرا امروز تو درمانِ جانی — که ویسِ دلستان را نیک مانی
تو چون زیسی لب از نوش و بر از سیم — تو گویی کرده شد سیبی به دو نیم

As we might expect, Gol is none too pleased to hear this and gives Rāmin a thorough dressing-down for his selfishness (*khwadkāmi*), cursing Vis and the Nurse into the bargain. Rāmin has thoroughly disgraced himself: he cannot stay loyal to his first love, but he cannot, as Gol had feared, give up his love for her. By any standard of manliness he aspires to, be it the steadfast lover who stoically endures all for love's sake or the prince who rules his emotions rather than let them rule him, he is not up to snuff. Even if we were to consider him as a crazed inamorato à la Majnun, breaking all social conventions and embarrassing all who know him, he has lessened his credibility by switching beloveds at the drop of a hat. Regrettably, inconstancy has become his trademark, and this realization, for the consummate performer of love-lyric, shames and enrages him, inspiring to further heights of cruelty. As the narrator puts it, "That faithless lover wrote a letter to a lover who had been nothing but loyal" (*yak-i nāma nevesht ān bivafā yār · be yāri bas vafājuy o vafādār*, 77.4). In it, he begins,

> How Strange! You'd say my love is all hate, for men and women alike curse it!
> Anyone in the world who hears my name reviles me and rips my garments.
> My honor has become despicable, and even more so my desire![151] (77.9–11)

"You'd say my love is hate"—an opening with all the appearance of a Freudian slip. It is certainly a stark departure from the conventions of Rāmin's love-lyrics, where our hero never seemed to tire of describing his long nights of suffering and solitude. Now he has a new story to tell about their love, one full of rage and vitriol: before they met, he says, he used to fear nothing, he used to fight lions, and his heart never troubled him. But then, Vis has destroyed his reputation, has stolen his youth, has unmanned him. But now he's renounced his love for Vis and has discovered the joys of legitimate marriage: here is a wife who goes to bed with him every night and is by his side every day, without disgrace, without toil, a love that isn't lived on the run. His letter concludes with a malicious farewell:

> When now I recall those wasted years, I pity my wounded soul
> For all the patience it showed to no avail, for all the poison it drank out of grief.
> I didn't know the world then, for I showed joy in times of travail.
> I was lost, I knew not my way; like a worm, I couldn't tell vinegar from honey.

151. R245/T338/M228/D305:

تو گفتی مهرِ من بود ای عجب کین — که مرد و زن برو کردند نفرین
به گیتی هر که نامِ من شنیدی — به زشتی پوستین بر من دریدی
بدین‌سان زشت گشتی روی نامم — وزین بدتر به زشتی روی کامم

Now I've woken up from that dream, now I'm sober from that drunken state.
Now I've broken the bonds of adversity, I've escaped the prison of misfortune.
I've said my vows to rose-scented Gol, by the glorious Word and wise Spirit.
. . . .
From now on, don't count the days, months, or years; don't look overmuch in my direction
or for the day of my coming.[152] (77.48–54, 60)

The ferocity of Rāmin's rage is an inviting opportunity to consider whether he, too, might be understood in terms more complex than what we normally are willing to consider for characters in the romance tradition—at least in comparison with a work like *Varqa & Golshāh*, the closest surviving relative to *V&R*. Throughout the story, as we have seen, Rāmin seems not only like the quintessential lover but even goes out of his way to play the part at every opportunity. The clichés and vapidity of his language certainly inculcate the impression that his "character" is merely a narrative expansion of the nuclear tropes of the lyric poem, as Zumthor has suggested, performed by a generic poet; but his failure to actually hold himself to the standards required of such a stock character is not allowed to pass by without some friction.[153] This suggests that there might be something much deeper going on in Rāmin's story, although what it reveals is not very pleasant to witness.

The spark that lights the fuse, I suspect, goes back to the underlying problem we had discussed in the world of the lyric tradition as a closed space where the ever-absent beloved is eternalized and abstracted into a static figure who simply acts as a sounding-board for the lover's emotions. True, the beloved has many guises, and is as commonly regarded as being cruel and aloof (a common complaint from Rāmin) as she is tender and kind; but Vis has never shown any behavior that would justify putting her in the first category. As for the second, such a beloved is understood to be *forever* devoted to her lover, as Vis maintains herself to be, and so Rāmin's ideas about love can safely revolve around this assumption that

152. R247/T340/M229/D307:

چو یاد آید گذشته سالیانم — ببخشایم همی بر خسته جانم
که چندان صبر بر ناکام چون کرد — ببیمارِ تو چندان زهر چون خورد
من آنگه از جهان آگه نبودم — که در سختی همی شادی نمودم
ز راه آگه نبودم همچو گمراه — چو کرمِ سِک ز طعمِ شهد ناگاه
کنون زان خفتگی بیدار گشتم — وز آن مستی کنون هشیار گشتم
کنون بندِ بلا بر هم شکستم — وز آن زندانِ بدروزی بجستم
بخوردم با گلِ گل‌بوی سوگند — به گفتِ فرّخ و جانِ خردمند
تو زین پس سال و ماه و روز مشمر — به راه و روزِ من بسیار منگر

153. Cf. Zumthor, *Toward a Medieval Poetics*, 282.

Vis will always be there to open the window, shimmy down the rope, pull a bed-trick, or suffer beatings for his sake. This all changes when Vis has reconciled with Mobad and tells Rāmin to get out of the king's seat. The impossible has happened: Vis has "broken faith," proving that she really is no good for him, giving him an excuse to flee from this destructive path. Yet the destruction, it turns out, is his own.

The extent of Rāmin's destructive fury is vividly portrayed in the follow-up scene to his letter. When Vis finds out about Rāmin's infidelity, she sends the Nurse out to beg him to keep her on as his mistress: "Keep your new wife alongside your old lover, for every seed will produce a joyful fruit for you" (*zan-e now bā delārām-e kohan dār · ke har tokhmi torā kām-i dehad bār*, 78.121). But when the Nurse arrives in Media to deliver Vis's desperate message, this is the scene she encounters:

> As the Nurse crossed into Gurab, the faithless prince appeared before her in the wild,
> Charging like an enraged lion among the boars, stags, and onagers,
> His men on the road had built a fortress on the road, beseiging every prey therein:
> Necks hung broken on their breasts, their four limbs bent and twisted off,
> Their hides sewn with so many arrows you would have thought birds his quarry.
> The air was full of hawks and dogs roamed the plain, diving and coursing,
> These filled the air with feathers, while those covered the ground in carcasses,
> The peaks turned read with flowing blood; the mountains offered as little refuge as a stone.
> When the Nurse saw Rāmin on the hunt, her heart was pierced with arrows at his cruelty.[154]
> (79.3–9)

This gruesome panorama did not escape the notice of Julie Meisami, who sees this as the moment when "Ramin's conduct becomes perilously close to that of Mowbad" in replicating the same patterns of violence and fury that had cost the king his claim both to Vis and to lawful rule.[155] Although the equivalence isn't exact—Mobad shows his violent streak not in the hunt, but in going to war against Viru and then

154. R253/T350/M235/D316. The fourth line, from the O, K, and I MSS, is not included in Rowshan's edition, but I kept it in here—not that it changes the overall image to take it out, but it is an especially effective detail.

چو اندر مرزِ گوراب آمد از راه به صحرا پیشش آمد بی‌وفا شاه
بسانِ شیرِ خشم‌آلود تازان به گوران و گوزنان و گرازان
سپه در ره شده همچون حصاری حصاری گشته در وی هر شکاری
گروهی گردن اندر بر شکسته گروهی دست و پای از هم گسسته
ز بس در چرم ایشان آژده تیر تو گفتی پرّور بودند نخچیر
هوا پر باز بود و دشت پر سگ شتابان هر دو از پرواز و از تگ
یکی کرده هوا را پر پرنده دگر کرده زمین را پر درنده
ز رنگِ خونِ رنگان کوه پر رنگ چو سنگی کوه بر آهو شده تنگ
چو دایه دید رامین را به نخچیر دلش گشت از جفای رام پر تیر

155. Meisami, "Kings and Lovers," 5. See also *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, 140, where she claims that the manifest violence of this scene establishes the two brothers and rivals as moral equivalents in their concupiscence.

beating Vis—it is very much worth investigating the symbolic or psychological underpinnings of the two brothers' violence. We discussed in Chapter 4 how Mobad's unwillingness to be violent when his public position demands it is eventually channeled into a blind fury at his own marginal and helpless state, embodied before him as Vis. Similarly, Rāmin's inability to relinquish Vis even as he cruelly pushes her away brings out the nearly psychopathic way he disregards all life outside of his own, revealing the inner workings of his love-relationship ("You'd say my love is hate"). His sudden transformation from a helpless, weeping lover to a maelstrom of death and fury suggests that the discourse of love as Rāmin expresses it is really just a sublimated version of a fundamentally destructive act. There is certainly no doubt that Rāmin's rancor knows no bounds: when the Nurse approaches him,

> He said to her, "You filthy demon-spawn! You maleficent, ill-omened teacher of evil!
> You've tricked me a hundred ways with your cunning; you took away my sense and culture
> and made me like a drunkard!
> Now you've come again, ghoul-like, to lead me astray again!"[156] (79.12–14)

With these words, he turns her away, leaving himself alone to continue raging uselessly at his heart. It is at this final betrayal that Vis turns to the pen, and the theme of writing out her message for the world to witness develops into one of the most important and memorable sections of *Vis & Rāmin*. The theme has already been carefully seeded in the form of her laments, as we saw above; and when she first learns that Rāmin has married Gol, she turns towards an imagined public and recites the following words:

> O lovers who revere love! Today I am the greatest of you all!
> I will give you a bit of advice in my kindness, for free as well,
> Accept my counsel, lovers, I'll give you advice if you will take it:
> Look at me! Hear my story! And strive no more to practice love!
> Look at me! Take heed! And forswear love for anyone!
> Do not plant the sapling of love in your hearts, or you'll give up your souls!
> If you don't know what happened to me,
> I have written the tale in blood on my face; read it there![157] (78.77–83)

156. R253/T350/M235/D316:

بدو گفت ای پلیدِ دیوگوهر　　بدْآموز و بداندیش و بداختر
مرا بفریفتی صد ره به نیرنگ　　ز من بردی چو مستی هوش و فرهنگ
دگر بار آمدی چون غول ناگاه　　که تا سازی مرا در راه گمراه

157. R250/T346/M232/D313:

الا ای عاشقانِ مهرپرور　　منم بر عاشقان امروز مهتر
شما را من ز روی مهربانی　　نصیحت کرد خواهم رایگانی

Vis's call to "read" the story of her grief upon her body has been made before in her laments through exclamations like "Look at me in my pursuit of love!" (67.106) and "My heart is like a letter" (62.30); but at this juncture her pleas have picked up a new urgency. It appears that these calls are motivated by two ongoing concerns, first that she vindicate herself and prove that she has been unjustly wronged, and second to act as an example and warning to others who might tread in her footsteps. That this message be heard is all the more important considering her social exile ("Why am I never like the others?" 67.115) and universal condemnation as a sinner (55.269), a whore (51.33), and a liar (68.169). Thus, when the Nurse returns to her with nothing to show for her self-abasement (remembering that she was willing to let Rāmin keep her on as a mistress, even though he had married another), she announces the themes that she must address in her efforts to hold Rāmin to task.

> Why, O lovers, do you not heed my advice and take a lesson from me?
> Look at me! And bind your hearts to no one, for if you do you'll suffer every hardship.
> Look at me from afar, O lovers! You'll burn if you get too close.
> Such a fire has fallen upon my heart, for my lover's heart is stone and steel.
> I'm excused if I let out a cry, for I cry out against the injustice of that youth.
> I showed him my wounded heart, and told him how I suffered for his sake.
> Who could know how much evil he has done me?
> Every evil deed grew a hundredfold in my soul.
> . . . .
> Rāmin in his folly has hurt me many times, but now he's broken my back in one blow.
> He's broken many branches from my tree, but now he's pulled out the roots.
> I always endured his ill-treatment, but now this blow from afar has done in all patience;
> This time he has done to my soul what patience cannot tolerate.
> His cruel sword has severed my head; the lance of his separation has skewered my heart.
> How can I tolerate my own beheading?
> How can I stay silent at my own impalement?[158] (80.16–22, 45–50)

نصیحت دوستان از من پذیرید　　دهم پندِ شما گر پند گیرید
مرا بینید حالِ من نیوشید　　ز مهرِ ناکسان بیزار باشید
نهالِ عاشقی در دل مکارید　　و گر کارید جان او را سپارید
اگر چونانکه حالِ من ندانید　　به خون بر رخ نوشتستم بخوانید

158. R255/T354/M238/D320:

چرا ای عاشقان عبرت نگیرید　　چرا از من نصیحت نه پذیرید
مرا بینید و دل بر کس مبندید　　که پس هر سختیی بر دل پسندید
مرا ای عاشقان از دور بینید　　بسوزید ار به نزدِ من نشینید
مرا زین گونه آتش در دل افتاد　　که یارم را دل از سنگست و پولاد
مرا عذرست اگر فریاد خوانم　　که من فریاد از آن بیداد خوانم
دلِ پر ریشِ خویش او را نمودم　　بدو گفتم که رنجت آزمودم
که داند کاو به جای من چه بد کرد　　یکی بد کرد و جانم را به صد کرد

With this, Vis summons her scribe and composes the famous "Ten Letters." Taken together, they are not an insignificant part of the work as a whole (some 623 lines out of 9,045, roughly seven per cent) and they appear to be highly polished pieces of rhetoric.[159] The regular length of the compositions suggests that they were laid out according to a systematic framework: the exordium runs at a hundred lines, and each subsequent essay is 50, 51, 50, 50, 52, 50, 51, 50, and 47 lines, ending with a final letter and peroration clocking in at 72 lines. The length of these passages forbids a close reading of all of them in a chapter that may have already tried the reader's patience, so for this discussion we will only focus on the opening doxology, as it contains what is in my opinion one of the most brilliant examples of Gorgāni's (speaking through Vis) literary genius and a profound moment in his development of Vis as a character with agency, voice, and an irrepressible selfhood. Again, we will employ some transliteration to highlight the rhetorical force of this opening passage, although it is evident enough in translation.

sar-e nāma be nām-e yak khodāvand	*v-az ān pas karda yād-e mehr o payvand*
ze sarv-i sukhta v-az bon gosasta	*be sarv-i az chaman shādāb rosta*
ze māh-i dar moḥāq-e mehr penhān	*be māh-i dar sepehr-e kām tābān*
ze bāgh-i sar be sar āfat gerefta	*be bāgh-i sar be sar khorram shekofta*
ze shākh-i khoshk gashta hāmvāra	*be shākh-i bār-e u māh o setāra*
ze kān-i kanda va bi-bar bemānda	*be kān-i dar jahān gohar feshānda*
ze ruz-i bar ḥad-e maghreb resida	*be ruz-i sar ze mashreq bar keshida*
ze yāqut-i be chāh-i dar bemānda	*be yāqut-i be tāj-i dar neshānda*
ze golzār-i samum-e hejr dida	*be golzār-i ze khubi beshkofida*
ze daryā-ye shoda bi-dorr o bi-āb	*be daryā-ye por-āb o dorr-e khwashāb*
ze bakht-i tira chun shurida āb-i	*be bakht-i nāmvar chun āftāb-i*
ze mehr-i tā gah-e maḥshar fazāyān	*be mehr-i har zamān kāhesh namāyān*
ze ʿeshq-i tāb-e u az ḥad gozashta	*be ʿeshq-i garm buda sard gashta*

At the head of the letter, the name of God the One
Followed by a recollection of love and connection:
From a cypress burned, its roots ripped out

مرا رامین به نادانی بسی خست   کنون پشتِ مرا یکباره بشکست
بسی شاخ از درختِ من بیفگند   کنون اصلش برید و بیخ بر کند
بر آزارش همی کردم صبوری   کنون صبرم ربود آزارِ دوری
بدین بار او به جانِ من آن کرد   که با آن خود شکیبایی توان کرد
مرا شمشیرِ جورش سر بریدست   مرا ژوپینِ هجرش دل دریدست
صبوری چون کنم بر سر بریدن   خموشی چون کنم بر دل دریدن

159. Some important studies of the "Letters" as a work-within-the-work include Gandjeï, "Dah-nāma"; Dankoff, "The Lyric in the Romance"; Rustamī, "Bar′rasī-i vīzhagī′hā-yi adabī dar nāmah′hā-yi ʿāshiqānah-yi Vīs va Rāmīn-i Asʿad-i Gurgānī"; Khurāsānī and Dāvūdī-Muqaddam, "Taḥlīl-i dahnāmah′hā"; see also section 1.4.

To a cypress verdant, flourishing in the field
From a moon unseen as love wanes crescent
To a moon shining bright in the sky of its pleasure
From a garden in blight from end to end
To a garden in bloom through and through
From a branch that has forever dried out
To a branch whose fruit is the moon and stars
From a mine dug out and exhausted
To a mine casting jewels to all the world
From a day arrived at sunset
To a day that rises above the horizon
From a ruby left behind in a pit
To a ruby set within a crown
From a rosebed ruined by separation's storm
To a rosebed blossoming in beauty
From a sea that's lost both pearls and water
To a sea that's full of water and lustrous gems
From a dreadful fate that churns like a raging sea
To a glorious lot that shines like the sun
From a love that will grow until the Gathering
To a love that shrinks with every moment
From a passion that burns beyond all bounds
To a passion once warm, now faded and cold[160] (81.9–21)

We have noticed Gorgāni's gift at anaphora in a number of other passages, but rarely do we see it deployed with such striking force. The *From–To* rhythm continues on for a total of nineteen lines, building the emotional urgency and fervor with each reiteration; it's as though Vis, who has claimed that Rāmin has wronged her a hundred ways, is now prepared to list them out individually. An even longer performance of the same strategy is found at the end of the letters, providing a fitting rhetorical bookend to the "Letters" as a whole. There, the anaphoric pattern "Greetings from me, to that [knight, cypress, moon, etc.]" (*dorud az man bedān* . . .) runs for an overwhelming forty-two lines, before doubling tempo by repeating the phrase "More than" (*fozun az*) twelve times in rapid succession. Such rhythmic patterns are striking enough on the page, but they can be devastating when performed out loud: like the act of reading out the individual names of a group of people killed in a disaster, one after another, the cumulative effect of each repetition impresses upon the audience a sense of crushing enormity that can only be achieved through time and attention—a one-off phrase like "hundreds" or "thousands" may imply such

160. R258/T358/M240/D326.

a thing, but can never effect the emotional response the numbers demand. Having primed (or softened) her readers with this aural bombardment, Vis then begins her argument:

> Know, Rāmin, that the world is ever turning; from it come health and hurt alike,
> Sometimes toil, sometimes joy, sometimes death, sometimes life.
> The world brings us good and ill, and then on we head to the next world.
> All that remains of us in the world is a story; only God is everlasting.
> The whole world will read our story and know who among us is in the right.
> You yourself know which of us is disgraced, for he seeks his every pleasure at the expense of his name.
> I'm the one whose purity you beheld, whom you selected above all others for my beauty.
> I was as pure as a drop of dew, my beauty like a tulip petal.
> No man enjoyed me save you; no dust was cast upon my face by fate.
> I was like an onager in the fields, who had never seen a hunter's traps and snares.
> You were the hunter, you were the trapper. You laid your noose in my path,
> And caught me in your shameful nets—and now you cast me in a lonely dungeon!
> You seduced me, you pulled me from my path, and now you break your vows to me!
> . . . .
> Consider now how many evil deeds you've done to rob us both of honor:
> First, you seduced the wife of other men, disgracing their families;
> Second, you swore false oaths, and broke your word with those you promised;
> Third, you turned your back on your faithful lover, who had brought you no shame or toil.
> Fourth, you spoke unjustly to she who only has you in the world.[161] (81.36–48, 57–61)

Striking again is Vis's reference to the act of reading, judgement, and knowing. She is determined to show how the case is in her favor, that it was Rāmin who wronged her, and not the other way around.

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161. R259/T360/M241/D327. On verse 81.44, there is a small typo in the Rowshan edition, which reads *tā* instead of *nā*.

بدان راما که گیتی گرد گردست — ازو گه تن‌درستی گاه دردست
گهی رنجست و گاهی شادمانی — گهی مرگست و گاهی زندگانی
به نیک و بد جهان بر ما سرآید — وزان پس خود جهانِ دیگر آید
ز ما ماند به گیتی در فسانه — در آن گیتی خدای جاودانه
فسانِ ما همه گیتی بخوانند — یکایک خوب و زشتِ ما بدانند
تو خود دانی که از ما کیست بدنام — کجا از نامِ بد جوید همه کام
من آن بودم به پاکی کِم تو دیدی — به خوبی از جهانم بر گزیدی
من از پاکی چو قطرِ ژاله بودم — به خوبی همچو برگِ لاله بودم
ندیده کام جز تو مرد بر من — زمانه نا فشانده گرد بر من
چو گوری بودم اندر مرغزاران — ندیده دام و داسِ دام‌داران
تو بودی دام‌دار و داس‌دارم — نهادی داس و دام اندر گذارم
مرا در دامِ رسوایی فگندی — کنون در چاهِ تنهایی فگندی
مرا بفریفتی وز ره ببردی — کنون زنهار با جانم بخوردی
نگر تا چند کارِ بد بکردی — که آبِ خویش و آبِ من ببردی
یکی بفریفتی جفتِ کسان را — به ننگ‌آلوده کردی دودمان را
دوم سوگندها بدروغ کردی — ابا زنهاریان زنهار خوردی
سوم برگشتی از یارِ وفادار — بی آن کز وی رسیدت رنج و آزار
چهارم ناسزا گفتی بر آن کس — که او را خود توی اندر جهان بس

Referring back to the negotiations that led to their relationship in the beginning, Vis reminds her readers that it was Rāmin who tried scheme after scheme to win her heart, until he finally landed on her Achilles' heel and convinced her to love him as an act of mercy. This is, she maintains, who she really is: not the reviled adulteress of the royal court, not the cruel and uncaring beloved of Rāmin's thought-world, but *Vis*, whose intrinsic value can be summoned and expressed by nothing more than the mention of her name.

man ān Vis-am ke ruy-am āftāb ast	*man ān Vis-am ke muy-am moshk-e nāb ast*
man ān Vis-am ke chehr-am now-bahār ast	*man ān Vis-am ke mehr-am pāydār ast*
man ān Vis-am ke māh-e nikvān-am	*man ān Vis-am ke shāh-e jāvdān-am*
man ān Vis-am ke māh-am bar rokhān ast	*man ān Vis-am ke nush-am dar labān ast*
man ān Vis-am man ān Vis-am man ān Vis	*ke budi to Solaymān man cho Bilqis*

I am that Vis whose face is the sun! I am that Vis whose hair is pure musk!
I am that Vis whose face is the spring! I am that Vis whose love lasts eternal!
I am that Vis, the moon of all beauties! I am that Vis, the queen of enchantresses!
I am that Vis whose cheeks are the moon! I am that Vis whose lips are ambrosia!
I am that Vis, I am that Vis, I am Vis, who was to your Solomon the queen Bilqis![162]
(81.62–66)

The use of patterns and anaphora performs a symbolically charged act: her discourse, circling around her name like a sculpture in the round, visiting the question of *who she is* from a variety of angles—moon-like Vis, dark-haired Vis, faithful Vis, enchanting Vis—finally settles upon into the name itself, to the exclusion of all external descriptors, in a thrice-spoken phrase: "I am that Vis"—that is, *I am myself*, whom the world knows and recognizes by name alone. In this bold declaration, selfhood is self-defined. This is why the acts of of letter-writing, storytelling, and witnessing is of the utmost importance to her; as a character whose name has become a byword for sin and immorality, she must reclaim that name as her own, regain control of her narrative, and have her voice acknowledged if she is to ever escape the disgrace and damnation she has feared and suffered for so long. It is an amazing moment of self-fashioning made possible through the threefold act of writing, speaking, and rhetorical performance, both declared and enacted by the repetition of a simple, irreducible statement.

162. R260/T361/M242/D329.

Different kinds of discourse go a long way towards defining the characters in *Vis & Rāmin*, allowing them to acquire distinct personalities and psychologies that carry over from scene to scene or episode to episode. By paying close attention to the regulation and modulation of voice through generic conventions and the abstraction of poetic codes into narrative form, we can begin to trace the contours of discrete thought-worlds for each character, not through the mechanisms of backstory or complex inner psychology as we find in later novels, but through the discursive modes utilized by each. By playing these images of language off one another in a narrative framework, the text reveals the way that a shared discourse about a given topic—love, for example—may produce ambivalence and polyvalence even when drawing from a fairly limited range of common topoi. The gap is most visible, I believe, in the self-presentations of Vis and Rāmin through their songs, soliloquies, laments, and letters, by which two radically different worldviews about love are articulated, through a shared set of poetic conventions. In short, we end up with two characters who are communicating at cross purposes, hearing different meanings embedded in the same words. While Rāmin's lyrical persona eventually drives him to enacting its latent violence, Vis shows herself unwavering in her commitment to the bedrock principles by which she has defined herself since the beginning of the story; in this latter half of the story, with her world crashing down around her, these are the principles that allow her to continue to fight for her own worth as a self-willed subject who acts and speaks, the two qualities that are conventionally denied her in the horizons of Rāmin's lyrics. The "Ten Letters" marks the most powerful and articulate presentation of this selfhood, and perhaps Vis would have been pleased to know that, despite her continued infamy in Persian literature, it was indeed these letters that were best preserved in the anthologies and collections of later years. Though they were intended for Rāmin, Vis's letters were in the end ineffective in altering his behavior; in an ironic but all too appropriate twist, the credit for that goes to his own inconstant heart.

As Vis writes the letters, an important development is taking place in Gurab that the narrator sums up in a single blunt line: "When Rāmin had spent some time married to Gol, he grew both tired and satiated of their union" (*cho Rāmin chand gah bā Gol bepayvast · shod as payvand-e u ham sir o ham mast* 84.1). Restless, the prince goes out riding with his companions, when an unexpected event sends his head spinning:

One of his companions, a beautiful maiden, handed him a bouquet of violets
And the memory of that day rushed into Rāmin's heart, when he had sworn his oath with fetching Vis:
She was sitting on the royal throne, her face a shining son, her breast a gleaming moon,
And she gave a nosegay of violets, saying, "Let this forever remind you of me,
Whenever you see fresh violets, recall this oath and promise to mind."
And then she wished many curses upon whoever should break his oaths and vows.
The heart of noble Rāmin was so wounded that the world grew dark before his eyes.
It was not the world that was dark, but his eyes, blinded by the smoke that rose from his burning heart.[163] (84.14–21)

It is thus the appearance of the token—an important recurring motif, from the story of *Varqa & Golshāh* to *Tristan & Iseut*—that effects a change in Rāmin's heart. Though one might imagine him to be relieved to have (re)discovered his "real" identity through this awakening, it is not to be: instead, it provokes the latest round in Rāmin's bitter feud with himself. Though he is seen to curse his heart throughout the story, few of his soliloquies personify it as much as this one, You Confused, Senseless Thing (*ḥayrān o bikhwish*, 84.32), in which he recasts the story of his waywardness as the wicked design of his own heart. In creating this alter ego, the "bad" Rāmin who cannot distinguish between right and wrong (*ke zesht as khub o nik az bad nadāni*, 84.36), "good" Rāmin can find a way to maintain his innocence, distancing himself from the damage he has caused. If anything, he is just another victim of his heart's cruel tricks:

You came to Gurab, you broke your vow, you told me I had been saved, but you were wrong!
You're not the one drunk, I'm the one drunk and ignorant for sailing the sea on your wind!
You told me, "Go find another love, let go of your love and loyalty for Vis,
Don't fear for me, for when we're apart, I'll be able to bear not seeing her."
Encouraged by your words, I cut off my beloved and picked someone else to take her place.
And now you're drowning in the sea, while you've placed me in the fires of separation.
. . . .

163. R287/T403/M268/D371:

ز یارانش یکی حورِ پری‌زاد — بنفشه داشت یک دسته بدو داد
دلِ رامین به یاد آورد آن روز — که پیمان بست با ویسِ دل‌افروز
نشسته ویس بر تختِ شهنشاه — ز رویش مهر تابان وز برش ماه
به رامین داد یک دسته بنفشه — به یادم دار گفت این را همیشه
کجا بینی بنفشه تازه هر بار — ازین عهد و ازین سوگند یاد آر
پس آنگه کرد نفرین فراوان — بر آن کاو بشکند سوگند و پیمان
چنان دلخسته شد آزاده رامین — که تیره شد جهانش بر جهان بین
جهان تیره نبود و چشمِ او بود — که بر چشم آمد از سوزان دلش دود

> I regret it now, why did I obey your command? Why did I place my bridle into your hands?
> Why did I conduct my affairs guided by your wisdom? I've degraded both you and me![164]
> (84.43–48, 51–52)

This poem marks the first signs of a gradual fragmentation of Rāmin's personality that will only reach full maturity by the snowstorm scene (see Chapter 5.5), but already we can see that he has dragged himself into a crisis that appears to be beyond his ability to solve. His efforts to distance himself from his guilt has only divorced himself from his own heart, and like Mobad, he appears to have fallen into a state of war against himself, echoing his brother's words when he admits, "It's only right that I've seen despair and affliction; for I myself broke the branch of happiness" (*sazad gar andoh o timār didam · ke shākh-e shādmāni khwad boridam*, 84.58). The question before him now, however, is what is he to do next; he's tired of Gol, he wants to return to Vis, but how can he face up to what he's done?

> What excuse can I bring to her now? How can I show her my branded heart?
> How cheeky, how shameless, how disgraceful would I be to warm a love that's gone cold?[165]
> (84.62–63)

For a long time, Rāmin is unable to come to a decision: in a memorable line, Gorgāni compares his roiling heart to a headless bird as it jerks and flops (*cho morgh-e sar-borida bar tapidi*, 85.123). Not the most discrete of individuals, he confesses his dilemma to his father-in-law, Rafidā, who proceeds to chide his daughter for ever getting involved with such a "snake" as Rāmin (85.1–14). That evening, seated at the royal banquet and paying as much attention to his wife as a corpse pays to a storehouse of gems (*chonān bod pish-e Rāmin ān saman-bar · ke bāshad pish-e morda ganj-e gohar*, 85.23), Rāmin delivers his last monologue (WHAT COULD BE SWEETER), a long soliloquy that seems like the kind of dramatic aside that

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164. R288/T404/M269/D373:

به گوراب آمدی پیمان شکستی — مرا گفتی برَستم هم نرَستی
نه تو مستی که من نادان و مستم — که بر بادِ تو در دریا نشستم
مرا گفتی که شو یاری دگر گیر — دل از مهر و وفای ویس بر گیر
مترس از من که من هنگامِ دوری — کنم بر دردِ نادیدن صبوری
به امیدِ تو از جانان بریدم — به جای او یکی دیگر گزیدم
کنونم غرقه در دریا بماندی — مرا بر آتشِ هجران نشاندی
پشیمانم چرا فرمانت بردم — مهارِ خود به دستِ تو سپردم
چرا بر دانشِ تو کار کردم — ترا و خویشتن را خوار کردم

165. R288/T405/M269/D372:

چه عذر آرم کنون با دلربایم — دلِ پر داغِ وی را چون نمایم
چو شوخم من چه بی‌آب و چه بی‌شرم — اگر بفسرده مهری را کنم گرم

sets the stage for the next act of a play. Contemplating his circumstances, Rāmin speculates that Vis must have no idea of his state, that she misunderstands him and must believe that he is happy here with his wife—if only she knew how he misses her! (85.30–34). Though embarrassed and humiliated, he decides, in the end, that he can conceal his feelings no longer, concluding with a theatrical flourish: "From now on, I won't keep my heart back! I'll reveal its secret to the world!" (*najuyam bish az in bā del madārā · konam rāz-ash be giti āshkārā*, 85.46). This thought seems to hearten him; he declares to us and himself:

> I'll leave this moment and take the way to my beloved; even if I die, I'll have died on the way to her.
> They'll lay me a grave at the head of the road, and the whole world will know of what happened.
> Strangers who see my dust will sit for a while by my tomb.
> They'll have pity when they know of my state, and say my name with approval.
> "He was a stranger killed by love-separation, may God forgive his soul."[166] (85.50–54)

The image that is flashing before Rāmin's eyes would be well familiar to those acquainted with the tropes of the romance tradition; to die a martyr to love is one of the best things that can happen to lovers, perhaps even better than acquiring the object of desire, for at such an occasion the lover will enter the lists of those whose love was so perfect the world was not fit to hold it. This is a story to stand behind; as things stand now, his infidelity and treachery to lover and brother have become legendary in the land:

> From Media to Khuzestan to Kerman to Tabarestan to Gorgan to Khorasan
> My tale is told in every tongue, my name is on everyone's lips,
> If you listen, you'll here from river and plain everyone singing songs about me
> In the city, the youth and the wise, and shepherds singing in the field
> Women in the home, men in the market, everyone is singing my song![167] (85.92–96)

166. R293/T/M274/D381:

هم اکنون راهِ شهرِ دوست گیرم   که گر میرم به راهِ دوست میرم
نهندم گورباری بر سرِ راه   همه گیتی شوند از حالم آگاه
غریبانی که خاکم را ببینند   زمانی بر سرِ گورم نشینند
ببخشایند چون حالم بدانند   به نیکی بر زبان نامم برانند
غریبی بود کشته شد ز هجران   روانش را بیامرزاد یزدان

167. R295/T414/M276/D383:

به کوهستان و خوزستان و کرمان   به طبرستان و گرگان و خراسان
رونده یادِ من بر هر زبانی   فتاده نامِ من در هر دهانی
چو بنیوشی ز هر دشتی و رودی   همی گویند بر حالم سرودی
همم در شهر دانندە جوانان   همم بر دشت خواننده شبانان
زنان در خانه و مردان به بازار   سرودِ من همی گویند هموار

If this is Rāmin's final poetic performance (the penultimate, actually—he will deliver one more short poem a while later, on the eve of his revolt against Mobad), it is a sobering indication of the general trajectory of his character. Despite his woes and worries, Rāmin does not seem to have had any epiphanies about the nature of love or the best way to be a lover. Even at this stage, with practically everyone in the story wishing he was dead, his thoughts remain firmly anchored on himself and the character he sees himself playing; his road to redemption does not lead to a paradigmatic shift, but regresses back to the self-referential landscape of his poetic persona. This comes at a certain price: as Rāmin resorts to less and less heroic deeds to prop up his heroic self-image and the worldview it represents, the mounting pressure and antipathy he faces from the narrative around him drives him to a suicidal course of action. Like Vis, he is obsessed with making sure his name is remembered in the way he wants it to be, but the only way he can see it realized now, at this stage in the game, is through his own death. As he rises from the banquet table, the narrator cannot help but take a jab at him as he flees the scandal he has created and disappears into the night, speeding off to a final confrontation with Vis.

> Rāmin was so miserable that he fled the banquet as a coward flees a battle.
> He got off his royal throne, they brought him his road-cutting horse,
> He leapt upon his mountain bodied steed; you'd say the horse had sprouted wings
> He sped out the portal like one who needs no guidance, taking the road to Khorasan.[168]
> (85.122–27)

168. R296/T416/M277/D385:

چنان دلتنگ شد رامین در آن بزم	کزو بگریخت همچون بددل از رزم
فـرود آمـد ز تـخـتِ شـاهـوارش	بـیـاوردنـد رخـشِ راهـوارش
به پشتِ رخش کُه پیکر درآمد	تـو گـفـتـی رخش او را پـر بـرآمـد
ز دروازه بـشـد چـون رهشـنـاسـان	گـرفـتـه راه و هـنـجـارِ خـراسـان

Epilogue: *Liebestod*

In the previous four chapters, we have spent some time considering our initial question about the poetics of romantic love in *Vis & Rāmin* from a variety of angles. In Chapter 2, "Finding Romance," we discussed romantic love as a theme that shapes and organizes a historical genre of writing and narration, bestowing it with a distinctive set of literary strategies. Through the time-honored practice of theme and variation, these strategies produce what Jauss has called a "horizon of expectations" that will bear upon the story's structure, organization, plot, topoi, and denouement, generating a push-and-pull dynamic between the familiar and the surprising that brings about aesthetic pleasure and opens up the space for change and innovation. Chapter 3, "An Affair of Conscience," considered one such innovation from the perspective of the story's heroine, Vis. Expecting to walk the well-worn path of romantic love as an ethical praxis rooted in faith, loyalty, and constancy, Vis is instead forced by the circumstances of her story to move outside the boundaries of this praxis, thereby complicating and at times challenging its normative authority in the ideological universe of her genre. With the figure of the romance heroine thus destabilized, we turned our focus to the story's equally ambivalent villain in Chapter 4, "Impotent." In this study, we saw how Mobad's failure to rule was symptomatic of a deeper instability inherent within his simultaneous claim to the roles of king and lover. Though both roles are couched in and legitimated by the underlying yet elusive notion of manliness, such that it takes a "real man" to successfully occupy either position, we found that this notion, when tested, proves to be more of a quagmire than a foundation. In the end, neither love nor kingship can deliver their promises of masculine virtue, power, and agency unto Mobad, subjecting him instead to a barrage of relentless and conflicting pressures that ultimately render any action at all on his part a form of suicide, insane and self-defeating. Such existential crises do not

seem to initially threaten the subject of Chapter 5, Rāmin, who, as a young man, bard, and ardent lover, seems ideally situated to play his part as the story's hero. Like all lovers, he must suffer, but he also seems to intuit that the world of the story is tipped in his favor, just as it is conditioned to guide his brother into defeat. In the end, he believes, he will get the girl. As he is the story's minstrel—the singer in the song, so to speak—we might forgive him for failing to realize that the disrupted conventions of *V&R* will have an impact on him as well; he is too enveloped in the generic expectations of the romance to see when they are broken. The worldview expressed in his many poems demands a stable cast of characters whose chief purpose is to act as a foil through which he may narrate the story of his unrequited love and long suffering, and it is only when this narrative is challenged and even invalidated by the counter-narratives of Vis and Mobad, making him something less than the hero he imagines himself to be, that Rāmin descends into a crisis of his own. In the final sections of Chapter 5, "The Minstrel in the Romance," we saw him capable of the kind of violence and cruelty usually reserved for the story's antagonist, further blurring the line between hero and villain and raising the disturbing possibility that good and evil are not at all the clear-cut categories that the world of the romance posits as a given.

All of these issues come to a head in the next section of *Vis & Rāmin*, an explosive climax that is witness to the final confrontation between the story's eponymous lovers. This scene marks the breaking of a long and abiding impasse, in which the protagonists have tried (almost) every strategy available to them to free themselves from an impossible situation, all to no avail. Vis's resolve to remain aloof from love after being sundered from Viru was eventually worn down by the Nurse and Rāmin; the endless feint-and-parries between her, Rāmin, and Mobad have undermined the king, disgraced the lovers, and left everyone weary and exhausted; and in attempting to reclaim his sense of self-worth by leaving Vis and marrying Gol, Rāmin has only succeeded in burning the remainder of his bridges. The situation is desperate when the lovers next meet; something must happen, something must give way, before the battered edifice of their love-story collapses once and for all into rubble. These dire stakes are illustrated by the scene of their encounter, a howling blizzard that threatens quite literally to take the lives of those caught in its clutches. To conclude this study, we will walk through a few passages from this scene, reflecting on how they speak to some of the fundamental problems raised by a text in which the dynamics

of romantic love have been twisted into an unworkable scheme, a Gordian knot so tangled that perhaps no solution save death may unravel it.

On his way back from his failed marriage with Gol, Rāmin is met by Vis's servant Āẕin, who has been dispatched bearing her long letter to him. Although he had already made up his mind to return to her, Rāmin's agitation is compounded tenfold upon reading Vis's message: he falls into a frenzied bout of weeping, shouting, fainting, falling silent, and kissing the letters as though they were sacred relics (86.22–28). The discombobulated state of his psyche is evident in the reply he sends back to Vis, lurching between apology and remonstrance as though he cannot quite decide on the account he wants to give of his actions:

> I have no life without you; you deserve an eternal throne.
> I dare not presume to see your moon-like face, or hear your sweet voice:
> I am a sinner; I fear that you'll treat me in a way that pleases our foes;
> Although I'm not at the root of this sin, it's also not right to lay it on you.
> You summoned the dread demon of separation when you drove me from your side;
> You showed yourself quick to tire of love; you encouraged me to follow my passions.
> I didn't think your love would be like this; I thought it the sky, and it was the earth.
> You know well that I built an eternal house in my love—
> You destroyed my happy abode, abundant in joy!
> The sin is yours, but I say you're innocent; you may rule me as you please.[1] (87.8–17)

The letter is an awkward read, full of muddled accusations and contradictory claims: at one moment, Rāmin claims ownership of the sin, and at the next, he lays it before Vis, saying in the same breath that it is not right that he does so.[2] This unwillingness to commit to a narrative of who did what to whom is not

1. R298/T420/M280/D388.

مرا بی تو مبادا زندگانی   ترا اورنگ بادا جاودانی
نیارم ماهِ رخسارِ تو دیدن   نیارم نوشِ گفتارت شنیدن
گنهکارم همی ترسم که با من   کنی کاری که باشد کامِ دشمن
اگرچه این گناه از بن مرا نیست   گنه بر تو نهادن هم روا نیست
ستنبه دیوِ هجران را تو خواندی   بدان گاهی که از پیشم براندی
به مهر اندر نمودی زودسیری   مرا دادی به خودکامی دلیری
گمانِ من به مهرِ تو نه این بود   گمانت آسمان بردم زمین بود
تو خود دانی که من در مهربانی   بنا کردم سرای جاودانی
تو ویران کردی آم خرّم سرایم   که بود از خرّمی شادی فزایم
گناهِ توست و گویم بی‌گناهی   خداوندی کنی تو هرچه خواهی

2. A quick note on my use of the word "sin": the Persian word is *gonāh*, which can mean both sin in a religious sense or any kind of fault or misdeed in a more general way. I opted for the word "sin" in this case because I like its intensity; it is the best word in English that captures the feel of a grave wrong with connotations for both the here and now and in the afterlife.

Table 10: Part V: The end of the story (86–127)

A. Signs of rapprochement?	Sated of Gol and repenting his infidelity, Rāmin speeds back to Marv; on the way he is met by Vis's messenger, Āẕin, who gives him her *Ten Letters* (86). Rāmin is devastated by the letter, and composes one to be sent back to her promising that he'll return (87). Vis is at first overjoyed by the news, but soon grows apprehensive (88).
B. The debate in the snowstorm.	Rāmin comes to Marv in the midst of a whirling blizzard; the Nurse casts a spell on Mobad to keep him asleep while Vis comes to treat with Rāmin from a window in her castle; at first, she cannot even address Rāmin in her anger, but rather speaks to his horse (89). This is the first sally of a bitter debate between the two lovers, who remonstrate each other for their mutual suffering, dashed hopes, and broken promises (90–104). Eventually, Vis's rage gets the better of her and she turns away from the window, leaving Rāmin to flee the storm or perish at the castle walls; stunned at this rejection, Rāmin departs, declaring himself finally free of his love for Vis (105).
C. The freeze and the thaw.	Vis soon repents of her anger and sends the Nurse after Rāmin (106). But Vis cannot wait; she herself goes out into the snowstorm to track him down. Another fight ensues when the (former?) lovers meet: Rāmin declares that nothing but hate for Vis remains in his heart, while Vis begs him to accept her apology; again at an impasse, Vis eventually turns back to her castle in despair (107–11). As he watches her go, Rāmin suddenly breaks down and rides after her, saying he would rather die with her in the storm than be separated again. Now reconciled, the lovers return to the castle and resume their relationship, while Mobad sleeps, oblivious. (112)
D. The fall of Mobad.	Rāmin eventually "officially" returns to Mobad's court and the lovers attempt to keep their affair under wraps (113); but when Mobad declares his next hunting expedition (114), making it clear that he expects Rāmin to go with him, the lovers are doomed to be separated again (115). Distraught, Vis seeks counsel from her Nurse, who advises her that the time has come for her and Rāmin to declare themselves and overthrow Mobad (116). Vis sends a message to Rāmin informing him of the plot (117), and after soliloquy in which he summons his courage, (118), Rāmin and his followers desert the hunting party and enters Mobad's citadel in disguise; joining forces with Vis's men, they launch a surprise attack under cover of night and take over the fortress (119); Rāmin kills his half-brother Zard during the battle (120). The lovers seize Mobad's treasure and flee to Daylam, where they recruit an army to overthrow the king (121). With one final curse at his fate, Mobad rides out to meet them (122), but before battle can be joined, his camp is unexpectedly assaulted by a savage boar; the king rides out to kill it, but his spear misses its target, while the boar's tusks find theirs (123).
E. The end of the story.	With the king dead and battle averted, Rāmin takes his brother's place on the imperial throne to jubilant celebration; he and Vis bear two sons and rule Iran for eighty-one years (124). Vis eventually dies in old age (125), and Rāmin hands over the kingship to his son; he retreats to the fire-temple and lives the remainder of his live in penitence and self-purification, such that he and Vis are reunited in heaven when he too passes away (126). Gorgāni ends his poem calling blessings on God and his patron, dedicating his poem to the memory of Abu l-Fatḥ Moẓaffar and the loves of Vis and Rāmin (127).

only indicative of Rāmin's personal distress but suggestive of the point posited above, that the order of the romance world has in some fundamental way crumbled around the story's characters, leaving them stranded in a frightening universe where sin, shame, and blame are everywhere and nowhere at the same time. It is not only the king's political authority that is on the brink of collapse; moral authority, and those ingrained structures and ideologies that define and support it, seems to have dissolved mirage-like before the characters even as they reach out to it for assurance. Hence the sense of urgency and the heightened emotions of this meeting: there is an unspoken understanding that the happy ending promised by the romance may not be an option after all.

At first overjoyed at the news of Rāmin's coming, Vis goes quiet and apprehensive as her lover draws near. She orders the Nurse to cast a sleeping-spell on the king, and then sits at a window to watch and wait. When she finally beholds him riding up to the castle gates, "the flower of love blossomed in her heart, but she exercised self-control and kept her heart suppressed, showing no sign of the turmoil she held therein" (*shekofta shod be jān-ash dar gol-e mehr / valikan ṣabr kard o del foru dāsht · benanmud ān tabāhi k-andar u dāsht*, 89.40–41). Instead of calling out to Rāmin, she addressees his horse, chiding it for deserting her and finding a new stable. Astonished by her refusal to even speak to him, Rāmin begins to protest:

> I am Rāmin, who holds you equal to his soul! You are Vis, dearer than life!
> I am Rāmin, your worthy servant! You are Vis, who must be my mistress!
> I am Rāmin, the king of the love-lorn, a legend in the world for my love for you!
> You are Vis, a beautiful moon, an eternal queen in your eyes and curls.
> I am I whom you saw, I am the same; I am that worthy loving paramour!
> I am I who I was, but you're no longer you: why do you not incline your heart to me?[3]
> (90.8–13)

These self-assertive lines are a not-too-distant echo of that memorable passage in Vis's "Letters," cul-

While Vis and Rāmin are not having a doctrinal debate about whether or not what they did was sinful (they're pretty sure it was), their language does suggest to me a first-degree violation of protocol, both social and religious.

3. R304/T429/M286/D397:

منم رامین ترا با جان برابر　　توی ویسه مرا از جان فزون‌تر
منم رامین ترا شایسته کهتر　　تویی ویسه مرا بایسته مهتر
منم رایمن که شاهِ بی‌دلانم　　ز مهرِ تو به گیتی داستانم
توی ویسه که ماهِ نیکوانی　　به چشم و زلف شاهِ جاودانی
همانم من که تو دیدی همانم　　همان شایسته یارِ مهربانم
همان من که بود تو نه آنی　　چرا بر من نمایی دل‌گرایی

minating with the refrain "I am that Vis, I am that Vis, I am Vis" (see page 382); taking up that refrain, Rāmin casts himself as the one whose loyalty has never changed, turning the accusation of inconstancy back onto his accuser. His use of the words *shāyesta* and *bāyesta*, which invoke the sense of worthiness, suitability, and necessity, is especially vital in this passage, for with them he recalls the rhetoric of true love grounded in mutual suitability and equivalence, whose practitioners are so perfectly matched to one another in mind, body, and spirit that it is all but inevitable that they will be together: by this logic, Vis "must" be his mistress; her resistance is only a denial of reality. But what Rāmin still fails to see is that this reality has been demolished by the structure and events of his story. To review what has been lost, let us revisit Bakhtin's analysis of love in the Greek novel:

> From the very beginning, the love between the hero and heroine is not subject to doubt; this love remains *absolutely unchanged* throughout the novel. Their chastity is also preserved, and their marriage at the end of the novel is *directly conjoined* with their love—that same love that had been ignited at their first meeting at the outset of the novel; it is as if absolutely nothing had happened between these two moments, as if the marriage had been consummated on the day after their meeting.[4]

Although still active in the minds of its characters as the norm that *should* be in place, the principle of timeless and eternal love has been severely undermined by the events of *Vis & Rāmin*. Vis did not want to fall in love with Rāmin, and indeed did all she could to prevent it; now forced into a relationship whose very existence subverts the legitimacy and order that she craves, her love will never be entirely devoid of hate and bitterness at the same time. As long as normativity is denied by the presence of Mobad, who in his very existence makes the relationship an illegitimate one, the promise of union will be as wrong as it is right, as repellent as it is attractive. The disturbance of this bedrock foundation, in which mutual desire aligns with the social and political order of the world around it, reveals its implicit consequences in this scene, for it reintroduces the possibility of change that had been all but written out in Bakhtin's analysis. In a world where love is taken for granted as a stable, pre-eternal bond of affection, the protagonists can come together after endless labors and sufferings, reassure each other of their constancy, and live happily ever after; in the "heroic" flavors of this narrative, it is common to see the beloved fade into the background as little more than a trophy, a stable and unproblematic object of

4. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 89.

desire whose image is readily conjured by the familiar topos of the princess locked in a tower, patiently awaiting the arrival of her handsome prince. In such a generic universe, it is almost inconceivable, save in parody, to suggest that the prince would come riding up to the tower, only to hear from above that the fair lady has changed her mind and would please like him to go. Rāmin is dumbfounded to realize that this has happened to him; "I didn't think your love would be like this," as he says. Vis is *supposed* to let him in at this point; to fail in this duty would be a moral abomination:

> To murder a man out in the snow, one whose soul is infused with loyalty, is a disgrace!
> I thought you'd free me from fire; I didn't know you'd throw me into the snow!
> O full moon, I am your guest! I've travelled half a moon to get to you!
> People expect guests to be treated well, not to be trapped in a blizzard like this!
> If killing me has become easy in your eyes, at least don't kill me like this in the snow![5]
> (90.84–88)

This latest resort to the codes of love, reward, and hospitality is but one of the ways by which Rāmin attempts to find a narrative that will convincingly portray himself in a morally positive light. Both before and after this moment, he throws out a wide range of conflicted and conflicting narratives about "what happened" between him and Vis, each one struggling to assert itself and establish dominance over the others. First Rāmin is the innocent bystander, then the sacrificial lamb, and then the injured party; his admission of guilt, when he admits it, is couched in a totally passive grammar, as though he was as surprised by his "unexpected mistake" as everyone else.

> The sin was yours from the start, my love, but I got caught up in it;
> You once committed a sin, and today I'm giving thousands of apologies for it!
> I'm making so many piteous supplications before you that I will cleanse your soul of the rust of shame;
> I always see the sin as mine, and I will seek your pardon until I die:
> As I seek your forgiveness, I say it now: *I'm wrong, I'm wrong, I'm wrong!*
> As I seek your remedy, I say it now: *I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry!*
> . . . .
> So what if I sinned once? Am I the only sinner in the world?

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5. R307/T434/M288/D402:

کسی کاو را وفا با جان سرشتست — به برف اندر بکشتن سخت زشتست
گمان بردم که از آتش رهانی — ندانستم که در برفم نشانی
منم مهمانت ای ماهِ دوهفته — به دو هفته دو ماهه راه رفته
به مهمانان همه خوبی پسندند — نه زین سان در میانِ برف بندند
اگر شد کشتنم بر چشمت آسان — به برف اندر مکش باری بدین سان

> Old and experienced men sin; wise scribes make mistakes;
> Galloping steeds tumble; cutting swords go blunt.
> If a mistake came from me unexpectedly, don't brand me for every wicked act![6]
>
> (90.52–57, 64–67)

As different as they are, all of these accounts are rhetorically aimed at the single purpose of restoring Rāmin's position as the story's hero. If it was Vis that was disloyal, than she is the one to blame; but if, on the other hand, Rāmin can take on Vis's sins as though they were his own, or is willing to die in his quest for forgiveness, than the world will remember him as "a lover who sacrificed his life in the name of love" (*ke yār-i dād jān az bahr-e yāri*, 91.46). At a certain level, Rāmin's desperate attempts to provide a narrative that corresponds with his self-image is virtually identical with Vis's project, for we have seen her also maintain a proactive defense of her account of the story's events. In both cases, what we see at work are two characters who are unhappy with the story they have been cast to play. To restore a sense of meaning, purpose, and order to their broken lives, they must resort to their own form of storytelling, searching for that elusive way of stringing events together in a way that confirms them to be the good people they know themselves to be.

This does not bode well for our heroes' love, however, for the pressure to be right leads both Vis and Rāmin towards mutually incompatible narratives, stories that cancel the other out. Our erstwhile lovers are in a situation completely different from the usual ending of a love-story, where the final words between the protagonists assert their mutual truth and validity; the concluding speeches of "were-you-loyal-that's-great-so-was-I" we find at the end of the *Ephesiaca*, which the narrator insightfully describes as a *generic necessity*, the message the lovers have to hear, is a classic example of this resolution.[7] Here,

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6. R306/T432/M287/D400:

گـنـاه از بُـن تـرا بـود ای دلارام	گـرفـتـاری مـرا آمـد بـه فـرجـام
گناهی را که تو کردی یکی روز	هزاران عذر خواهم از تو امروز
کـنـم پـیـشِ تـو چـنـدان لابهٔ زار	کـه بـزدایـم ز جـانـت زنـگ آزار
گناه از خویشتن بینم همیشه	کـنـم تـا مـرگ بـا تـو عـذرپـیـشـه
گهی گویم چو خواهم از تو زنهار	گنهکارم گنهکارم گنهکار
گه گویم چو خواهم از تو درمان	پشیمانم پشیمانم پشیمان
چه بود ار من گنه کردم یکی بار	نه جز من نیست در گیتی گنهکار
گناه آیـد ز گـیـهـان‌دیـده پـیـران	خـطـا آیـد ز دانـنـده دبـیـران
دونـده بـاره هـم در سـر درآیـد	بُـرنـده تـیـغ هـم کُـنـدی نـمـایـد
گر آمد ناگهان از من خطایی	مـرا مـنـمـای داغِ هـر جـفـایـی

7. See page 173.

on the contrary, Vis *must* be responsible somehow for Rāmin's narrative to work, and Rāmin *must* be in the wrong for Vis's image of herself to hold; his protestations must be silenced if she is ever to reclaim the honor that she gave up so dearly. This would partially explain the furious reply, "like a poison-stained dagger" (*javāb-i hamcho zahr-āluda khanjar*, 91.1), that Vis returns at this latest round of false apologies and crude attempts to pin the blame on her. We need not review the fine points of her language here, as they cover many of the themes we encountered in the previous chapters: the pain of her sullied reputation, the beatings and the humiliations, her lost virginity, her sensations of guilt and shame. The gist of her reply is this: she is not an idiot (*nayam man niz nāhoshyār o nādān*, 91.7); that he fooled her once, and she won't be fooled again (*marā befrifti yak rah be goftār · konun befrift natvāni degar bār*, 91.4); and it is far better for her to stay with Mobad, who has never been of two hearts when it came his love for her, then to be with an oath-breaker like Rāmin (*marā yakdel hamisha dustdār-ast · na chun to dahdel-e zenhārkhwār-ast*, 91.15). Concluding her polemic, she bids her faithless lover to quit Marv and go back to his joyless marriage, then turns away from the window, weeping in humiliation and anger.

Rāmin is left alone, with nothing but his dejected thoughts and his horse to keep him company. After the furious exchange between the two lovers, the eerie quiet of the dark night seems all the more ominous, especially as the night sets in and the snow begins to fall, white as the camphor that the Persian kings used to embalm their dead.[8] Images of death have already begun to creep into this scene ("at least don't kill me like this in the snow!"), and as Rāmin's wretched mount begins to sink up to its knees in the mud (*bemānda tā be zānu rakhsh dar gel*, 91.55), the impression that the lovers have entered a living hell is hard to shake off, especially when read against against the Zoroastrian image of perdition as described in *The Book of Arda Viraf*: "Then I saw the souls of the wicked who died, and ever suffer torment and punishment, in that dreadful, dark place of punishment of various kinds, such as driving snow, and severe cold, and the heat of brisk-burning fire, and foul stench, and stone and ashes, hail and rain, and many other evils."[9] In this ruined landscape of snow, mud, wind, and rain, it seems certain that something is coming to an end; but whether love or life is yet to be seen.

8. Hūshang A'lam, "Camphor," in *EIr*, online edition (1990), accessed June 11, 2015, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/camphor-npers; Boyce, *Zoroastrians*, 120–21; Christine van Ruymbeke, *Science and Poetry in Medieval Persia: The Botany of Nizami's* Khamsa (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 127, 137.

9. Asa, Haug, and West, *The Book of Arda Viraf*, 184, ch. 55.

All night, Rāmin's eyes shed tears, and the air sifted camphor upon his mount.
All night, Rāmin's horse grew soaked in the rain, and its rider's state was worse in the snow.
All night, the clouds wept over Rāmin's head; all night, the wind swirled around his body.
The cloak, boots, and leggings upon his body, from head to toe, froze as though iron.[10]
(91.56–59)

The debate resumes at the first light of dawn. Despite his ordeal in the night, Rāmin does not seem to have changed his tune; many of the passages show him still alternating between excuse—including such inventive lines as "I sinned in order to test you, to see how you'd be at forgiveness" (*gonah kardam ze bahr-e āzmāyesh · ke chun dāri dar āmorzesh namāyesh*, 93.29), "My dear, I'm just a man, how could I escape the clutches of lust?" (*negārā man yak-i az mardomān-am · ze dast-e āz rastan chun tavānam*, 95.26), and "If I looked joyful on the outside, I was still weeping at your absence on the inside" (*ze birun gar be rāmesh mineshastam · nehāni bar ferāq-at migeristam*, 95.50)—and apology, when he again admits his mistakes and swears never to do them again (93.23–27, 95.57–58). Vis shows no such wavering, although the narrator tells us her heart still burned for him inside (96.3); the years of hurt, resentment, and bitterness have been allowed to speak, and she continues to attack Rāmin with a torrent of remonstrance, speaking of herself as having been *murdered* by his evil ways; if he is dying now of the cold, it is only his just comeuppance.

Vis of jasmine breast spoke: "Rāmin, you fool, you have nothing of wisdom but a name!
When cruelty strikes its heavy brick upon the heart, the scar remains forever.
Your cruelty remains on my heart, just as you've driven out my devotion to you.
No one can be both faithful and faithless; no heart can store both love and hate.
When I think of your hundred ways of cruelty, I can't catch a whiff of your devotion.
You know well how I was with you, how much I suffered in the hope of your fidelity,
And then what did you do for me? You murdered me, then consumed my carcass!"[11]
(94.1–7)

10. R309/T437/M291/D405:

همه شب چشمِ رامین اشک‌ریزان — هوا بر رخشِ او کافور بیزان
همه شب رخشِ در باران شده تر — به برف اندر سوار از رخش بدتر
همه شب ابرِ گریان بر سرِ رام — همه شب بادِ پیچان در برِ رام
قبا و موزه و رانینش بر تن — ز سر تا پای بفسرده چو آهن

11. R313/T443/M295/D411:

سمن‌بر ویس گفت ای بی‌خرد رام — نداری از خردمندی بجز نام
جفا بر دل زند خشتِ گرانش — بماند جاودان بر دل نشانش
جفای تو مرا بر دل بماندست — چنان کز دل وفای تو براندست
نباشد با کسی هم کفر و هم دین — نگنجد در دلی هم مهر و هم کین
چو یاد آرم ز صدگونه جفایت — نماند در دلم بوی وفایت

The negotiations have reached a total deadlock: Rāmin, married to his own narrative, cannot fathom Vis's anger towards him, and because of that failure, he will never find the words needed to persuade her to open the castle doors. It takes him quite some time to realize the depths of her determination; at first, he vows to stay at the gates, even if he dies of cold, for then "My name will live on for loyalty, after death comes to me" (*bemānad dar vafā zenda marā nām · cho marg-am pish-e to bāshad be farjām*, 97.18). But Vis, even angrier at this, screams at him to go: "For God's sake, *free me!*" (*marā āzād kon az bahr-e yazdān*, 98.26). Cowed in the end, Rāmin retracts his pledge and prepares to depart, with a final petulant shot:

> It's better for me to die in some battlefield, surrounded by my fallen foes.
> Why should I die here by some trick? Why should I not take the road to safety?
> You don't want me, and I can't force you—but there's not a few beauties out there for me!
> You can have Mobad to embrace, I'll have some other beloved just like you.
> When I'm gone, you'll know then who has lost out from your anger.
> I'm off, then! Farewell! Keep playing that song—I hope your lute doesn't break![12]
> (103.18–23)

Vis has nothing more to say; she turns away from the window and orders the castle soldiers to seal the gates and guard the walls. Rāmin gallops away. His attempt to return to Vis has failed; the love affair, it seems, is over.

> Thus it was that that in the wake of love,
> only hate remained between Vis and Rāmin.
> When Rāmin left Vis in despair,
> even the Devil had no hope of love between them.[13] (106.9–10)

This is a remarkable thing to see in the romance tradition: the apparent death of love, played out on the metaphorical level as Vis drives Rāmin away from her castle to perish in the blizzard. This is, of

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تو خود دانی که من با تو چه کردم   بـه اومـیـدِ وفـا چـه رنـج بـردم
پس آنگه تو بجای من چه کردی   بکشتی وانچه کشتی خود بخوردی

12. R325/T460/M305/D427:

مـرا مـردن بُـوَد در رزمـگـاهـی   که گـردِ من بُوَد کُشته سپاهی
چرا به فسوس در سرما بمیرم   چـرا راهِ سـلامـت بـرنـگـیـرم
نخواهی مر مرا بر تو ستم نیست   چو من باشم مرا دلدار کم نیست
تـرا مـوبـد هـم ایـدون بـاد در بـر   مـرا چـون تـو یـکـی دلـدارِ دیـگـر
چو من بر گردم از پیشت بدانی   کـزیـن تـنـدی کـرا دارد زیـانـی
کنون رفتم تو از من باش بدرود   همی زن این نوا گر نگسلد رود

13. R328/T465/M308/D431:

چنان کاندر میانِ ویس و رامین   بگسترد از پسِ مهر آن همه کین
چو رامین باز گشت از ویس نومید   ز مهرِ هر دو گشت ابلیس نومید

course, another false death, one of the cornerstone strategies of romance narratives, but no less significant in its implications. When a character "dies" in this genre, it is usually to show his or her loyalty and fidelity towards the other half of the couple, but here, the specter of death is raised by the lovers' mutual antipathy, frankly and liberally expressed for the first time. Experiencing this new reality that love is not a constant is both traumatic and liberating for our characters. On one hand, tradition holds that they share the same soul, and having driven Rāmin from her heart, Vis experiences a kind of internal deadening within herself as well: "Neither laugher nor tears now come to me," she says, "for my soul is no longer a slave to the love in my heart" (*konun na gerya-am āyad na khanda · ke jān-am mehr-e del rā nist banda*, 100.11). Yet at the same time, she expresses a reciprocal sensation of freedom and inner peace, the two things that have eluded her since the beginning of the story:

> Drive hope from your heart, as I have; I've found peace in hopelessness.
> Hope only brings toil; hopelessness brings so much peace.
> I was once such that in in my hope I sailed my boat across the sea,
> Now I'm saved from the turbulent sea; I've washed my heart of useless hope.
> In contentment, I've chosen chastity, for contentment is the best sovereignty.[14] (92.17–21)

At least for this fleeting moment, Vis has discovered a sense of freedom; she has gained the power to tell her lover off and to go home. Her feelings of contentment, though, do not last long; as Rāmin rides off, she has a change of heart and rushes down from her castle and into the snowstorm to treat with him. The scene of their next meeting is witness to a remarkable turning of the tables, with the power dynamic between the characters neatly reversed: just as Vis previously addressed Rāmin (or his horse) from the heights of her castle walls, slowly tearing down his protests and defenses, now Rāmin speaks to her from atop his horse, unmoved by her tearful apologies. Although Vis continues to offer reasons and excuses to justify her anger at him, she fails to realize that she is now preaching to the choir; Rāmin readily agrees with her points, and encourages her to follow her own advice: "You did well to drive me away," (*neku kardi ke az pish-am berāndi*, 108.16), he says, "Now go back, don't hang around me—give up

14. R311/T439/M292/D407:

ببر اومیدِ دل چون من بریدم — ز نومیدی به آسانی رسیدم
اگر اومید رنجوری نماید — ز نومیدی بسی آسانی آید
من آن بودم که از اومیدواری — همی بردم به دریا بر سماری
کنون از شورِش دریا برستم — دل از اومید بیهوده بشستم
ز خرسندی گزیدم پارسایی — که خدرسندیست بهتر پادشایی

your love, just as you said" (*konun bar gard o andar man mayāviz · chonān chun gofti az mehr-am beparhiz*, 108.20). In being turned away, Rāmin has discovered his own hatred for Vis, and is ready to inflict the same punishment upon her:

> You left me in the rain and snow, you drove me wretched from your side.
> You were so merciless, you would not take my hand so that I would not die in the snow!
> In your bitter envy of me, you showed no love; you sought my death like an enemy.
> . . . .
> Now that I've seen you for who you are, I hate your stony heart.[15] (108.51–53, 60)

As he chides her in this wise, Rāmin too begins to speak of himself as though, in being driven off to die in the snow, he has indeed been freed from the world: he speaks as though he is rising up to the sky, divesting himself of his body.

> I've escaped from all this talk and apology, from this grief and burning and ruin—
> You'd say I was a slave, and now I'm a king; I was the earth, and now I'm the moon and sky.
> My soul is so free of pain and distress that you'd say I'm not of this world!
> I've woken up from drunkenness, I'm so aware,
> I've woken up from foolish dreams.[16] (110.19–22)

This talk of contentment and self-rule through love's abstention is not new for either character; however, this is the first time that both Vis and Rāmin articulate their desire to be liberated from one another in the same scene, one after the other and from alternating positions of power. From the beginning, the lovers have been talking at cross purposes, both claiming to tell the truth in their stories and to occupy the moral high ground at the other's expense; now that they are brought face to face, their narratives can only collide and cancel each other out. The theme of mutual negation is nearly carried to the literal level by Rāmin, who has the same change of heart after sending Vis away. Rushing to catch up with her,

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15. R335/T474/M314/D440:

مرا در برف و در باران بماندی   به خواری وانگه از پیشم براندی
ز بی‌رحمی نبودی دستگیرم   بدان تا من به برف اندر بمیرم
نبخشودی ز رشکِ سخت بر من   همی مرگم سگالیدی چو دشمن
کنون کز حالِ تو آگاه گشتم   دلِ سنگینت را بدخاه گشتم

16. R337/T478/M316/D443:

برستم زان همه گفتار و پوزش   وزان غم خوردن و تیمار و سوزش
تو گویی بنده بودم شاه گشتم   زمین بودم سپهر و ماه گشتم
چنن بی‌رنج و بی‌غم گشت جانم   که گویی من کنون نی زین جهانم
من از مستی چنان هشیار گشته   ز خوابِ ابلهی بیدار گشته

he apologies for his harsh words and tells her that, if they are to die (speaking as though it's a foregone conclusion), they should die together:

> Let me take your hem in the snow; I will hold it until there nothing left of us.
> There's no one for me in the world save you; when I am gone, you must leave too!
> If I am to die at your side, why should I not clutch your hem in death,
> And seek in death a lover like you? Perhaps we'll rise again together in the next world.[17]
> (112.25–26)

It is because of this passage that I entitle this brief epilogue *Liebestod*, "love-death," for the juxtaposition of the crisis of love with literal death we have seen throughout this passage suggests to me that we have reached a moment of no return: old fictions will give way to new ones, realities transformed, ancient contracts and ideologies broken down and rebuilt. The lovers have come to a point were they must either destroy each other or the world around them, and it is a striking testament to the genre's conservatism and normative power that it takes this long before they will even consider the final and only path that remains for them if their love is to ever survive: they must rise up and kill Mobad, sacrificing the old order and everything it stands for. But to arrive at this point, they themselves experience a kind of double-death, figuratively perishing together as they witness the total collapse of the structures that lend meaning and purpose to their lives. The image of double-death is a common motif in romance narratives, found in stories such as *Pyramus & Thisbe*, *Panthea & Abradatas*, *Layli & Majnun*, *Varqa & Golshāh*, *Floire & Blancheflor*, *Tristan & Iseut*, and *Romeo & Juliet*, and it is usually understood in as an expression of the idea that they live in a social world that will never allow their love to persist. But Paul Kottman, in a stimulating analysis of the story of *Pyramus & Thisbe*, suggests that romantic love is not so much about the individual's struggle against society, but the individual's struggle for the self, "the struggle of individuals to recognize themselves as the *protagonists* of their life, as actively leading a life rather than merely suffering whatever happens."[18] Rāmin's talk of rising up again to enter a new world is per-

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17. R341/T484/M320/D449:

بگیرم من ترا در برف دامن　　بدارم تا نه تو مانی و نه من
مرا کس نیست جز تو در جهان نیز　　چو من مانده نباشم تو ممان نیز
اگر شاید که من پیشت بمیرم　　چرا در مرگ دامانت نگیرم
به گاهِ مرگ جویم چون تو یاری　　در آن گیتی به هم خیزیم باری

18. Paul Kottman, "Quid Non Sentit Amor: Romantic Love as the Struggle for Freedom in Ovid's 'Pyramus and Thisbe'," *Constellations* 19, no. 3 (2012): 522–23.

haps deeply significant in that regard; the lovers, having lost everything, are now free to write their own stories and do what they could never have done before. As long as Mobad is alive, their love is impossible, and so the king must die: it is the only route to moral restitution, yet that route itself entails those most dubious acts of sedition, regicide, and fratricide. That these acts become incumbent leaves us with the last and lingering paradox of *Vis & Rāmin*, that the restoration of moral normativity necessitates the destruction of the very structures that claim to uphold it.

And so the lovers retreat back to the palace, where they begin the long, hard work of reconciliation. They still have some loose ends to tie up, but the drama of the story has already ended, for Vis and Rāmin have made peace with one another. The king's time is up; now that the story does not need him anymore, he is mercilessly cut down by a raging boar, showing in this last wretched stand a poignant attempt to defend himself from his inevitable fate. The lovers, now instated as king and queen, live on for another eighty-three years, bring order to the kingdom, and finally pass away: the happy ending that seemed so at risk is finally brought to fruition. But the trails that needed to be blazed to arrive at this moment are unlike anything seen in any Greek novel or indeed the other love-stories in the Persian and Arabic tradition: the lovers have come together not through patience and fortitude, but by recognizing and forgiving the very impatience and weakness that they had so long despised in the other. Time, in the end, does seem to move on in this story; the lovers cannot bounce back to their old selves, as Bakhtin describes, and pick up where they left off. Their love has broken them, and their only hope to move forward, if they will not give up and embrace their deaths, is to revisit their stories and tell them in a way that acknowledges the other and the hurt they have caused. Though back on their feet, their hearts are still wounded, and a broken heart needs kindness and forgiveness if it is ever to heal.

> Old words that were spoken a hundred times were spoken again from the top.
> They renewed the old cruelties, and counted them again, one by one.
> . . . .
> And though their hearts were still full of pain,
> with kisses, they begged the other's forgiveness.[19] (112.31–32, 54)

19. R341/T484/M320/D450:

سخن‌هایی که صد باره بگفتند — دگرباره همان ازسر گرفتند
جفاهی کهن را تازه کردند — دگرباره یکایک بر شمردند
اگرچه بود دل‌هاشان پر آزار — به بوسه خواستندش عذر بسیار

This concludes our study of *Vis & Rāmin*; while I hope to have answered some questions about the story's origins and historical trajectory, to have placed it within an intertextual literary tradition, and to have offered some insights into some of the unique ways it takes up the endeavor of romance literature, providing new approaches to an ongoing inquiry selfhood, love, and agency, my fondest wish is to have left my readers with questions and curiosities they did not know they had about a work they may have never read or heard of. In these pages, I have raised frameworks, readings, translations, and interpretations that may not convince everyone, and nothing would make me happier than to see these discussions complicated and challenged by other scholars from a variety of disciples, for the text is a rich and complex tale that produces new insights with every additional read and perspective. *Vis & Rāmin* is a story about stories, about women and men recovering their narratives and ensuring that they can define for themselves who they are and how they want to be remembered. Perhaps Fakhroddin was reflecting on this intimate relationship between stories and people as he wrote his concluding lines to the poem: in his efforts to take an old popular tale and refurbish it into a work of art, the tale he told changed his own story forever.

خبر گردیم و ما بوده خبرجوی
سمر گردیم و خود بوده سمرگوی

In seeking a story, we became what we sought;
In telling a tale, we became ourselves a legend.
(127.53)

Appendix A

MSS, Anthologies, and Editions of *Vis & Rāmin*

A.1 Manuscripts

Calcutta (*C*): Indian MS discovered by Alois Sprenger in 1854 and published by William Nassau Lees and Munshi Ahmad Ali in 1865. It was copied towards the end of the tenth century AH (= late sixteenth century CE)—much older than Kaladze had been led to believe.[1] 18×9.5 cm, 16 lines per page, good Indian nasta'liq; some portions are damaged and worm-eaten.[2]

Berlin (*B*): Indian MS once kept at the *Königlichen Bibliothek* (now the Berlin State Library). The 1888 catalogue states this is a careless transcription of *C*, adding new errors on top of the already-defective original.[3] Minovi held the same low opinion of the MS and did not refer to it for his 1935 critical edition, and it seems to have been lost or destroyed during the Second World War.[4]

Oxford (*O*): Indian MS in the Bodleian Library, 229 folios with 19 lines per folio, 22×11.75 cm (8⅝×4⅝ in), nasta'liq hand. It is worm-eaten and some leaves are considerably damaged, and Minovi writes that although this copy is more complete and sometimes better than *C*, it is not adequate for a critical edition. He referred to this only to fill in the pages missing from *P* below. T'odua and Gvaxaria revisited this MS in their edition.[5]

Bombay (*B*): Indian MS in the University of Bombay, 20.8×12.5 cm (8.2×4.9 in), 22 lines per folio, written in "clear Indian *nastaʿliq*."[6] Though incomplete, it seems to follow the tradition of *C*, *O*, and presumably *B*; many of the lines that appear in those MSS recur in this copy, which begins with Rāmin's seduction of

1. See Kaladze, "Georgian Translation," 140: "It is significant that only six manuscripts, some incomplete, have survived outside Iran from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and not a single copy from Iran has survived." Her source is the introduction to the 1884 edition of *Visramiani* by Ilia Chavchavadze.

2. Wladimir Ivanow, *Concise Descriptive Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the Collection of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1924), 191, no. 429; cf. Sprenger, "Bibliographische Anzeigen: Literarische Notizen"; Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī, *Wís o Rámín*.

3. Cf. Wilhelm Pertsch, *Verzeichniss der persischen Handschriften der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin* (Berlin: A. Asher & Co., 1888), 707, no. 681 (Sprenger 1378).

4. Mīnuvī, "Yādʹdāsht"; Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī, *Vis & Rāmin* (*eds. T'odua and Gvaxaria*), xxvii–xxviii.

5. Eduard Sachau and Hermann Ethé, *Catalogue of the Persian, Turkish, Hindûstânî and Pushtû Manuscripts in the Bodliean Library* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889), 460, no. 522 (Elliot Collection 273); Mīnuvī, "Yādʹdāsht"; T'odua and Gvaxaria, "Pishguftār," xxx.

6. ʿAbd al-Ḳādir Sarfarāz, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Arabic, Persian, and Urdu Manuscripts in the Library of the University of Bombay*, 220–22, no. 137.

the Nurse and breaks off at the protagonists' wedding.[7]

Paris (*P*): Ottoman MS in the Bibliothèque Nationale, 262 folios, 24×14 cm, in fine nasta'liq, with colored borders, bound in leather, and recovered in green silk. This was the basis for the critical editions by Mojtabā Minovi (1935) and Moḥammad Jaʿfar Maḥjub (1959). Although it is not free from errors, additions, and lost lines (and even is missing six continuous pages = p. 313 in Minovi's ed.), it is still the oldest and most reliable MS that we have today.[8] There are two catalogue entries that mention this work, and based on the dimensions and number of folios they appear to refer to the same MS, yet the details given are not consistent. The Schefer catalogue says that it was copied for the library of the Ottoman sultan Mehmet II Fatıh (d. 886/1481), and Minovi's description agrees with this; but the Blochet catalogue, which refers to Schefer, says that the book was completed in the second half of the sixteenth century CE for the library of Sultan Mehmet III (d. 1012/1603).[9]

Istanbul (*I*): MS no. 5411 in the Beyazıt Devlet Kütüphanesi. Information on the MS is limited at this time (the catalogues are being consolidated under a new organization), but we do know that it consists of 294 folios, 15 lines of nasta'liq per page, with a damaged leather cover and some missing pages.[10] Although it had never been used until the 1970 edition of the poem, Gvaxaria says that this was one of the most important MSS for establishing the critical edition of *V&R*, along with the Old Georgian translation *Visramiani*.[11]

A.2 Anthologies

Safina-ye Tabrizi: A florilegium copied out over the years 721–23/1321–23, encompassing sections of 209 books and epistles in 367 folios, 32×19×9 cm. It is currently preserved at the library of the Islamic Consultative Assembly (no. 14590) in Tehran. The cited verses correspond with lines 81.2–83.75 in the Rowshan edition (pp. 257–87), namely Vis's "Ten Letters" and her lament that follows.[12]

British Museum: An anthology housed in the British Museum (Add. 12,560), consisting of 203 folios written in a nasta'liq hand, 22.85×12.7 cm (9×5 in), dated 1228/1813. It was seized as plunder by the British after the Battle of Ghazni on July 23, 1839.[13] The work features nearly eighty pages of Sanā'i's verse, a masnavi on the art of wrestling, a satire by the Safavid poet Sharafoddin Shefā'i (d. 1037/1637), extracts from the *Shāhnāma*, and then a series of poems featuring love-letters: the exchange between Amir Khosraw's *Dovalrāni & Kheżr Khan* (w. ca. 715/1315), the letters of Neẓāmi's *Layli & Majnun* (w. 584/1188), and of course *Vis & Rāmin*. Specifically, the sections cited from *V&R* recount Rāmin's letter to Vis with the

7. This corresponds with vv. 40.218–124.27 in *Vis & Rāmin* (*ed. Rawshan*), 105–366. The final line in this MS is *ze gerdun akhtarān neẓāra budand · ke ḥeṣn-ash por mah o estāra budand*; this has been excised by the editors, but the passage can be found in Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī, *Vis & Rāmin* (*eds. T'odua and Gvaxaria*), 522.

8. Mīnuvī, "Yād′dāsht."

9. Charles Henri Auguste Schefer and Edgar Blochet, *Catalogue de la collection de manuscrits orientaux, arabes, persans et turcs formée par M. Charles Schefer et acquise par l'État* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1900), 83, no. 1380; Edgar Blochet, *Catalogue des manuscrits persans*, 4 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1905–34), 3:24, no. 1203.

10. Many thanks to Ahmet Tunç Şen for helping me do some on-line sleuthing through the Turkish catalogues.

11. T'odua and Gvaxaria, "Pishguftār," xxx.

12. For further discussion of this work, see page 43; also Tabrīzī, *Safīnah-yi Tabrīz*, v–vi; Seyed-Gohrab, "Casing the Treasury," 15–16.

13. Charles Rieu, *Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the British Museum*, 3 vols. (London: British Museum, 1879–83), 2:822.

news that he has abandoned her for Gol, Vis's reaction, and the first of her ten letters back to Rāmin, corresponding with lines 77–78.22 and 80–81.100 in the Rowshan edition, pp. 245–49 and 255–61. It should be noted that this excerpt even differs considerably that found in *C*, which may suggest either local variants or that the "Indian" *Nachleben* of the story was not particularly unified.

Ṭerāz al-Akhbār: Some lines of *V&R* are preserved in a manuscript written in the eleventh/seventeenth century by ʿAbdonnabi Fakhrozzamāni Qazvini with the title *Ṭerāz al-akhbār* (*The Embroidery of Tales*, w. 1032/1622). This work was a "manual for storytellers," as Pasha Mohamad Khan puts it, with citations in prose and poetry on a wide variety of subjects, including war, courtiers, weapons, animals, sunrise, sunset, music, love, gardens, wine, sex, marriage, child-rearing, magic, art, eloquence, old age, travel, and prayer; to quote from Khan again, the variety of this selection "allows us to see very clearly that romances were constructed from pre-existing bits and pieces, whether we refer to them as *patah*s or intertexts."[14] It is striking that the only mention of *V&R* in this anthology is under the heading "On Soldiers, the Battles of Armies, and Battlefields" (*dar sepāh o razm-e lashkarān o razmgāh*, 62) and not under any of the sections on love, which I would have expected.[15]

Taẕkera-ye ʿAlāʾi: A personal notebook (*jung*) called, after the name of its author, the *Taẕkera-ye ʿAlāʾi*, consisting of 598 folios, 13×24 cm, written in nasta'liq script from the eleventh/seventeenth century. Extracts from slightly over 100 authors, with short biographies of each one, are included. The notice on Fakhroddin Gorgāni runs for two pages (710–11), followed by the famous Shams of Tabriz. The book seems to have been compiled in India by a Persian-speaking clerk by the name of ʿAlāʾi, who names prominent Timurids and Safavids such as Shāhrokh, Abu Saʿid Bahādor, Homāyun, and Sām Mirzā in the end of his collection. Most of the first owners of the book lived in the city of Surat, Gujarat. In the thirteenth/nineteenth century, it made its way to Tabriz, where it was owned by a number of Qajar government officials.[16]

Tehran: An anthology of nearly 15,000 verses collected from 658 poets whose dates range from the fourth/tenth to the eleventh/seventeenth centuries and are arranged more or less in alphabetical order. Fakhroddin Gorgāni gets a page out of this collection (545–46), followed by one Fakhroddin Khāled, who I wonder might be the poet Amir Fakhroddin Khāled b. Rabiʿ described by Foruzanfar.[17]

Dushanbe: In their forward to their edition of *Vis & Rāmin*, T'odua and Gvaxaria write that an excerpt of the poem is found in a manuscript housed in Dushanbe, and its description can be found in *The Catalogue of Oriental Manuscripts of the Academy of Science of the Tajik SSR*.[18] Unfortunately, we were unable to follow up on this reference; the page cited by the editors has nothing about *V&R*, nor does the poem or its author appear in any of the catalogue's indices. More research is necessary to track down this fragment.[19]

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14. Khan, "The Broken Spell," 90–97.

15. Muḥammad Taqī Dānish´pazhūh, *Fihrist-i Kitābkhānah-i Markazī-i Dānishgāh-i Tihrān* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Dānishgāh-i Tihrān, 1330– [1951–]), 2267, no. 3295; cf. Muḥammad Riẓā Shafīʿī-Kadkanī, "Nigāhī bih ṭirāz al-akhbār," *Nāmah-yi Bahāristān* 1, no. 5 (1381 [2002]): 109–122.

16. Dānish´pazhūh, *Fihrist-i Kitābkhānah-i Markazī-i Dānishgāh-i Tihrān*, 10:1977, no. 3036.

17. ibid., 9:1132, no. 2446; Furūzānfar, *Sukhan*, 364.

18. T'odua and Gvaxaria, "Pishguftār," xxviii.

19. The manuscript's supposed location is in A. M. Mirzoev and A. N. Boldyrev, eds., *Katalog vostochnykh rukopisei akademii nauk Tadzhikskoi SSR* (Nashrieti Donish, 1968), 2:87. My thanks go out to Sam Hodgkin for confirming the non-presence of this entry.

A.3 Editions

Nassau Lees (1865): Published in the series *Bibliotheca Indica: a collection of Oriental works*, N.S., nos. 48, 49, 52, 53, and 76, by the Asiatic Society of Bengal. It is a straight-up publication of the *C* manuscript, with no preface, notes, or line numbers. Physical copies are now rare, but a digital version may be found online through Hathi Trust: http://hdl.handle.net/2027/njp.32101077699328 (accessed 11 June 2015).[20]

Minovi (1935): The first critical edition of *V&R*, established on the basis of the *P* manuscript and filling in lacunae from *O*. It was intended to be a two-volume publication, the first volume text and the second a critical apparatus and commentary; however, the second volume was never completed, and as such the edition only boasts a two-page introduction by the editor. It was republished (*sans* introduction) in 1978 by Ketābforushi-ye Fakhr-e Rāzi.[21]

Maḥjub (1959): A revised production of Minovi's edition, relying on the same MSS but also bringing in *C*. The most important contribution is Maḥjub's extensive introduction, which presented to the reader practically all known information about the poem at the time of publication, and detailed indices. A Persian translation of Minorsky's article "Vis-u-Rāmin: a Parthian Romance" is included as an appendix.[22]

Devonaqulov (1966): All I know about this edition at the moment is that it is a rendition of *Vis & Rāmin* in Tajik (Persian in Cyrillic characters), but on the basis of which manuscripts or editions I cannot yet say, although Maḥjub's is the most probable guess.[23]

T'odua and Gvaxaria (1970): A full revision of *V&R* from the ground up, still primarily dependent on *P* but now bringing in the full range of available MSS (including *I*, which had previously not been known) and the recently-established Georgian translation. This is by far my favorite edition of the poem, as the critical apparatus, excised lines and all, is right in front of you in the footnotes, which makes it enormously helpful when comparing the critical text with the many excerpts of *V&R* one finds in the anthologies. Even more helpful, the corresponding folio pages from the various MSS are indicated in the margins, an essential tool for future scholarship. Unfortunately, the book is now out of print, but a digital copy has been made and can be found by digging through the Internet.[24]

Okada and Machida (1991): A novel and useful resource. Employing techniques developed by Riccardo Zipoli for the *Lirica Persica* project, the editors put the poem into a machine-readable format and produced a three-part study: a frequency list of literally every word in the poem, arranged alphabetically and numerically, a concordance, and the digitized version of Maḥjub's edition. In a sense, this makes this edition the best (and only) "standard" for referencing *V&R* by line number; even Rowshan's edition inexplicably resets its numbering in the chapter on the "Ten Letters," making it impossible to cite from this section without introducing an extra-textual method of clarification (81a, 81b, etc.). The concordance is especially helpful for those interested in the rare or archaic words in the poem. There are two major flaws with the work, as far as I can see: the first, as Heshmat Moayyad noted in his review of this

20. Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī, *Wís o Rámín: a Romance of Ancient Persia, Translated from the Pahlawi and rendered into Verse by Fakhr al-Dín, As'ad al-Astarabádi, al-Fakhri, al-Gurgáni*, ed. William Nassau Lees and Munshi Ahmad Ali (Calcutta: Printed at the College Press, 1865).

21. Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī, *Vis and Rāmin: a romance of ancient Iran originally written in Pahlavi and rendered into Persian verse by Fakhroddin Gorgānī c. 1054 A.D.*, ed. Mujtabā Mīnuvī (Tehran: Beroukhim, 1314 [1935]).

22. Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī, *Vīs va Rāmīn*, ed. Muḥammad Ja'far Maḥjūb (Tehran: Ibn-i Sīnā, 1337 [1959]), 7–105.

23. Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī, *Vis va Romin*, ed. Alikul D. Devonakulov (Dushanbe: Nashrieti Irfon, 1966).

24. Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī, *Vīs va Rāmīn*, ed. Magali T'odua and Alek'sandre Gvaxaria (Tehran: Bunyād-i Farhang-i Īrān, 1349 [1970]).

edition, is that the programmers did not have sufficient command of Persian to create a database free of errors (the word *ahreman*, for example, was entered as two separate words, *āhar man*); the second is that Maḥjub's edition is now somewhat out of date. For these reasons, one should not rely on this edition as the primary source for the Persian text, but its many concordances make it a valuable research tool.[25]

Rowshan (1998): The most recent edition of *V&R*. Very little has changed from the 1970 edition, except for one pro and one con: both lines and chapters are numbered, allowing (for the first time!) a convenient shorthand for textual references (but see my complaint about the "Ten Letters" above); on the other hand, the editor's comments and critical apparatus are buried in the back in a way that is both cluttered and inaccessible. The compressed apparatus does not make the book any less bulky, because all the saved space is replaced with both Hedāyat's and Minorsky's articles in addition to numerous indices of names and proverbs. This is all helpful, and this being the most recent and accessible edition, it is is naturally the first choice for most readers of the poem; but those who are interested in the manuscript tradition of *V&R* would benefit from a copy of the T'odua and Gvaxaria edition.[26]

25. Emiko Okada and Kazuhiko Machida, *Persia bungaku bunka no data-base-ka josei no seikatsu to shikou wo chusin-ni* [*Database on Persian Literature and Culture with Special Reference to Women's Life and Thought*] (Tokyo: University of Foreign Studies, 1991); cf. Heshmat Moayyad, "[Review of *Vis & Rāmin*, eds. Okada and Machida]," *Irānshināsī* 1 (1998): 182–188; Daniela Meneghini Correale, Giampaolo Urbani, and Riccardo Zipoli, *Handbook of Lirica Persica* (Venice: Poligrafo, 1989).

26. Fakhr al-Dīn Gurgānī, *Vīs va Rāmīn*, ed. Muḥammad Rawshan (Tehran: Ṣidā-yi Muʿāṣir, 1377 [1998]).

Appendix B

The Reception of *Vis & Rāmin*

These are some of the shorter entries by medieval anthologists and biographers about *Vis & Rāmin* and/or its author, Fakhroddin Gorgāni. For older editions, I have added punctuation and *eżāfa* markings and slightly modernized the orthography.

B.1 Moḥammad ʿOwfi, *Lobāb al-albāb* (w. 617/1220)

The consummate sage, Fakhroddin Asʿad Gorgāni: Fakhroddin Gorgāni is one of the exemplary poets of the world. In pearls of wisdom, his thought was an ocean of sweetness, and his passion was a boundless sea. Perfect virtue, beautiful artistry, and the utmost of taste and sagacity are revealed and evident in his composition, the book of *Vis & Rāmin*, into the form of which he so inlaid the spirit of meaning that the hand of extinction will not touch the garment of that perfection, nor will the affliction of decay find a way to it or the splendors of description and the pearls of metaphor spoken therein. No other information of his poetry outside of *V&R* can be found save this short piece:

I've read and recited much poetry in my time,
each one an effort before Ṡeqat al-Molk Shahriyar
I was a green branch of hope in his service;
and that branch grew dry and brought forth no fruit.
He claims to know poetry, and doesn't know the meaning of the word,
and then even takes pride in his ignorance!
I've never seen nor heard of one more bovine than he;
fortune made a grave mistake in granting him glory.
My hope is misfortune upon that pimp,
my poems bring woe on that cuckold's son.[1]

الحکیم الکامل فخرالدین اسعد الجرجانی: فخرالدین جرجانی که [از] اماثلِ شعرای جهان است. خاطرِ او به دررِ معانیِ لطیفِ محیط بود، غیرت قُلزُم و محیط بود، کمالِ فضل و جمالِ هنر و غایتِ ذکا و ذوقِ شعر او در تألیفِ کتابِ

1. Muḥammad ʿAwfī, *Kitāb-i Lubāb al-albāb*, ed. Edward Granville Browne and Muḥammad Qazvīnī (Leiden: Brill, 1903–6), 2:240; cf. Muḥammad ʿAwfī, *Lubāb al-albāb*, ed. Saʿīd Nafīsī (Tehran: Ibn Sīnā, 1333 [1955]), 417. Meter: *możāreʿ akhrab makfuf maḥẕuf* [– – ⏑ – | ⏑ – ⏑⏑ | – – ⏑ – | ⏑ –].

«ویس و رامین» ظاهر و مکشوف شده‌است، که جانِ معنی را در آن قالب چنان مفرَّغ گردانیده‌است که دستِ زوال به دامنِ آن کمال نرسد و بلای بلی بدو راه نیابد و آنچه از غررِ اوصاف و دررِ تشبیهات در آنجا ایراد کرده‌است. و از اشعارِ جز «ویس و رامین» مطالعه نیفتاد جز این یک قطعه:

بسیار شعر گفتم و خواندم به روزگار	یک یک به جهد بر ثقة‌الملک شهریار
شاخی تر از امید بگشتم به خدمتش	آن شاخ خشک گشت و نیاورد هیچ بار
دعوی شعر کرد و ندانست شاعری	و آنگاه کرد نیز به نادانی افتخار
زو گاوتر ندیدم و نشنیدم آدمی	در دولتش عجب غلطی کرد روزگار
امیدِ من دریغ بدان خام قلتبان	اشعارِ من دریغ بدان روسپی‌تبار

B.2 Ḥamdollāh Mostowfi, *Tārikh-e gozida* (w. 730/1330)

Narsē son of Gōdarz (Gotarzes) son of Belāsh (?) son of Ashgh (Arsaces): He became king after his father and reigned for twenty years. Before him, Mo'bad of *Vis & Rāmin* was ruler of Khorasan and Mazandaran.[2]

نرسی ابن گودرز بن بلاش ابن اشغ: بعد از پدر پادشاه شد و بیست سال در پادشاهی بود و نماند. مؤبد ویس و رامین از قبل او حاکم خراسان و مازندران بود.

Fakhroddin Gorgāni was a contemporary of Toghrul Bey. He has nice poetry. The book *Vis & Rāmin* is among his compositions.[3]

فخرالدین گرگانی معاصر سلطان طغرل بک بود. شعری نیک دارد. کتاب ویس و رامین از منشآت اوست.

B.3 Jājarmi, *Munes al-aḥrār* (w. after 736/1335)

On the ghazals of the king of poets, Fakhroddin Gorgāni:

You do not know nor have any news of me, O heart of stone
    how wretched I have become in the catastrophe of your love
Though I am the sage of my times, I'm stuck in hardship
    Though I am the throne of my city, I've fallen into ignominy
In my love for you, I forever write "loyalty" upon my heart
    you forever write "cruelty" upon toil in my name
In my love for you, I'm always in a state of toil and anxiety
    you'd say that I struggle with an elephant of war
Anywhere you go before me, you're spiteful of me
    you'd say I'm an eagle, you're a mountain partridge
Despite all these cruelties, I see you in a good light

2. Mustawfī Qazvīnī, *Tārīkh-i guzīdah*, 101.
3. ibid., 743.

for I know no cure for myself save patience and tolerance
When you took away my heart from me, you became brave to me
you always show me cruelty, you know that you have your heart
Your unkind heart is not good to my heart
If you're always taking hearts, perhaps you'll leave one for me[4]

فی ذکر الغزلیات ملک‌الشعرا فخرالدین الجرجانی فرماید:

ای سنگدل ندانی وز من خبر نداری   کاندر بلای عشقت چون گشته‌ام به زاری
گرچه حکیمِ دهرم درمانده‌ام به سختی   ورچه سریرِ شهرم افتاده‌ام به خواری
من مهرِ تو وفا را بر دل همی نگارم   تو نامِ من جفا را بر رنج همی نگاری
با عشقِ تو همیشه در رنج و در نهیبم   گوئی به کارزارم با پیلِ کارزاری
هر جا که پیشم آئی از من نفور باشی   گوئی که من عُقابم تو کَبگِ کوه‌ساری
با این همه جفاها کز تو همی به بینم   درمانِ خود ندانم جز صبر و بردباری
چون دل ز من ببُردی بر من دلیر گشتی   جورم همی نمائی دانی که دلِ تو داری
به نیست از دلِ من نامهربان دلِ تو   گر دل همی ستانی شاید که دل سپاری

B.4 Dowlatshāh, *Taẕkerat al-shoʿarā* (w. 892/1486)

Notice on the Beloved of Kings, Neẓāmi ʿAruži of Samarqand, God's mercy upon him: He was a noble man with a sensitive temperament, among the pupils of [the poet] Amir Moʿezzi and skilled in the knowledge of poetry. He versified *Vis & Rāmin*, [but] some say that the great shaykh Neẓāmi of Ganja versified that story before [he wrote] the *Quintet*. Among Neẓāmi Aruži's compositions is the *Four Discourses*, and that work is extremely beneficial in the rules of social conduct, scholarly wisdom, the protocols of serving royalty, and other matters. This line from the story of *Vis & Rāmin*, which is by Neẓāmi ʿAruži, is cited [here] so that its meter may be known.

For that reason, they call Ārash the "Bowman,"
For he shot an arrow from Amol to Marv.[5]

ذکر مقبول الملوک نظامی عروضی سمرقندی رحمة الله علیه: مردی اهلِ فصل بوده و طبعی لطیف داشته از جملهٔ شاکردانِ امیر معزّی است و در علمِ شعر ماهر بوده. داستان ویسه و رامین به نظم آورده و گویند که آن داستان را شیخِ بزرگوارِ نظامی گنجوی نظم کرده قبل از خمسه، و کتابِ چهار مقاله از تصانیف نظامیِ عروضی است و آن

4. Jājarmī, *Mūnis al-aḥrār fī daqāʾiq al-ashʿār*, 2:952. Meter: *możāreʿ akhrab makfuf sālem* [– – ⏑ – | ⏑ – ⏖ | – – ⏑ – | ⏑ – –]. For Jājarmi's biography, see Anna Livia Beelaert, "Jājarmi," in *EIr*, online edition (2008), accessed June 11, 2015, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/jajarmi.

5. Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tadhkirah*, 60. The verse corresponds with v. 39 in *Vis & Rāmin* (*ed. Rawshan*), 270, which is the fifth of Vis's "Letters."

نخسه‌ایست به غایت مفید در آدابِ معاشرت و حکمتِ علمی و دانستنِ آئینِ خدمتِ ملوک و غیرِ ذلک و این بیت از داستان ویسه و رامین که از نظمِ نظامیِ عروضی است آورده می‌شود تا وزنِ ابیاتِ آن نسخه معلوم باشد:

از آن گویند آرش را کمان‌گیر   که از آمُل به مرو انداخت او تیر

[The notice continues on a short digression about the story of Ārash the Bowman, but *V&R* is not mentioned again until we arrive to the notice on Neẓāmi of Ganja.] Before his *Quintet*, Shaykh Neẓāmi versified the story of *Vis & Rāmin* in his youth and dedicated it to Maḥmud b. Moḥammad b. Malekshāh [d. 525/1131]. Some say that Neẓāmi ʿArużi versified this story, but the truth is that the poem belongs to the great shaykh Neẓāmi, for, looking at the dating, Neẓāmi ʿArużi lived during the era of Malekshāh [d. 485/1092], and there is no doubt that the story of *Vis & Rāmin* was versified in the name of Sultan Maḥmud, and this is closer to the time of Shaykh Neẓāmi.[6]

و شیخ قبل از خمسه در آوانِ شباب داستانِ ویسه و رامین را به نامِ سلطانِ محمودِ بنِ محمّدِ بنِ ملکشاه به نظم آورده. و بعضی گویند آن را عروضی نظم کرد، درست آنست که نظمِ شیخِ بزرگوارِ نظامی است چه از روی تاریخ نظامیِ عروضی در عهدِ سلطانِ ملکشاه بوده‌است و شک نیست که داستانِ ویسه و رامین را به نامِ سلطانِ محمود نظم کرده‌اند و این به عهدِ شیخ نظامی اقرب است.

B.5 Jāmi, *Bahārestān* (w. 892/1487)

Fakhri of Gorgan, may God grant him mercy, is among the most exemplary and eloquent [poets] of history. The measure of the perfection of the virtue and distinction of his poetry is *Vis & Rāmin*; these days, [it is] unknown and unobtainable. Here are some lines on a number of topics in that book:

This is a nice aphorism made by the wise and worldly, that “war by eyes is easy.” (47.129)
I do not have that golden basin in my possession,
for the enemy sees my blood within it. (47.145)
The snake has no offspring but snakes; the bad branch only produces bad seeds. (48.45)
Traveling while hale and hearty isn’t fun;
look how bad it is in this toil and weakness! (61.72)
The rose and narcissus are nice to look at, but bitter to taste. (59.80)
How much better it is to say you have not sinned,
then to hide it among the people! (54.42)
The king is like a fire kindled, wild by its nature when it comes;
Although you’ve the strength of an elephant and the nature of a lion,
don’t be a hero against blazing fire! (59.92–93)[7]

6. Dawlatshāh Samarqandī, *Tadhkirah*, 130. Dowlatshāh’s dating is hopelessly confused, for Neẓāmi Ganjavi could not have been more than an infant if he were alive at all when Maḥmud b. Muḥammad died. Furthermore, *V&R* is not dedicated to this sultan in the first place, but rather to Toghrul Bey, his vizier Kondori, and his governor ʿAmid Abu l-Fatḥ; all this suggests that Dowlatshāh had no access to the text in the first place and was relying entirely on hearsay in his efforts to identify the author of *V&R*.

7. Jāmī, *Bahāristān va rasāʾil-i Jāmī*, 142–43.

فخری جرجانی - رحمه الله تعالی - از اماثل و افاضلِ روزگار است. میزانِ کمالِ فضل و دقتِ شعرِ وی کتابِ ویس و رامین است و آن در این روزگار مهجور و نایاب، و این چند بیت از مواضعِ متعددِ آن کتاب است:

خوش است این نکته از گیتی‌شناسان   که باشد جنگ بر نظّاره آسان
مرا آن طشتِ زرّین نیست درخور   که دشمن خونِ من بیند بدو در
نباشد مار را بچه بجز مار   نیارد شاخِ بد جز تخمِ بد بار
نباشد خوش سفر در تندرستی   نگر تا چون بُوَد در رنج و سستی
گل و نرگس نکو باشد به دیدن   ولیکن تلخ باشد در چشیدن
گناه بوده بر مردم نهفتن   بسی نیکوتر از نابوده گفتن
مثالِ پادشه چون آتش آمد   به طبع آتش همیشه سرکش آمد
اگر با زورِ پیل و طبعِ شیری   مکن با آتشِ سوزان دلیری

B.6 *Haft Eqlim* by Amin Aḥmad Rāzi (w. 1002/1593)

Fakhroddin As'ad was the pride of the age and the most fortunate of the era. The refinement of his verse was the hero of the army of speech; the perfection of his prose ruled over the realm of expression. The strength of his virtue and the good taste of his poetry is evident in his book of *Vis & Rāmin*.

> I've read and recited much poetry in my time,
> each one an effort before Śeqat al-Molk Shahriyar
> I became a branch full of hope in his service;
> now dry and bearing no fruit.
> He claims to know poetry, and doesn't know the meaning of the word,
> and then even takes pride in his ignorance!
> I've never seen nor heard a man more bovine than he;
> fortune made a grave mistake in granting him glory.
> My hope is misfortune upon that puerile cuckold,
> my poems bring woe on that Russian Tatar.[8]

[This is followed by forty lines of poetry, about twenty of which are from Vis's "Letters"; the other citations are from some laments by Vis and Shahru, some wise sayings by Behguy, a line from when Rāmin falls in love with Vis, a few lines from Rāmin and Mobad complaining about the travails of love, and the narrator on the cruel world.] The story of *Vis & Rāmin* was in the time of Shapur b. Ashk of the Arsacid family; he is the second of the Arsacid kings who are also called the "Petty Kings." The prophethood of Jesus, peace be upon him, was brought low in his time.[9]

فخرالدین اسعد فخرِ زمان و اسعدِ دوران بوده لطفِ نظمش بر سپاهِ لفظ قهرمان و کمالِ نثرش بر ولایتِ معنی نافذِ فرمان قوّتِ فضل و ذوقِ شعرِ او از کتابِ ویس و رامین ظاهر می‌گردد مر او راست.

8. Cf. section B.1.
9. Amīn Aḥmad, *Haft iqlīm*, 3:103–5.

نظم

بسیار شعر گفتم و خواندم به روزگار   یک‌یک به جهد بر ثقة‌الملک شهریار
شاخی پر از امید بگشتم به خدمتش   آن خشک و بار نیاورد هیچ بار
دعویِ شعر کرد و ندانست شاعری   آنگاه کرد نیز به نادانی افتخار
زو گاوتر ندیدم و نشنیدم آدمی   در دولتش عجب غلطی کرد روزگار
امیدِ من دریغ بدان خام قلتبان   اشعارِ من دریغ بدان روسیِ تتار

ویس و رامین در عهدِ اشکانیانِ شاپور بن اشک بوده و او دوّمِ ملوکِ اشکانیانست و ایشان را ملوک‌الطوایف نیز خوانند بعثتِ حضرتِ عیسی علیه‌السلام در عهدِ او دقوع یافته.

B.7 The *Bayāż* of Ṣāʾeb (d. 1087/1676)

All lesser men who strive with the great will fall such that they never rise again. (3.46)
In the eyes of the wise, the world is a game, and no game lasts long. (42.95)
Wine covers wisdom as sleep covers eyes; excuse washes sin as water does cloth. (59.268)
Casting felt into water is easy, but not so pulling it back out! (62.60)
I have a heart that heeds not my command—you'd think it wasn't mine! (66.19)
Her heart, waist, and mouth were narrow, so narrow that the world grew so too. (43.9)
I'll go and throw myself from that mountain,
so that a despairing death will be a feast! (65.94)[10]

هر آن که‌تر که با مه‌تر ستیزد   چنان افتد که هرگز بر نخیزد
جهان در چشمِ دانا هست بازی   نباشد هیچ بازی را درازی
خرد را می بپوشد دیده را خواب   گنه را عذر شوید جامه را آب
نمد باشد در آب افگندن آسان   نباشد زو بر آوردن بدانسان
دلی دارم که در فرمانِ من نیست   تو پنداری که این دل زانِ من نیست
دلش تنگ و میان تنگ و دهان تنگ   ز بس تنگی برو گشته جهان تنگ
رَوَم خود را در اندازم ازان کوه   که چون جشنی بوَد مرگی به انبوه

B.8 Kātip Çelebi (d. 1068/1657), *Kashf al-ẓunūn*

The story of *Vis & Rāmin* is from the time of the Arsacids and was versified by Fakhroddin Asʿad Astarābādi "Fakhri" of Gorgān,* who died in the year [...]. Fakhroddin Gorgāni was a contemporary of Toghrïl the Seljuk; he has good poetry and *Vis & Rāmin* is the select [work] of his compositions. Neẓāmi ʿAružī of Samarqand, that is Neẓāmoddin Aḥmad b. ʿAli, who died in the year [...].[11] Muḥammad b. ʿUth-

10. Tarbīyat, "Mathnavī va mathnavī guyān-i Īrānī," 434; Maḥjūb, "Muqaddamah," 101.
11. This sentence seems to be a fragment.

mān, who was known as “Lāmiʿī” and died in the year 938 [= 1531 CE], translated it.[12]

* Lāmiʿī translated this person’s book. Upon completing and presenting the book, which was in the meter of hazaj, by the order of Sultan Süleyman, his son was given a job worth 20 akçe [per month].[13]

ويس و رامين كانت قصّتُها في زمن الأشقانية فنظم فخر الدين أسعد الأسترابادي فخري الجرجاني* المتفوي سنة . . . وهو فخر الدين الكركاني معاصر طغرل السلجوقي شعر نيك دارد وويس ورامين از منشآت اوست كزيده. ونظامي العروضي المسرقندي وهو نظام الدين أحمد بن علي المتوفي سنة . . . وترجمَهُ محمود بن عثمان المعروف بلامعي المتوفي سنة ٩٣٨.

* لامعي بونك كتابني ترجمه ايتمشدر سلطان سليمان فرمانيله بحر هزجده تمام ايدوب ويرلدكده اولادينه يكرمي اقچه وظيفه اولمشدر.

B.9 Vāleh Dāghestāni (d. 1170/1756), *Riyāż al-shoʿarā*

Although the poetry of *Vis & Rāmin* comes across to this writer as plain (*sāda*) from beginning to end, the truth is that despite this simplicity and lack of ornamentation, it still possesses incredible power and maturity, and its excessively plain passages are forgivable, considering that this was the beginning of the art form. Back then, the beauty of the brides of speech had not yet been adorned by the ornaments of artifice; they were like bewitching beauties perched under tents in the desert with no desire for kohl or makeup, waiting to ensnare dejected hearts. Despite this, so much ease and fluency is preserved in this book that it cannot be described; the truth of my words will be clear to those who are knowledgeable in the ways of discourse.

To cut to the chase, though I promised at the beginning of this book that I wouldn’t present famous masnavis for reasons I there mentioned, but would only excerpt little-known masnavis that will seldom be recorded, this masnavi too, though its name is famous, is difficult to obtain, and for that reason I have selected and transcribed here about seven hundred verses. This poem is six thousand lines in full; one half of this has been anthologized.[14]

مثنویِ ویس و رامین من اوّله الی آخره به نظرِ راقمِ حروف رسیده، اگر چه اشعارش ساده وقاع شده، لیکن حقّ این است که با وجودِ سادگی و بی‌تکلّفی نهایتِ پختگی و قوّت دارد و در بعضی جا اکثر تساهل به کار رفته باشد نظر به اینکه ابتدای این فنّ بوده معذور است؛ چه در آن وقت جمالِ عرایسِ سخن به حُلیِّ تکلّفات هنوز پیراسته نشده بود، مانندِ جادونگاهانِ صحرانشینِ بی‌مِنّتِ سُرمه و غازه صیدافکنِي دلهای حزین می‌نموده‌اند. معهذا آنقدر سلاست و فصاحت در آن کتاب درج است که وصف ندارد، حقیقتِ این سخن به سخندان روشن خواهد بود.

خلاصهٔ کلام آنکه اگر چه راقمِ حروف در ابتدای این کتاب التماس نموده‌ام که متعرّض به انتخابِ مثنویّاتِ مشهوره نمی‌شوم و جهتِ آن نیز مذکور است، مگر از مثنویّاتِ غیرِ مشهوره که قدری به تحریر خواهد آمد، چنانچه این مثنوی هم اگر چه به اسمِ مشهور است لیکن کمیاب است و لهذا تخمیناً به قدر هفتصد بیت از او انتخاب نموده، در اینجا ثبت می‌نمایم. تمامِ آن مثنوی به شش هزار بیت می‌رسد. نصف آن منتخب است.

12. Kâtip Çelebi, *Kitāb kashf al-ẓunūn ʿan asāmī al-kutub wa-al-funūn*, 2:2025; cf. Kâtip Çelebi, *Kashf al-ẓunūn ʿan asāmī al-kutub wa-al-funūn*, 3:540.

13. My profound thanks and appreciation to Ahmet Tunç Şen for translating this passage for me.

14. ʿAlī Qulī Khān Vālih, *Taẕkirah-i Riyāż al-shuʿarāʾ*, 3:1550–51.

B.10 Āẕar Bigdeli, *Ātashkada* (w. 1174/1760)

Fakhroddin As'ad: one of the eloquent [poets] of that region [Gorgan]. These two verses are a memorial of him:

O my idol, you are a red rose and I am yellow;
You've blossomed out of joy, and I out of pain.
You'd say I had a mother who prayed,
"May that which you seek be forever distant."[15]

فخرالدین اسعد: از فصحای آن دیار است و این دو شعر ازو یادگار است:

نگارا تو گلِ سرخی و من زرد — تو از شادی شکفتی و من از درد
مرا مادر دعا کرده‌است گوئی — که از تو دور بادا آنچه جوئی

B.11 Reżaqoli Khan Hedāyat, *Majma^c al-foṣahā* (w. ca. 1288/1871)

Fakhr of Gorgan: His name is Fakhroddin As'ad, and he was among the well-known poets of his time. He wrote panegyrics to Muḥammad b. Maḥmud the Seljuk.[16] He lost his heart to one of the sultan's slave-boys, and when the sultan found this out one night at a wine-party, he gave the slave to him. Because of Fakhroddin's respect for the sultan and his pure morals, at that moment he foolishly put the slave-boy to bed in a room and lit some candles by his head and feet. He went back out to a corner, tormented by his aching heart. As it happened, the boy made some movement and a candle fell, burning pillow, bed, furnishings, the room, and the boy one after the other. Because of this, a terrible anguish rose up in Fakhroddin and he left the sultan's service, and during that time, on account of his own preoccupation, he composed the story of *Vis & Rāmin*, which some have attributed to Neẓāmi 'Aruži and others. It is said that the poem is ten thousand lines. It has generally not been noticed, but we will record the best of some of that which is found in this book.

فخر گرگانی: اسمش فخرالدین اسعد، از فضلای معروف و شعرای مشهورِ زمان خود بوده. مداحيِ محمد بن محمود سلجوقی را می‌نموده. به یکی از علامانِ سلطان دل داده و بعد از اطلاعِ سلطان شبی در مجلسِ باده غلام را به وی باز نهاده. فخرالدین بنا بر حرمتِ سلطان و پاکیِ دامان، غلام را به همان حالت بی‌خودی در اطاقی خوابانیده. شمعی چند بر بالای سر و زیرِ پای وی افروخته. به بیرون آمده در گوشه‌ای به دردِ دلِ خود گرفتار بود. اتفاقاً غلام حرکتی کرده شمعی افتاده بالین و بستر و فرش و خانه و غلام را به تدریج بسوخت. بنا بر این شوری در فخرالدین به هم رسیده و از خدمت دامن کشیده در آن اوقات به جهة مشغوليِ خود حکایتِ ویسه و رامین را که بعضی به نظامی عروضی و غیره نسبت می‌دهند منظوم نموده. گویند ده هزار بیت است. کُلاً به ملاحظه نرسیده اما آنچه از آن دیده در این کتاب زبدهٔ بعضی را ثبت می‌نماید.

[The author then relates four lines from the same satire quoted in the *Lobāb al-albāb* (section B.1), followed by this quatrain:]

15. Āẕar, *Ātishkadah*, 804–5. The lines are from v. 34 and 35 from the second and third of Vis's "Letters," *Vis & Rāmin* (*ed. Rawshan*), 264 and 266 respectively.

16. This is either a mix-up of Dowlatshāh's attribution, or perhaps he means Muḥammad II b. Maḥmud II, d. 554/1159.

Again my breath has the whiff of madness	This pain is more than I can bear
If one should poke blame at my heart	Blood will spill out from such talk

باز از نَفَسم بوی جنون می‌آید	وز طاقتم این درد فزون می‌آید
بر حرفِ دلم گر نهد انگشت کسی	خونِ دل ازان حرف برون می‌آید

[This is followed by quotations under the following headings: (1) description of Vis's beauty, (2) description of Rāmin, (3) on Vis and Rāmin's wedding, (4) complaints by Rāmin at Vis's absence, and (5) miscellany. Most of these headings only loosely correspond with their contents, however; the "wedding" quotes are mostly from Rāmin's wedding with Gol, the "complaints" mix up Rāmin with Mobad, and so on. The verses are rarely consecutive.][17]

17. Hidāyat, *Majmaʿ al-fuṣaḥā*, 1:934–36.

Appendix C

The Many Lives of ʿUrwa b. Ḥizām

This appendix is a complement to Chapter 2, where I trace the changing legend of the seventh-century CE poet ʿUrwa b. Ḥizām. The first account of the poet is found in Ibn Qutayba's (d. 276/889) anthology and biographical dictionary *Poets and Poetry*, which consists of a collection of short anecdotes and poetic citations.[1] About a century later, we see an expanded and systematized treatment of the story in Abu l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī's (d. ca. 363/972) *Book of Songs*.[2] Finally, another century down the road, we have the Persian text of ʿAyyuqi's (fl. 421/1030) *Varqa & Golshāh*.[3] This work is far too long to translate in full as an appendix, but I provide an outline of the story's plot to show how it draws from Iṣbahānī's narrative and adopts the basic plot elements and structures of romance discussed in the dissertation. I have sought a fluid and engaging style of translation, rather than a brackets-ridden gloss of the original Arabic. This means that at times I add explanatory words (Arabic is generally more concise a language than English) and sometimes "domesticate" the idioms and phrases used in the text (but not to such a degree, I hope, as to produce a misleading impression). The numbers in brackets and parentheses correspond to the [page numbers] and (section numbers) of the Arabic edition. The footnotes contain additional information to contextualize terms, tribes, and persons who might not be familiar to my readers.

A deep note of appreciation and gratitude goes out to my advisor, Tahera Qutbuddin, who helped me through the first draft of these translations. All remaining errors and infelicities are solely my own. I also typed up the Arabic texts for quick consultation, but let the reader be warned that I may not have caught all the typos.

1. The edition used is Ibn Qutaybah, *al-Shiʿr wa-al-shuʿarāʾ*, 622–27; the reader may also consult ʿUrwah ibn Ḥizām, *Dīwān*, 78–81.

2. Iṣbahānī, *al-Aghānī* (*Beirut*), 24:80–90, no. 534. This edition is newer and probably easier to access, but it has the occasional typo that I rectified in consultation with Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: al-Hayʾah al-Miṣrīyah al-ʿĀmmah lil-Kitāb, 1994), 24:145–168.

3. ʿAyyūqī, *Varqah va Gulshāh-i ʿAyyūqī*, ed. Zabīḥ Allāh Ṣafā (Tehran: Dānishgāh-i Tihrān, 1964).

C.1 Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), *al-Shiʿr wa-al-shuʿarāʾ*

(1094) ʿUrwa b. Ḥizām was of the Banū ʿUdhra, one of the lovers killed by passionate love. His beloved is ʿAfrāʾ bt. Mālik of the ʿUdhra.[4]

(1095) ʿUrwa was an orphan who lived in his uncle's household. He grew up with his cousin ʿAfrāʾ, and the two fell into passionate love as they came of age. ʿUrwa begged his uncle's permission to marry ʿAfrāʾ, but the uncle put off the decision until ʿUrwa had to leave for Damascus with his family's caravan. While he was away, another of ʿAfrāʾ's cousins who lived in the city of Balqaʾ asked for her hand, married her, and brought her back to his home country.[5] ʿUrwa was headed southwards on the return journey with his caravan, when in Tabuk he spotted a band of people headed north from the direction of Medina, and in that group was a woman mounted upon a tawny camel. He said to his companions, "By God, she looks just like ʿAfrāʾ!" His comrades grumbled, "Oh, bother! Why don't you stop thinking about ʿAfrāʾ for a moment?" But nothing would calm him but to know if it was her, and in his misery he stood there silently until the group passed on, at which point he said:

> I tremble in awe when I think of you
>   it creeps between my skin and bones
> It's not there, but then I see her
>   I'm so overwhelmed I forget to speak
> Whatever was in my mind is driven out
>   I forget my thoughts until she is gone
> My heart forgives her and sides against me
>   and I am left with no share of my heart
> My soul knows that its cure is nearby
>   but is one beyond reach ever at hand?
> If cold water, pure and white, is what I cherish
>   then she truly is the most dear

[623] ʿUrwa then returned to his people, wretched and weeping, and grew so emaciated that nothing remained of him. Some thought him mad, others bewitched. Finally, they said, "In Yamama there lives a sage named Sālim to whom the jinn are but servants; they say that he is the best of physicians."[6] They set out from their land, and when they came to him, he gave ʿUrwa something to drink and began to cast protective charms, then said, "Hey! Has a love-spell been cast on you?" ʿUrwa replied, "No, by God"; and so they left and went to another sage from Hajr, who treated him in the same manner. ʿUrwa replied, "By God, I have no cure save the one who resides in Balqaʾ," and so they departed with him. He said on this occasion: [624]

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4. The ʿUdhra tribe (*banū ʿudhra*) were a semi-pastoralist clan that is is said to have converted to Islam about seven years after the *hijra* and eventually wound up in Wadi'l-qura (*wādī al-qurā*), a region to the north and west of Medina.

5. Balqaʾ (*al-Balqāʾ*) is a city near Damascus. Cf. *Lisan al-ʿarab*.

6. Yamama (*al-yamāma*) is a region of the central part of the Arabian peninsula, just east of plateau of Najd.

I would accept the wisdom of the sages
from Hajr and Yamama, if they could cure me!
They left no remedy untried
they made me drink every possible medicine.
Until they said, "May God heal you! By God, our hands cannot touch
that which you bear between your ribs."

He also said:

O crows amidst the desolate ruins, tell me!
Do you two mourn my separation from ʿAfrāʾ?
For if what you say is true, then bear my flesh
to your aeries, and devour me!

The sage of Yamama is Riyāḥ Abu Kalḥaba, a client of the Banū Aʿraj b. Kaʿb b. Saʿd b. Zayd Manāt b. Tamīm. The name of the Aʿrajite is Ḥārith, and the sage has many progeny in Yamama. ʿUrwa also said:

I told the sage of Yamama, "Cure me!
For if you do, you're a healer indeed,
For I am not afflicted by disease nor by madness."
But the Aʿrajite's slave is a quack!

So ʿUrwa returned to his people, and they nursed him for a while. One day, he said to the women, "Do you know that if I were to one day see ʿAfrāʾ, all my pain would go away?" So they took him and went to Balqaʾ, concealing their identities. He began pay visits to ʿAfrāʾ, who was living with a very wealthy man, and gaze at her in secret. One day, while ʿUrwa was at the local market, a man from his tribe recognized him and asked, "When did you arrive?" When ʿUrwa told him, the man said, "I had thought you ill, and now I see you recovered!" He then went to ʿAfrāʾ's husband, and said, "When did he arrive, this dog who scandalized you in front of everyone?"

The husband asked, "What dog?"

"ʿUrwa!"

"What, he has arrived?"

"Indeed he has!"

The husband replied, "The word 'dog' befits you more than him! I did not know that he had come, and if I had, I would have kept him at my home!" The next morning, he set out looking for ʿUrwa and his womenfolk, and when he found them, he scolded them: "You came to Balqaʾ and didn't bother to let me know and stay with me?" He then swore that they would stay with none other, and they finally assented, saying, "Very well, we will come to you tonight or on the morrow." After the husband had left, ʿUrwa said to his family, "You see how things are. Go back to the tribe; I'll be fine." So they turned homewards and set out, and ʿUrwa fell back into despair and suffered a setback; he remained sick until he reached Wadi'l-qura.

(1096) From Marzūq via Ibn al-Kalbī via Abu l-Sā'ib of Makhzūm via Hishām b. ʿUrwa via his father, I am told that Nuʿmān b. Bashīr told the following story:[7]

Either ʿUthmān or Muʿāwiya sent me to collect taxes from the Banū ʿUdhra. This I did, and while I was preparing for my voyage home, I came upon a remote and desolate house, with a man sprawled on his back in the courtyard, nothing but skin and bones. I was startled, and when he heard me, he murmured in a sad voice *I would accept the wisdom of the sages* and the rest of those lines. Then others who resembled him gathered round: his sisters, his mother, his mother's sister. I asked him, "Are you ʿUrwa?" and he said that he was.

"The one who loves ʿAfrā'?"

He said he was, and sat up. "I am the one who said,

I failed to reach the heights
My eyes cannot see for the tears they shed
It's as though a grouse, beating its wings
Is joined to my furiously beating heart

He then turned to his sisters and said:

Who among my sisters will mourn me forever?
For I know that today I will die
They will lament me, but I will not hear
As I am raised up on the necks of my people, a perfumed corpse

A modern poet took these lines and said:

Who weeps for what afflicts me
throughout this deep obsession
Now, before my death
no perfume after the bride

To return to the story: by God, the women exploded in grief, striking their faces and tearing their garments. I did not leave until he died, then I put his affairs in order, prayed over his body, and buried him. Such is my tale.

(1097) When ʿAfrā' learned of ʿUrwa's death, she said to her husband, "You know of that man who was nothing but good and beautiful; they say he has perished in a strange land, and if you see it fit to allow me, I shall leave with the women of my people and mourn his passing." Her husband gave his assent, and ʿAfrā' departed, reciting these lines:

7. Nuʿmān b. Bashīr was the son of one of Medinese companions of the Prophet (*anṣār*) and a loyal supporter of ʿUthmān and Muʿāwiya (unlike the majority of the *anṣār*, who backed ʿAlī). He served as governor of Kufa and Homs for the Umayyad caliphs Muʿāwiya and Yazīd, then declared for ʿAbd Allāh b. Zubayr in the second civil war (683–685 CE). He was killed shortly after the battle of Marj Rāhiṭ (64/684).

O you who drive your camels on, woe to you!
Do you truly lament the death of ʿUrwa, son of Ḥizām?
O ʿUrwa, may all young men after you never enjoy pleasure!
May they never safely return from their travels!
And tell the pregnant women not to hope for one who is absent.
May she never rejoice with a son after him!

She did not cease repeating these lines until she too perished. When this story was reported to Muʿāwiya, he said: "Had I known of these two noble souls, I would have seen them united."

(1098) They say that when ʿAfrāʾ was taken away, ʿUrwa smeared the menstrual blood of the camels upon his belly, seeking its coolness. An onlooker said to him, "Hold on! Don't kill yourself! Do you not fear the Almighty?" ʿUrwa replied:

I'm afflicted by despair, or I'm consumed by a terrible fever—
Keep away from me, lest you catch what I've caught![8]

عروة بن حزام

١٠٩٤ ❖ هو من عُذرة، وهو أحد العُشَّاق الذين قتلَهم العشق، وصاحبتُهُ عفراء بنت مالك العذرية.

١٠٩٥ ❖ وكان عروة يتيماً في حَجْر عمِّهِ، حتَّى بلغ، فعلِقَ عفراءَ عُلاقةَ الصِّبَى، وكانا نَشَآ معاً، فسألَ عمَّهُ أَن يُزوِّجَهُ إيَّاها، فكان يُسوِّفُهُ، إلى أَن خرج في عِيرٍ لأَهليه إلى الشأم، وخطبَ عفراءَ ابنُ عمٍّ لها من البَلْقاءِ، فتزوَّجَها، فحملها إلى بلدِهِ، أَقبل عروةُ في عيرِهِ راجعاً، حتَّى إذا كان بتَبوك، نظر إلى رُفْقَةٍ مُقبِلةٍ من ناحية المدينة فيه امرأةٌ على جملٍ أَحمر، فقالَ لأَصحابِهِ: «واللهِ لكأَنَّها شمائلُ عفراءِ!» فقالوا: «ويحك! ما تتركُ ذكر عفراءَ على حالٍ من الحال!» فلم يُرَع إلَّا بمعرفتها، فبئِسَ قائماً لا يُحيرُ جواباً، حتَّى نفَذَ القومُ فذلك قولُهُ: [من الطويل]

وَإنّي لـتَـعْـروني لِـذِكـراكِ رَوْعَـةٌ	لَـها بَيْـنَ جِـلـدي والـعِـظامِ دَبيـبُ
ومـا هـو إلَّا أن أراهـا فُـجـاءَةً	فـأُبْـهَـتُ حَـتَّـى مـا أكـادُ أُجـيـبُ
وأُصرَفَ عن رأيي الَّذي كُنتُ أرتَئي	وأنسى الَّذي أعدَدْتُ حينَ تَغيبُ
ويُظْـهِرَ قَـلـبي عُـذْرَها ويُـعيـنَـها	علـيَّ فـما لي في الفُـؤادِ نَصيبُ
وقد عَلِمَتْ نَفسي مكانَ شِفائِها	قَـريـباً وهـل مـا لا يُـنـالُ قَـريـبُ
لَئِنْ كان بَردُ الـماءِ أبْيَضَ صافياً	إلـيَّ حَـبـيـبـاً إنَّـهـا لَـحَـبـيـبُ

8. The editors point out that this fever (*al-huyām*) is a burning illness that afflicts camels when they are deprived of water; their skin heats up, they lose their senses, and soon perish. It has been said, they continue, that menstrual blood was considered cold and was the only remedy for this disease; hence Ibn Qutayba explains that ʿUrwa was seeking the blood's coolness.

[623] ثمَّ انصرفَ إلى أَهلِهِ باكياً محزوناً، فأَخذَهُ الهُلاس، حتَّى لم يبقَ منه شيء، وقال القوم: «هو مسحور»، وقال القوم: «به جِنَّةٌ»، وقالوا: «باليمامة طبيبٌ يقالُ له سالم، له تابعٌ من الجِنِّ، وهو أَطبُّ الناس»، فساروا إليه من أَرض بني عُذرة حتَّى جاؤوه، فجعل يَسْقيه ويُنَشِّرُ عنه، فقال: «يا هناهْ! هل عندك من الحُبِّ رُقْيةٌ؟» قال: «لا والله»، فانصرفوا، فمرُّوا بطبيب بحَجْرٍ، فعالجه وصنع به مثلَ ذلك، فقال عروةُ: إنَّهُ والله ما دوائي إلَّا شخصٌ بالبلقاء، فانصرفوا به، وفي ذلك يقول: [من الطويل]

جَعَلْتُ لعَّرافِ اليَمَامةِ حُكْمَهُ   وعَرَّافِ حَجْرٍ إنْ هُما شَفَيانِي
فما تَرَكا مِن رُقَيَّةٍ يَعْلَمانِها   ولا سَلْوَةٍ إلَّا بها سَقَيانِي
فَقالا: شَفاكَ اللهُ، واللهِ ما لَنا   بما جُمِّلتْ مِنْكَ الضُّلوعُ يَدانِي

[624] وفيها يقول: [من الطويل]

أَلا يا غُرابَيْ دِمْنَةِ الدارِ خَبِّرا   أَبالبَيْنِ مِن عَفْراءَ تَنْتَحِبانِ؟
فإنْ كانَ حَقّاً ما تَقولانِ فانْهَضا   بِلَحْمي إلى وَكْرَيْكُما فكُلانِي

وعرَّاف اليمامة: هو رِياح أَبو كَلْحَبَة مولى بني الأَعْرَج بن كعب بن سعد بن زيد مَناةَ بن تميم، والاسم الأَعرج الحارثُ.

ولعرَّاف اليمامة عَقِبٌ باليمامة كثيرٌ.

وقال عروة أَيْضاً: [من الطويل]

فقُلتُ لِعَّرافِ اليمامةِ داوِني   فإنَّكَ إنْ داوَيْتَني لَطبيبُ
فما بِيَ مِن سَقْمٍ ولا طَيْفُ جِنَّةٍ   ولكِنَّ عَبْدَ الأَعرَجيِّ كَذُوبُ

فَردَّ إلى أَهْلِهِ، فمرَّضوه دهراً، فقالَ لِهنَّ يوماً: أَعَلِمْتُنَّ أَنِّي لو نظرتُ [625] إلى عفْراءَ يوماً ذهبَ وَجَعي؟ فخرجوا به حتَّى نزلوا البَلقاءَ مستَخْفين، فكانَ لا يزال يُلمُّ بعفراءَ وينظرُ إليها، وكانت عند رجلٍ كثيرِ المالِ، فبينا عروةُ يوماً بسوق البلقاء لقيَهُ رجلٌ يعرفُهُ من بني عُذْرة، فسَأَلَهُ متى قَدِمَ؟ فأَخْبَرَهُ فقال: لقد عهدتُكَ مريضاً وأَراكَ قد صححْتَ، ثمَّ سارَ إلى زوجِها، فقال: متى قَدم عليكم هذا الكلبُ الذي قد فضحكُم في الناس؟ فقال زوجُ عفراءَ: أَيُّ كلبٍ؟ قال عروةُ، قال: أَوَقد قَدِم؟ قال: نعم، قال: أَنتَ أَولى بأَن تكون كلباً منه! ما علمتُ بمَقْدَمِهِ، ولو كنتُ علمتُ لَضَمَمْتُهُ إلى منزلي، فلمَّا أَصْبحَ غدا يستدلُّ عليهم حتَّى جاءَهم، فقال لهم: قَدِمتُم ولم تَرَوا أَنْ تُعلِموني فيكونَ منزلُكم عندي، ثمَّ حلَف لا يكون نزولُهُم إلَّا عليه، قالوا: نعم، نتحوَّلُ إلَيْكَ الليلةَ أَو غداً، فلمَّا ولَّى قال عورةُ لِأَهلِهِ: قد كانَ مِن الأَمْرِ ما تَرَونَ، فالحَقْنَ بقومِكُنَّ، فإنَّهُ لا بأْسَ عليَّ، فقرَّبوا ظَهْرَهم وارتَحَلوا، فنُكِسَ، فلم يَزَلْ مُدنَفاً حَتَّى نزل بوادي القُرى.

١٠٩٦ ❖ حدثني ابن مرزوقٍ عن ابن الكلبيِّ عن أَبي السائبِ المخزوميِّ عن هشام بن عروة عن أَبيهِ عن النعمان بن بَشير قال: بعثَني عُثمانُ أو معاوية مُصَدِّقاً لبني عُذرَةَ، فصدَّقْتُهم، ثُمَّ أَقبلتُ راجعاً، فإذا ببيتٍ حَريدٍ ليسَ قربَهُ أَحَدٌ، وإذا رجلٌ بِفَنائِهِ مستلقٍ على قَفاه، لم يبْقَ منه إلَّا جلدٌ وعظمٌ، فلمَّا سمع وَجسي ترَنَّمَ بصَوتٍ حزين: [من الطويل]

جعلتُ لعرَّافِ اليَمامةِ حُكْمَهُ

[626] الأَبيات كُلَّها، قال: وإذا أَمثالُ التماثيل حولَهُ، أَخواتُهُ وأُمُّهُ وخالتُهُ، فقلتُ له: أَنتَ عروة؟ قال نعم، قلتُ: صاحب عفراءَ؟ قال: نعم، ثمَّ استَوَى قاعداً، وقال: وأَنا الذي أَقول: [من الطويل]

وعَيْنانِ ما أَوْفَيْتُ نَشْزاً فَتَنْظُرا بِمَأْقَيْهِما إلَّا هُما تَكِفانِ
كأَنَّ قَطاةً عُلِّقَتْ بجَناحِها على كَبدي من شِدَّةِ الخَفَقانِ

ثُمَّ التَفتَ إلى أَخَواتِهِ فقال: [من البسيط]

مَنْ كانَ مِن أَخَواتي باكِياً أَبَداً فاليومَ إنِّي أَراني اليومَ مقبوضا
يُسمِعنَنِيه فأنِّي غيرُ سامِعِه إذا عَلَوْتُ رِقابَ القومَ معروضا

سَمِعَهُ بعضُ المحدَثينَ فأَخَذَهُ فقال: [من المجتثّ]

مَن كانَ يَبكي لِما بي مِن طُولِ وَجْدٍ أَسيسِ
فالآنَ قَبلَ وَفاتي لا عِطرَ بَعدَ عَروسِ

ثمَّ رجَع الحديثُ، قال: فبَرَزْنَ والله يضربْنَ وجوهَهُنَّ ويشقُقْنَ جيوبَهُنَّ، ثمَّ لم أَبرَحْ حتَّى ماتَ، فهيَّأْتُ من أَمرِهِ وصلَّيْتُ عليه ودفنتُهُ. هذا معنى الحديث.

١٠٩٧ ❖ [627] ولمّا بلغ عفراءَ مَوْتُهُ قالت لزوجِها: يا هَناه، قد كان من أَمرِ هذا الرجلِ ما قد علمتَ، وما كان والله إلَّا على الحَسن الجميل، وقد بلغَني أَنَّهُ قد ماتَ في أَرضِ غربةٍ، فإنْ رَأَيْتَ أَنْ تأْذَنَ لي فأَخرجَ في نسوةٍ من قومي فنَنْدُبَهُ ونبكي عليه؟ فأَذِنَ لها فخرجت وهي تقول: [من الطويل]

أَلا أَيُّها الركبُ المُخِبُّونَ وَيْحَكُم بحَقٍّ نَعَيْتُم عُروَةَ بنَ حِزامِ؟
فلا نَفَعَ الفِتْيانَ بعدَكَ لَذَّةٌ ولا رَجعوا مِن غَيْبَةٍ بسلامِ
وقُل لِلحَبالى لا يُرجِّينَ غائباً ولا فَرِحَتْ مِن بعدِهِ بغُلامِ

فما زالت تردِّدُ هذه الأَبياتَ حتَّى ماتت. فبلَغ الخبر معاويةَ، فقال: لو علمتُ بحال هذين الشريفين لَجمعتُ بينَهُما.

١٠٩٨ ❖ قالوا: وكان عروةُ حينَ أُجرِجَتْ عفراءُ يُلصِقُ بطنَهُ بحياضِ النَّعَمِ يريدُ بَردَها، فيقال: مهلاً لا تقتلْ نفسَكَ! أَلا تتَّقي الله؟ فيقول: [من الطويل]

بِيَ اليَأْسُ أَو داءُ الهُيامِ شَرِبتُهُ فإيَّاكَ عنِّي لا يَكُنْ بِكَ ما بيا

C.2 Abu l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī (d. ca. 363/972), *Kitāb al-aghānī*

He is ʿUrwa, son of Ḥizām, son of Muhāṣir, of the tribe of Ḥizām b. Ḍabba b. ʿAbd Kabīr b. ʿUdhra. A poet of the Islamic age, he is one of the lovers killed by passion. None of his poetry is known save his compositions and lyrics to ʿAfrāʾ, the daughter of his paternal uncle ʿIqāl b. Muhāṣir.

A number of transmitters have told me this story, among them: Ḥasan b. ʿAlī b. Muḥammad Ādamī via ʿUmar b. Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Malik al-Zayyāt via Mūsā b. ʿĪsā Jaʿfarī, via Asbāṭ b. ʿĪsā of the Banū ʿUdhra; Ḥusayn b. Yaḥyā Mirdāsī and Muḥammad b. Mazīd b. Abu l-Azhar via Ḥammād b. Isḥāq via his father via his people; Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Jawharī via ʿUmar b. Shabba; Ḥurmī b. Abu l-ʿAlāʾ; Zubayr b. Bakkār via those attributed to him; Ibrāhīm b. Ayyūb Ṣāʾigh via Ibn Qutayba. I have extracted their narratives and compiled them.

Absāṭ b. ʿĪsā, whose narrative is the most complete and well-arranged, says that he knew the old men of the tribe who remember the story of ʿUrwa b. Ḥizām and ʿAfrāʾ bt. ʿIqāl:

Ḥizām died and left ʿUrwa at a young age in the care of his uncle, ʿIqāl b. Muhāṣir. ʿAfrāʾ was the same age as ʿUrwa, and so they played with each other and were always together, so that they became totally intimate with each other. When ʿIqāl observed their love for each other, he would say to ʿUrwa, "Rejoice, for God willing, ʿAfrāʾ will be your bride!" Thus they remained together until ʿAfrāʾ joined the womenfolk, and ʿUrwa joined the men.[9] ʿUrwa went to his aunt, who was called Hind bt. Muhāṣir, and complained to her of his unfulfilled love for ʿAfrāʾ, saying, "O my aunt, I am ashamed to speak to you of this, and I only do so now because I can no longer bear my predicament!" So his aunt went to her brother and said to him, [81] "O my brother, I come to you in need of something and I hope the answer is yes; God will surely recompense you for your love of your kindred in what I ask." He said, "Speak! There is no favor you can name that I will not grant." She said, "Will you marry your daughter to ʿUrwa, the son of your brother?" He replied, "There is no reason to shun him; he is no less than any other desirable man and I don't dislike him; he is poor, and there is no need for him to hurry." ʿUrwa's soul was soothed at this and he was able to find some respite.

However, ʿAfrāʾ's mother had a bad opinion of ʿUrwa and held him in utter contempt; she wanted for her daughter a man of means and luxury, and opposed the whole affair. When ʿUrwa came of age and reached maturity, he learned that a wealthy man from his tribe was seeking ʿAfrāʾ's hand. He went to his uncle and said, "Uncle, you acknowledged my close relation to ʿAfrāʾ and my right to her, I who am your son and grew up in your household. Now I learn that another man is courting ʿAfrāʾ; if you grant him his request, then you'll murder me, you'll spill my blood! I swear by God, my kinship, and my right!" ʿIqāl pitied him and said, "My son, you are destitute, as are we. I would give her to no one but you, but her mother has refused to let anyone marry her without a steep bride-price; so get going, and find some provision from God!" ʿUrwa was greatly upset and called upon God most high for succor.

He went to ʿAfrāʾ's mother, but however he coaxed her and pleaded with her, she refused to give in unless he came up with the money she named for her bride-price; and after he had given her half of it, he promised he would pay her the rest.

9. That is, when they reached puberty.

He knew that nothing, not even his kinship, would avail him except the money they demanded. He therefore resolved to work for a well-to-do cousin of his who lived in Yemen, and went to his uncle and his uncle's wife to inform them of his purpose, and they gave him their assent, promising that they would not do anything until he returned.

On the eve of his departure, ʿUrwa went to ʿAfrāʾ and sat with her and the young girls of the tribe, and they talked together through night until dawn broke. He then bade ʿAfrāʾ and the rest of the tribe farewell and cinched up his saddle to depart. Two youths of the Banū Hilāl b. ʿĀmir (a neighboring tribe) who were friendly with him accompanied him. They spoke to him throughout their journey, but he never heard their words, absorbed as he was in thoughts of ʿAfrāʾ, such that they had to repeat themselves over and over. Finally, they arrived at his cousin's land and located him, telling him of what had befallen ʿUrwa and his current lamentable state. The man gave his cousin the money, dressed him in new clothes, and bestowed him with a hundred camels. With all this in tow, ʿUrwa departed and made for his homeland.

Meanwhile, there was a man from the Umayyad family, living in Damascus, who came down to visit ʿAfrāʾ's tribe. He was a very wealthy man, and slaughtered his livestock and gave the meat to the people. His residence was close to ʿAfrāʾ's, and one day he saw her and was smitten, so he went to her father and asked to marry her. The father apologized and said, "I have promised her to my brother's son, who is her peer in my eyes; none other have a claim to her." [82] The man tried to tempt her father with a handsome offer, but he refused, saying, "I have no need of this." The man then turned to the mother, who found him a very agreeable match, desiring his weath and aware of his generous spending. She accepted his proposal and gave him her word, and then went to ʿIqāl and scolded him: "What is so good about ʿUrwa that you reserve my daughter for him? Here is a rich man who has come knocking at her door, while we don't even know if ʿUrwa is alive or dead, by God! Will he return to you in good condition or not? You're keeping your daughter away from a good that is right here, keeping her from a brilliant fortune!" She wouldn't leave him alone until he said, "If that man comes back to me asking for her, I will assent!" She sent word to the new suitor: "Come back and ask again." The next day, the man slaughtered many camels, distributing food and gathering the entire village for the feast. ʿAfrāʾ's father was there too, and after they ate, the man asked for her hand again, and ʿIqāl gave his blessing and married off his daughter, giving her to him in exchange for the bride-price. As he made ready to consumate the marriage, ʿAfrāʾ cried, in long verses:

O ʿUrwa! The tribe has broken the sacred pact and committed treachery!

The man took ʿAfrāʾ's virginity that night and remained with her for three days; then, he set out with her for Damascus. Her father went to an old grave and freshened it, smoothing out the earth, and asked the tribe to keep the whole affair under wraps.

Some days later, ʿUrwa arrived, and the father told him that his daughter had died, and took him to the grave. For days, ʿUrwa lingered there, frequenting the grave and growing gaunt and weak, until one day a young girl from the tribe came to him and told him the truth. So he left the site, mounted a camel, packed up food and provisions, and headed for Damascus. When he drew near, he asked about ʿAfrāʾ's husband and was shown the way to him. When he found him, he introduced himself as a member of the tribe of ʿAdnān.[10] The husband received him generously and hospitably, and ʿUrwa stayed with him for some days until the entire household knew him well. He then asked one of their slave-girls, "Will you

10. This fits in with the disguise motif found in the first narrative.

do me a favor?” She said she would. He said, “Present this, my ring, to your mistress.” She replied, “For shame! How can you dare to say such things?” He turned away from her, then turned back and said, “God save you! By God, she is my cousin, and each of us is dearer to the other than all the poeple of the world put together. Put this ring in her cup, and if she denies she knows it, tell her, ‘Your guest drank from it before you, and perhaps it fell from his hand.’ ” The slave-girl took pity on him and did as he bade.

When ʿAfrāʾ drank her sour milk, she saw the ring and recognized it. With a gasp, she said, “Tell me the truth—what is going on?” The slave-girl told her everything. When ʿAfrāʾ’s husband arrived, she said to him, “Do you know who your guest is?” He said, “Yes, he is so-and-so son of so-and-so,” reciting the line which ʿUrwa had said. She replied, “Indeed not, by God; he is my cousin, ʿUrwa son of Ḥizām, who was too modest to reveal his identity to you!”

[83] ʿUmar b. Shabba has this on the story: “It wasn’t like that; rather another cousin of his came to him and said, ‘Have you allowed this dog who is staying with you in your own home to disgrace you?’ The husband replied, ‘Who do you mean?’

‘ʿUrwa, son of Ḥizām of the Banū ʿUdhra, is your guest!’

‘Indeed, this is ʿUrwa? Then you, by God, are the dog, for he is my noble kinsman.’ ”

All the transmitters agree on what follows: The husband summoned ʿUrwa to his presence and scolded him for hiding his identity, saying, “You are most welcome here! By God, we implore you never to leave this place!” He then exited, leaving ʿUrwa alone to speak with ʿAfrāʾ, but had one of his servants spy on them and tell him what he heard. When the two of them were alone, they mourned what had befallen them after their separation, and their complaints lengthened, and ʿUrwa shed many a hot tear. ʿAfrāʾ brought him some wine and invited him to drink, but ʿUrwa said, “By God, no forbidden thing has ever entered me, nor have I committed a sin as long as I have lived! If had helped myself to that which is forbidden, I would have helped myself to *you*, for you are my share of this world! But you left me, and I followed behind like the walking dead! And this generous man has shown me courtesy and grace, and I am ashamed before him! By God, I will not stay now that he knows my state, even as I know that I depart for my doom!” She wept, and he wept, and then he departed.

When the husband returned, his servant told him what had transpired between them. He asked ʿAfrāʾ to forbid her cousin from leaving, but she replied, “He won’t be dissuaded. He is too proud and too noble to stay after what happened between you two.” The husband then summoned ʿUrwa and said to him, “My brother, fear God in your soul! I know who you are, and that if you leave, you will die; by God, I would never forbid you from staying together with her, and if you wish, I shall divorce her and leave her for you!” ʿUrwa thanked him and praised him, then said, “In truth, my longing for her is my destruction, and now I have given in to despair and given myself to despair and patient suffering. Indeed, there is consolation in despair. I have things to do, and I simply must return to them, if I find within myself the strength to; if not, I shall return and visit you, and God will do with me as he will.” So they outfitted him with provisions and escorted him out with the highest honor, and he left. As he took his leave, he suffered a relapse after his late recovery, and was stuck by dizziness and a palpitating heart. Whenever

he lost consciousness, his companions would place a veil that ʿAfrāʾ had given him over his face, and he would regain his senses.

On ʿUrwa's journey home, Ibn Makḥūl, the fortuneteller from Yamama, came upon him. He sat with him and asked what was the matter; was he witless, or possessed? ʿUrwa told him, "Do you know [the different kinds of] pain?" The fortuneteller said he did, and ʿUrwa began to recite: [84]

I'm not possessed, nor am I mad; but my uncle, O brothers, is a liar!
"Cure me!" I cry to the sage of Yamamah, "For if you do, you're a healer indeed."
Alas, my heart! It's been destroyed, branded by the doctor's coals.
At night, ʿAfrāʾ is not far enough away to be forgotten, nor is she near.
At night, nothing incites me from behind, no passion entices me,
and no outsider desires her as I do.
By God, I'll never forget you, no matter where the east wind goes,
nor the winds of the south in its wake;
I'm seized by a shiver when I think of you, it creeps between my skin and bones.

He also said, telling his two companions from the Hilāl tribe of his tale:

O my companions, noble sons of Hilāl b. ʿĀmir!
Turn aside at Ṣanʿāʾ for a day, and wait for me!
And don't be stingy in my share, bring it all together,
For you both suffer with me today.
Pass by ʿAfrāʾ, for tomorrow
You shall nearly recognize separation and distance.
O you who slander ʿAfrāʾ, curse you!
Who, what, and by whom have you come to revile?
By whom, if I saw him suffering, I would sacrifice myself for him;
And who, if he saw me suffering, would do the same for me.
O comrades, when shall you strip off the shirt
Revealing the damage that ʿAfrāʾ has done me?
When you do, you shall see one of little flesh
Whose bones have crumbled, whose heart is perpetually choked
She has left me deaf to those who speak to me
Even if he whispers to me, and I to him.
I would accept the wisdom of the sages
From Hajr and Yamama, if they could cure me!
And they left no spell they knew untried,
Or medicine they gave me to drink.
They sprinkled water upon my face on the hour,
And stood with their staves, striving against each other,
And said, "May God heal you!
By God, our hands cannot touch what you bear between your ribs."
Alas for ʿAfrāʾ, alas!
It's as though I have spear-points in my chest and guts.

I love the ʿUdhrī girl though she be far away
And approach her without ever arriving.

A Song

When my heart desires separation from her, it turns back despite itself
She has two intercessors who feud in my heart

[85] Shāriya sang this piece, and its melody goes with *thaqīl al-awwal*:[11]

When I say no*, they respond* yes*,*
And then they come together on their opinion
I bear a burden from ʿAfrāʾ that neither I
nor immovable mountains can bear
My Lord, I seek your aid in that which I have borne
Of ʿAfrāʾ for so long
It's as though a grouse, beating its wings
is joined to my furiously beating heart

And what follows after; it is said that Abu l-ʿAnbas b. Ḥamdūn composed it.

ʿUrwa was not long on the road before he perished, three nights before he would have arrived home. When ʿAfrāʾ learned the news of his death, she was consumed by anguish, and composed a threnody to him:

O you who drive your camels on, woe to you!
Do you truly lament the death of ʿUrwa, son of Ḥizām?
O ʿUrwa, may all young men after you never enjoy pleasure!
May they never safely return from their travels!
And tell the pregnant women not to hope for one who is absent.
May she never rejoice with a son after him!

And she did not cease to repeat these lines and mourn his passing with them, until she died after him by only a few days.

ʿUmar b. Shabba says that ʿUrwa did not learn of ʿAfrāʾ's marriage until he encountered her caravan, for he was headed for his cousin who lived in Damascus (and not in Yemen). When he saw her, he stood there, astonished, and then said:

11. Shāriya is the name of a singing-girl, and *thaqīl al-awwal*, literally "first-heavy," is a particular rhythm used for the song's performance. See Sawa, *Music Performance Practice*, 42.

She’s nowhere, then I see her
  I’m so overwhelmed I forget to speak
I expel my notions from my mind
  I forget my thoughts until she is gone
My heart forgives her and sides against me
  and I am left with no share of my heart
My soul knows that its cure is nearby
  but is one beyond reach ever at hand?
I swear by the Lord of those who prostrate to Him
  in submission, the Watcher above them
If cold water is what I cherish, hot and thirty
  it would be she

[86] Abu Zayd says: “And then he returned to his people from ʿAfrā’, and he had grown thin and weak. He had sisters, his aunt, and his grandmother; they began to admonish him to no avail, so they brought a sage from Yamama and a client of the Banū Thuʿayla, Abu Kuḥayla Rabbāḥ b. Shaddād, to heal him; but his cure was of no use.”

Abu Zayd mentions a qasida by ʿUrwa that ends in *nūn* that we have already mentioned, and adds these lines:[12]

I failed to reach the heights;
  My eyes cannot see for the tears they shed.
Except that I said to my companion one day,
  As we galloped our young camels in the morning light,
“How lovely it is to love ʿAfra’ in the valley:
  A blessing and affliction come together.

According to Abu Zayd, ʿUrwa would collect the menstrual blood of the camel that ʿAfrā’ used to bring to water and smear it over his chest. When someone said to him, “Hang on! You’re killing yourself! Have fear in God,” he did not agree until he was on the brink of destruction and could feel his death. Then he began to recite:

I’m afflicted by despair and a burning fever that has entered me—
  Keep away from me, lest you catch what I’ve caught!

Ḥirmī b. Abu l-ʿAlā’ told me, via Zubayr b. Bakkār via ʿAbd al-Malik b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Mājishūn via Abu l-Sā’ib via Ibn Abu l-ʿAtīq: “I was once traveling in the lands of the Banū ʿUdhra when I came upon a woman carrying a sturdy youth, the likes of whom is never carried. I was astounded by this, and when

12. He means the long poem that begins, “O my companions, noble sons of Hilāl b. ʿĀmir!”

she turned with him, I saw that he was bearded. I called her over and said, 'Lord have mercy! What is this?' She said, 'Have you heard of 'Urwa, the son of Ḥizām?' I said I had, and she said, 'By God, this is he.' I asked him, 'You are 'Urwa?' He spoke to me, as his eyes overflowed with tears and turned in their sockets, 'I am indeed. I am the one who says:'

I would accept the wisdom of the sages
from Hajr and Yamama, if they could cure me!
They said, "Yes, we will cure you from your whole sickness,"
And stood with their staves, striving against each other
'Afrā' has the greatest share of my love of all people
'Afrā' is forever shunning me

[87] "The woman left. No sooner had I left the water when I heard a scream. I asked what had happened, and was told that 'Urwa, son of Ḥizām, had perished."

'Abd al-Malik says: "I asked Abu l-Sā'ib, 'What did 'Urwa die from? I thought he had choked.' Abu l-Sā'ib replied, 'May your eyes be warm![13] What did he choke on?' I said, 'On his own saliva.' I had wanted to joke around with Abu l-Sā'ib. 'Have you ever seen someone die from love?' He said, 'May you never be fortunate! Yes, he dies out of the fear that God would forgive him!"

My uncle told me, via Kurānī via 'Umarī via Haytham b. 'Adī via Hishām b. 'Urwa via his father via Nu'mān b. Bashīr, who said: "Because 'Uthmān (may God be pleased with him) had me collect taxes for Sa'd Hudhaym, and they are: Balī, Salāmān, 'Udhra, Ḍabba b. Ḥārith, Wā'il, and Banū Zayd. When I collected the taxes, I distributed them amongst the people, and when I was done and had left with two shares for 'Uthmān (God be pleased with him), I came upon a solitary house away from the village and headed towards it. There, I saw a young man lying as though asleep in the ruins of the house, and there was an old woman in the rubble. I greeted the man, who returned my greetings in a weak voice, and I asked him what was the matter. He said:

It's as though a grouse, beating its wings
Is joined to my furiously beating heart

"And then he recited the lines from the well-known *nūnīya*, with a soft moan that seemed to carry his soul.[14] I looked at his face and saw that his doom was nigh. I said, 'Old woman, what is this young man's relation to you?' She said, 'He is my son.' I said, 'He is doomed.' She said, 'By God, I know.' She got up and gazed at his face, then said, 'By my Lord and Muḥammad, he is [as good as] dead.' I said, 'Dear lady, who is he?' She said, "Urwa, son of Ḥizām, of the Banū Ḍabba, and I am his mother.' I said, 'What brought him to what I see here?' She said, 'Love. By God, I haven't heard a word nor a moan from him in a year, save for today.' Then he turned to me and said:

13. I guess this to mean may they be hot with tears.

14. The *nūnīya* is any poem that ends with the letter *nūn*. In this case, he means again the long poem that begins, "O my companions, noble sons of Hilāl b. 'Āmir," which seems to have been his signature piece.

Who among my mothers will mourn me forever?
For I know that today I will die.
They will lament me, but I will not hear
as I am raised up on the necks of my people, a perfumed corpse

"I did not leave the village until I had bathed his body, wrapped it in a shroud, prayed for him, and buried him."

In his account of ʿUrwa, Abu Zayd ʿUmar b. Shabba mentions this story via ʿUrwa b. Zubayr, who said these lines in his presence, [88] *Who among my sisters will mourn me forever? &c., &c.* When ʿUrwa recited these, the women appeared, as beautiful as dolls, and approached him, rending their collars and striking their cheeks, and causing all who were present to weep. He died that day.

The news of ʿUrwa's death reached ʿAfrāʾ, so she went to her husband and said, "Some news of my cousin has reached you. By God, I knew nothing of him save goodness and beauty. He has died for me and because of me, and I must hold vigil over him and mourn his passing." Her husband said, "Very well," and she was not in mourning for more than three days before she died on the fourth.

Muʿāwiya b. Abu Sufyān learned of their story and said, "Had I known of these two noble souls, I would have brought them together."

This story is related via Hārūn b. Mūsā Qarawī via Muḥammad b. Ḥārith Makhzūmī via Hishām b. ʿAbd Allāh via ʿIkrama via Hishām b. ʿUrwa via his father, that he was present that day. Nuʿmān b. Bashīr says nothing of this.

Hārūn b. Maslama via Ghuṣayn b. Barrāq via Umm Jamīl of Ṭāʾī tells us that ʿAfrāʾ was an orphan raised in the care of ʿUrwa's uncle, who offered her to him and he refused. After some time passed, ʿUrwa went out on a festival after he had prayed the Eid prayers, and he saw her when she was all adorned and exceedingly beautiful.[15] She offered him a present, and he took it from her, staring all the while. He then requested her hand from his uncle but was refused, in compensation for his own refusal to marry her when she was offered to him. The uncle married her to another man, who left with her to Damascus, and ʿUrwa persisted in his love for her until it killed him.

Muḥammad b. Khalaf Wakīʿ tells us, via ʿAbd Allāh b. Shabīb via Abu Bakr b. Abu Shāyba and others via Sulaymān b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. ʿImrān Zuhrī via Khārija of Mecca: "I saw ʿUrwa b. Ḥizām being made to circumambulate the Kaʿba. I went down to him and asked, 'Who are you?' He replied, 'I am the one who says:

15. Compare with the falling-in-love scenes in the Greek novels.

Are you every day looking for lands with two eyes whose two pupils have gone deep?
So please bear me—God bless you!—to Rawha', and leave me there.[16]

"I said, 'Tell me more.' He replied, 'No, by God, not a word.' "

[89] ʿAlī b. Sulaymān Akhfash informed me, via Abu Saʿīd Sukarī via Muḥammad b. Ḥabīb via Kalbī via Abu Ṣāliḥ: "I was in Arafat with Ibn ʿAbbās, and some youths came up to him, carrying between them a young man with nothing left of him but his shadow.[17] They said to him, 'O cousin of God's Prophet, pray for this man!' Ibn ʿAbbās said, 'What's the matter with him?' The youth spoke:

It's the throes of love and the sorrows of passion in my breast,
For which an anxious comrade's soul would nearly melt.
But yet, He bestows a last breath to weep with
upon someone there made of stern enough stuff.[18]

"Then he became still in their arms. He was dead. And Ibn ʿAbbas said,

This is one killed by love: no blood money; no retaliation.

"Then I did not see Ibn ʿAbbās ask God, great be his glory, for anything in his evening prayers except for good health and protection from that which had destoyed the young man. He asked us who he was, and we replied, 'That was ʿUrwa, son of Ḥizām.' "

أَخبار عروة بن حزام

هو عروة بن حزام بن مهاصر، أَحد بني حزام بن ضَبَّة بن عبد بن كبير بن عذرة. شاعر إسلامي، أَحد المتيمين الذين قتلهم الهوى، لا يعرف له شعر إلا في عفراء بنت عمه عقال بن مهاصر، وتشبيبه بها.

أَخبرني بخبرها جماعة من الرواة؛ فمنه ما أَخبرني به الحسن بن علي بن محمد الآدمي، قال: حدثنا عمر بن محمد بن عبد الملك الزيات، قال: حدثني موسى بن عيسى الجعفري، عن الأَسباط بن عيسى العذري.

وأَخبرني الحسين بن يحيى المرداسي، ومحمد بن مزيد بن أَبي الإزهر، عن حماد بن إسحاق عن أَبيه عن رجاله.

وأَخبرني أَحمد بن عبد العزيز الجوهري قال: حدثنا عمر بن شبة. وأَخبرني الحرمي بن أَبي العلاء قال: حدثنا الزبير بن بكار عمن أَسند إليه. وأَخبرني إبراهيم بن أَيوب الصائغ عن ابن قتيبة. وقد سُقتُ رواياتهم وجمعتها.

16. Rawha' (*al-rawḥā'*) is a place between Mecca and Medina, about 4 miles southeast of the latter city (according to the *Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ*).

17. The place is the famous plain of Arafat, a little southeast of Mecca, where Mt. Arafat is situated. Ibn ʿAbbās (d. ca. 68/687–8) was Muḥammad's cousin and an early scholar of the Qur'an and hadith.

18. Many thanks to Nathaniel Miller for his help parsing this line and the wonderful translation he devised.

❖ قال الأَسباط بن عيسى، وروايته كأَنها أَتم الروايات وأَشدها اتساقاً، أَدركت شيوخ الحي يذكرون أَنه كان من حديث عروة بن حزام وعفراء بنت عقال:

أَنَّ حزاماً هلك وترك ابنه عروة صغيراً في حجر عمه عقال بن مهاصر. وكانت عفراء ترباً لعروة، يلعبان جميعاً، ويكونان معاً، حتى أَلف كل واحد منهما صاحبه إلفاً شديداً. وكان عقال يقول لعروة، لما يرى من إلفهما: أُبشِرْ، فإن عفراء امرأَتك، إن شاء الله. فكانا كذلك حتى لحقت عفراء بالنساء، ولحق عروة بالرجال. فأَتى عروة عمةً له يقال لها: هند بنت مهاصر، فشكا إليها ما به من حب عفراء، وقال لها في بعض ما يقول لها: يا عمة، إني لأُكلمك وأَنا منك مستحٍ، ولكن لم أَفعل هذا حتى ضقتُ ذرعاً بما أَنا فيه، فذهبت عمته إلى أَخيها فقالت له: [81] يا أَخي، قد أَتيتك في حاجة أَحب أَن تحسن فيها الرد، فإن الله يأَجرك بصلة رحمك فيما أَسأَلك. فقال لها: قولي، فلن تسأَلي حاجة إلا رددتك بها. قالت: تزوج عروة بن أَخيك بابنتك عفراء، فقال: ما عنه مذهب، ولا هو دونَ رجلٍ يُرغَبُ فيه، ولا بنا عنه رغبةٌ، ولكنه ليس بذي مال، وليست عليه عجلة. فطابت نفس عروة، وسكن بعض السكون.

وكانت أُمها سيئة الرأْي فيه، تريد لابنتها ذا مال ووفر، وكانت عُرضة ذلك كمالاً وجمالاً، فلما تكاملت سنه وبلغ أَشُدَّهُ عرف أَن رجلاً من قومه ذا يسار ومال كثير يخطبها، فأَتى عمه، فقال: يا عم، قد عرفت حقي وقرابتي، وإني ولدك ورُبيت في حجرك، وقد بلغني أَن رجلاً يخطب عفراء، فإن أَسعفته بطلبته قتلتَني وسفكتَ دمي، فأَنشدك الله ورحمي وحقي، فرق له وقال له: يا بني، أَنت مُعدِم، وحالنا قريبة من حالك، ولستُ مُخرجها إلى سواك، وأُمها قد أَبت أَن تزوجها إلا بمهر غال، فاضطرب واسترزق الله تعالى.

فجاء إلى أُمها فأَلطفها ودارها، فأَبت أَن تجيبه إلا بما تحتكمه من المهر، وبعد أَن يسوق شطره إليها، فوعدها بذلك.

وعلم أَنه لا ينفعه قرابة ولا غيرها إلا بالمال الذي يطلبونه، فعمل على قصد ابن عم له موسر كان مقيماً باليمن، فجاء إلى عمه وامرأَته فأَخبرهما بعزمه، فصوباه ووعداه أَلا يحدثا حدثاً حتى يعود.

وصار في ليلة رحيله إلى عفراء، فجلس عندها ليلة هو وجواري الحي، يتحدثون حتى أَصبحوا، ثم ودعها وودع الحي وشد على راحلته، وصحبه في طريقه فتيان من بني هلال بن عامر كانا يأَلفانه، وكان حياهم متجاورين، وكان في طول سفره ساهياً يكلمانه فلا يفهم، فكرةً في عفراء، حتى يرد القول عليه مراراً، حتى قدم على ابن عمه، فلقيه وعرفه حاله وما قدم له، فوصله وكساه، وأَعطاه مائة من الإبل، فانصرف بها إلى أَهله.

وقد كان رجل من أَهل الشام من أَسباب بني أُمية نزل في حي عفراء، فنحر ووهب وأَطعم، وكان ذا مال عظيم، فرأَى عفراء، وكان منزله قريباً من منزلهم، فأَعجبته وخطبها إلى أَبيها، فاعتذر إليه وقال: قد سميتها إلى ابن أَخ لي يعدلها عندي، وما إليها لغيره سبيل، [82] فقال له: إني أَرغبك في المهر، قال: لا حاجة لي بذلك، فعدل إلى أُمها، فوافق عندها قبولاً، لبذله ورغبةً في ماله، فأَجابته ووعدته، وجاءت إلى عقال فآدته وصخبت معه، وقالت: أَي خير في عروة حتى تُحبَس ابنتي عليه وقد جاءها الغني يطرق عليها بابها؟ والله ما ندري أَعروة حي أَم ميت؟ وهل ينقلب إليك بخير أَم لا؟ فتكون قد حرمت ابنتك خيراً حاضراً ورزقاً سنياً، فلم تزل به حتى قال لها: فإن عاد لي خاطباً أَجبته. فوجهت إليه أَن عد إليه خاطباً. فلما كان من غد نحر جزراً عدة، وأَطعم ووهب وجمع الحي معه على طعامه، وفيهم أَبو عفراء، فلما طعموا أَعاد القول في الخطبة، فأَجابه وزوجه، وساق إليه المهر، وحولت إليه عفراء وقالت قبل أَن يدخل بها:

يا عُروَ إنَّ الحيَّ قد نَقَضوا   عَهدَ الإلهِ وحاوَلوا الغَدرا

في أَبيات طويلة.

فلما كان الليل دخل بها زوجها، وأَقام فيهم ثلاثاً، ثم ارتحل بها إلى الشام، وعمد أَبوها إلى قبر عتيق، فجدده وسواه، وسأَل الحي كتمان أَمرها.

وقدم عروة بعد أَيام، فنعاها أَبوها إليه، وذهب به إلى ذلك القبر، فمكث يختلف إليه أَياماً وهو مضنى هالك، حتى جاءته جارية من الحي فأَخبرته الخبر، فتركهم وركب بعض إبله، وأَخذ معه زاداً ونفقة، ورحل إلى الشام فقدمها وسأَل عن الرجل فأَخبر به، ودُلَّ عليه، فقصده وانتسب له إلى عدنان، فأَكرمه وأَحسن ضيافته، فمكث أَياماً حتى أَنسوا به، ثم قال لجارية لهم: «هل لك في يدٍ تولينيها؟» قالت: نعم، قال: تدفعين خاتمي هذا إلى مولاتك. فقالت: سوءة لك، أَما تستحي لهذا القول؟ فأَمسك عنها، ثم أَعاد عليها وقال لها: ويحك! هي والله بنت عمي، وما أَحدٌ منا إلا وهو أَعزُّ على صاحبه من الناس جميعاً، فاطرحي هذا الخاتم في صبوحها، فإذا أَنكرت عليك فقولي لها: اصطبح ضيفك قبلك، ولعله سقط منه. فرقت الأَمة وفعلت ما أَمرها به.

فلما شربت عفراء اللبنَ رأَت الخاتم فعرفته، فشهقت، ثم قالت: اصدقيني عن الخبر، فصدقتها. فلما جاء زوجها قالت له: أَتدري من ضيفك هذا؟ قال: نعم، فلان بن فلان، للنسب الذي انتسب له عروة، فقالت: كلا والله يا هذا، بل هو عروة بن حزام ابن عمي، وقد كتم نفسه حياءً منك.

❖ [83] وقال عمر بن شَبَّة في خبره: بل جاء ابن عم له فقال: أَتركتم هذا الكلب الذي قد نزل بكم هكذا في داركم يفضحكم؟ فقال له: ومن تعني؟ قال: عروة بن حزام العذري ضيفك هذا، قال: أَوَ إنَّه لعروة؟ بل أَنت والله الكلب، وهو الكريم القريب.

❖ قالوا جميعاً: ثم بعث إليه فدعاه، وعاتبه على كتمانه نفسه إياه، وقال له: بالرحب والسعة، نشدتك الله إن رمت هذا المكان أَبداً، وخرج وتركه مع عفراء يتحدثان. وأَوصى خادماً له بالاستماع عليهما، وإعادة ما تسمعه منهما عليه، فلما خلوا تشاكيا ما وجدا بعد الفراق، فطالت الشكوى، وهو يبكي أَحر بكاء، ثم أَتته بشراب وسأَلته أَن يشربه، فقال: والله ما دخل جوفي حرام قط، ولا ارتكبته منذ كنت، ولو استحللت حراماً لكنتُ قد استحللته منكِ، فأَنت حظي من الدنيا، وقد ذهبت مني، وذهبتُ بعدك فما أَعيش! وقد أَجمل هذا الرجل الكريم وأَحسن، وأَنا مستحيي منه، ووالله لا أَقيم بعد علمه مكاني، وإني عالم أَني أَرحل إلى مَنيَّتي. فبكت وبكى، وانصرف.

فلما جاء زوجه أَخبره الخادم بما دار بينهما، فقال: يا عفراء، امنعي ابن عمك من الخروج، فقالت: لا يمتنع، هو والله أَكرم وأَشد حياءً من أَن يقيم بعد ما جرى بينكما، فدعاه وقال له: يا أَخي، أَتق الله في نفسك، فقد عرفت خبرك، وإنك إن رحلت تلفت، ووالله لا أَمنعك من الاجتماع معها أَبداً، ولئن شئت لأُفارقَنَّها ولأَنزلَنَّ عنها لك. فجزاه خيراً، وأَثنى عليه، وقال: إنما كان الطمع فيها آفتي، والآن قد يئست، وقد حملت نفسي على اليأْس والصبر، فإن اليأْس يُسلي، ولي أُمور، ولا بد لي من رجوعي إليها، فإن وجدتُ من نفسي قوة على ذلك، وإلا رجعت إليكم وزرتكم، حتى يقضيَ الله من أَمري ما يشاء. فزودوه وأَكرموه وشيعوه، فانصرف. فلما رحل عنهم نكس بعد صلاحه وتماثله، وأَصابه غشيٌ وخفقانٌ؛ فكان كلَّما أُغمِيَ عليه أُلقِي على وجهه خمارٌ لعفراء زودته إياهُ؛ فيُفيق.

قال: ولقيه في الطريق ابن مكحول عراف اليمامة، فرآه وجلس عنده؛ وسأَله عما به؛ وهل هو خبل أَو جنون؟ فقال له عروة: أَلك عنده علم بالأَوجاع؟. قال: نعم؛ فأَنشأَ يقول [84]: [من الطويل]

وما بيَ من خَبْلٍ ولا بي جِنَةٌ ... ولـكـنَّ عـمِّـي يـا أُخَـيَّ كـذوبُ
أَقولُ لعَرَّافِ اليمامةِ داوني ... فإنَّكَ إنْ داوَيتَني لَطبيبُ
فوا كَبِدا أَمسَتْ رُفاتاً كأَنَّما ... يلذِّعُها بالمُوقِداتِ طبيبُ
عشيَّةَ لا عَفراءُ منكَ بعيدةٌ ... فَتَسْلو ولا عَفراءُ منكَ قريبُ
عشيَّةَ لا خلفي مَكَرٌّ ولا الهوى ... أَمامي ولا يَهوَى هوايَ غَريبُ
فوالله لا أَنساكِ ما هَبَّت الصَّبا ... وما عقَّبتْها في الرِّياح جَنوبُ
وإني لتَغْشاني لذِكراكِ هِزَّةٌ ... لها بينَ جلدي والعِظامِ دَبيبُ

وقال أَيضاً يخاطب صاحبيه الهلاليين بقصته: [من الطويل]

خَليلَيَّ من عُليا هلالِ بنِ عامرٍ ... بِصَنْعاءَ عُوجاء اليومَ وانتظِراني
ولا تَزْهَدا في الذُّخرِ عندي وأَجملا ... فإنكما بيَ اليومَ مُبتَليانِ
أَلِمَّا على عَفراءَ إنكما غَداً ... بِوَشْكِ النَّوى والبينَ معترفانِ
فيا واشِيَي عفراءَ ويحَكُما بِمَن ... وما وإلى مَن جِئتُما تَشِيانِ
بمَن لو أَراهُ عانياً لَفَدَيْتُه ... ومَن لو رآني عانياً لَفَداني
متى تكشفانِ عني القميصَ تبيَّنا ... بِيَ الضُّرُّ من عَفراءَ يا فَتَيانِ
إذَنْ تَرَيا لحماً قليلاً وأَعظُماً ... بَلِينَ وقلباً دائمَ الخفقانِ
وقد تركَتْني لا أَعي لمحدِّثٍ ... حديثاً وإن ناجَيتُه ونَجاني
جعلتُ لِعَرَّافِ اليمامةِ حُكمَهُ ... وعرافِ حَجْرٍ إنْ هما شَفَياني
فما تَرَكا مِن حيلةٍ يعرفانِها ... ولا شَرْبةٍ إلَّا وقد سَقَياني
ورَشَّا على وجهي من الماءِ ساعةً ... وقاما مع العُوَّادِ يبتدِرانِ
وقالا: شَفاكَ اللهُ واللهِ ما لَنا ... بما ضُمِّنَت منكَ الضُّلوعُ يدانِ
فوَيلي على عَفراءَ وَيلاً كأَنَّهُ ... على الصَّدْرِ والأَحشاءِ حدُّ سِنانِ
أُحِبُّ ابنةَ العُذريِّ حُباً وإن نَأَتْ ... ودانَيتُ فيها غيرَ ما مُتَداني

صوت

إذا رامَ قَلبي هَجْرَها حالَ دونَهُ ... شَفيعَانِ مِن قلبي لها جَدِلانِ

[85] غنته شاريه؛ ولحنه من الثقيل الأَول.

إذا قُلتُ لا قالا بَلى ثم أَصبحا	جميعاً على الرأَي الذي يَريَانِ
تَحمَّلتُ من عَفراءَ ما ليسَ لي به	ولا للجِبالِ الراسياتِ يَدانِ
فيا رَبِّ أَنتَ المستعانُ على الذي	تَحمَّلتُ من عَفراءَ مُنذُ زَمانِ
كأَنَّ قطاةً عُلِّقَتْ بِجَناحِها	على كَبِدي مِن شِدَّةِ الخَفَقانِ
في تَحمَّلتُ من عَفراءَ . . .	. . . .

والذي بعده، ثقيل أَول، يقال إنه لأَبي العبيس بن حمدون.

قال: فلم يزل في طريقه حتى مات قبل أَن يصل إلى حيه بثلاث ليال، وبلغ عفراء خبر وفاته، فجزعت جزعاً شديداً، وقالت ترثيه: [من الطويل]

أَلا أَيُّها الركبُ المُخِبُّونَ وَيْحَكُم	بحَقٍّ نَعَيْتُم عُروَةَ بنَ حِزامِ
فلا تَهنأُ الفِتْيانَ بعدَكَ لَذَّةٌ	ولا رَجعوا مِن غَيْبَةٍ بسلامِ
وقُل لِلحَبالى لا يُرجِّينَ غائباً	ولا فَرِحاتٍ بعدَهُ بغُلامِ

قال: ولم تزل تردد هذه الأَبيات وتندبه بها، حتى ماتت بعده بأَيام قلائل.

❖ وذكر عمر بن شبة في خبره: أَنه لم يعلم بتزويجها حتى لقي الرفقة التي هي فيها، وأَنه كان توجه إلى ابن عم له بالشام، لا باليمن، فلما رآها وقف دهشاً، ثم قال: [من الطويل]

فما هي إِلَّا أَنْ أَراها فَجاءةً	فأُبْهَتَ حتَّى ما أَكادُ أُجيبُ
وأَصدِفُ عن رأَيي الذي كنتُ أَرتأي	وأَنسى الذي أَزْمَعتُ حينَ تَغيبُ
ويُظهِرُ قلبي عُذرَها ويُعينُها	عليَّ فما لي في الفؤادِ نَصيبُ
وقد علِمَت نفسي مكانَ شِفائها	قريباً، وهل ما لا يُنالُ قريبُ؟
حَلفتُ بِربِّ الساجدينَ لرَبِّهم	خشوعاً، وفوقَ الساجدينَ رقيبُ
لئن كانَ بَردُ الماءِ حرَّانَ صادياً	إليَّ حبيباً إنَّها لَحبيبُ

❖ [86] وقال أَبو زيد في خبره: ثم عاد من عند عفراء إلى أَهله، وقد ضني ونحل، وكانت له أَخوات وخالة وجدة، فجعلن يعظنه ولا ينفع، وجئن بأَبي كحيلة رباح بن شداد مولى بني ثعيلة، وهو عراف حجر، ليداويه فلم ينفعه دواؤه.

وذكر أَبو زيد قصيدته النونية التي تقدم ذكرها، وزاد فيها:

وعينانِ ما أَوفَيتُ نَشْزاً فتَنظُرا	مآقِيهُما إِلَّا هما تَكِفانِ
سِوى أَنَّني قد قلتُ يوماً لصاحبي	ضُحىً وقَلُوصانا بنا تَخِدانِ
أَلا حبَّذا مِن حُبِّ عَفراءَ وادياً	نَعامٌ وبُزْلٌ حيثُ يلتَقِيانِ

وقال أَبو يزيد: وكان عروة يأَتي حياض الماء التي كانت إبل عفراء تردها فيلصق صدره بها، فيقال له: مهلاً، فإنك قاتل نفسك، فاتق الله. فلا يقبل، حتى أَشرف على التلف، وأَحس بالموت.

فجعل يقول:

بِيَ اليَأْسُ والداءُ الهُيامُ سُقِيتُهُ فإيَّاكَ عنِّي لا يَكُنْ بِكَ ما بِيا

❖ أَخبرني الحِرمي بن أَبي العلاء قال: حدثنا الزبير بن بَكَّار قال: حدثني عبد الملك بن عبد العزيز بن الماجشون، عن أَبي السائب قال: أَخبرني ابن أَبي عتيق قال: والله إني لأَسيرُ في أَرضِ عُذرة إذا بامرأَةٍ تحمل غلاماً جَزْلاً، ليس يُحمَلُ مثلُهُ، فعجِبتُ لذلك، حتى أَقبلَت به، فإذا له لحيةٌ، فدعوتُها فجاءت، فقلتُ لها: ويحَكِ! ما هذا؟ فقالت: هل سمعتَ بعروةَ بن حزام؟ فقلتُ: نعم، قالت: هذا والله عروة. فقلت له: أَنت عروة؟ فكلَّمَني وعيناه تذرِفانِ وتدوران في رَأْسِهِ، وقال: نعم أَنا والله القائل:

جَعلتُ لعرَّافِ اليمامةِ حُكمَهُ وعرَّافِ حَجْرٍ إنْ هما شَفَيانِ

فقالا نعم نَشفي من الداءِ كلِّهِ وقاما مع العُوَّادِ يَبْتدِرانِ

فعَفراءُ أَحظى الناسِ عندي مودَّةً وعَفراءُ عنِّي المُعرِضُ المُتَواني

[87] قال: وذهبت المرأَة، فما برحت من الماء حتى سمعت الصيحة، فسأَلت عنها، فقيل: مات عروة بن حزام.

قال عبد الملك: فقلت لأَبي السائب: ومن أَي شيء مات؟ أَظنه شرق، فقال: سخُنت عيناك، بأَي شيء شرق؟ قلت بريقه، وأَنا أُريد العبث بأَبي السائب، أَفترى أَحداً يموت من الحب؟ قال: والله لا تُفلحُ أَبداً، نعم يموت خوفاً أَن يتوب الله عليه!

❖ أَخبرني عمي قال: حدثنا الكراني، عن العمري، عن الهيثم بن عدي، عن هشام بن عروة، عن أَبيه، عن النعمان بن بشير قال: ولاني عثمان، رضي الله عنه، صدقات سعد هذيم، وهم: بلي، وسلامان عذرة، وضبة بن الحارث، ووائل: بنو زيد، فلما قبضت الصدقة قسَّمتُها في أَهلها، فلما فرغت وانصرفت بالسهمين إلى عثمان، رضي الله عنه، إذا أَنا ببيت مُفرَد عن الحي، فملت إليه، فإذا أَنا بفتىً راقدٍ في فناء البيت، وإذا بعجوز من ورائه في كِسْرِ البيت، فسلَّمتُ عليه، فردَّ عليَّ بصوت ضعيف، فسأَلته: ما لك؟ فقال:

كأَنَّ قَطاةً عُلِّقَت بِجَناحِها على كَبِدي من شدَّةِ الخَفَقانِ

وذكر الأَبيات النونية المعروفة، ثم شهَق شهقة خفيفة كانت نفسُه فيها، فنظرتُ إلى وجهه فإذا هو قد قضى فقلت: أَيتها العجوز، من هذا الفتى منك؟ قالت: ابني، فقلت: إني أَراه قد قضى، فقالت: وأَنا والله أَرى ذلك، فقامت فنظرت في وجهه ثم قالت: فاظ وربِّ محمدٍ، فقلت لها: يا أُماه، من هو؟ فقالت: عروة بن حزام، أَحد بني ضبة، وأَنا أُمُّه، فقلت لها: ما بلغ به ما أَرى؟ قالت: الحب، والله ما سمعت له منذُ سنةٍ كلمةً ولا أَنَّةً إلَّا اليومَ، فإنَّه أَقبلَ عليَّ ثم قال: [من البسيط]

مَن كانَ مِن أُمَّهاتي باكياً أَبداً فاليومَ إنِّي أُراني اليومَ مقبوضا

يُسمِعْنَنيهِ فإنِّي غيرُ سامعِهِ إذا علوتُ رقابَ القومِ معروضا

قال: فما برحتُ من الحي حتى غسلتُه، وكفنتُه، وصليتُ عليه، ودفنته.

❖ وذكر أَبو زيد عمر بن شبة في خبره، هذه القصة عن عروة بن الزبير، فقال هذين البيتين بحضرته [88]:

مَن كانَ مِن أُمَّهاتي باكياً أَبداً . . . .

قال: فحضرنَه فبرزنَ - والله - كأَنهنَّ الدُمى، فشققنَ جيوبهُنَّ، وضربْنَ خُدودَهُنَّ، فأَبكينَ كلَّ مَن حضَر. وقضى من يومه.

وبلغ عفراء خبره، فقامت لزوجها فقالت: يا هناه، قد كان من خبر ابن عمي ما كان بلغك، و والله ما عرفتُ منه قطُّ إلا الحسنَ الجميلَ، وقد مات فيَّ وبسببي، ولابد لي من أَن أَندبَه وأَقيمَ مأَتماً عليه. قال: افعلي. فما زالت تندبُه ثلاثاً، حتى تُوُفِّيَت في اليوم الرابع.

وبلغ معاوية بن أَبي سفيان خبرهما، فقال: لو علمتُ بحال هذين الحُرَّين الكريمين لجمعتُ بينهما.

ورُوي هذا الخبرُ عن هارونَ بن موسى القروي، عن محمد بن الحارث المخزومي، عن هشام بن عبد الله، عن عِكرمة، عن هشام بن عروة عن أَبيه، أَنَّه كان شاهداً ذلك اليوم. ولم يذكر النعمان بن بشير في خبره.

❖ وذكر هارون بن مسلمة عن غصين بن براق، عن أُم جميل الطائبة: أَن عفراء كانت يتيمةً في حَجرِ عمِّها عمِّه، فعرضَها عليه فأَباها، ثمَّ طال المدى، وانصرفَ عروة في يوم عيد، بعدَ أَنْ صلَّى صلاةَ العيدِ، فرآها وقد زُيِّنَت، فرأَى منها جمالاً بارعاً، وقدَّمَت له تُحفةً فنالَ منها وهو ينظرُ إليها، ثمَّ خطبَها إلى عمه فمنعَه ذلك، مكافأَةً لما كانَ من كراهتِهِ لها لمَّا عرضَها عليه، وزوَّجَها رجلاً غيره فخرجَ بها إلى الشام، وتَمادى في حبِّها حتَّى قتلَهُ.

❖ حدثنا محمد بن خلف وكيع قال: حدثنا عبد الله بن شبيب قال: حدثنا أَبو بكر بن أَبي شيبة وغيره، عن سليمان بن عبد العزيز بن عمران الزهري قال: حدثني خارجة المكي: أَنه رأَى عروة بن حزام يطاف به حول البيت، قال: فدنوت منه، فقلت: من أَنت؟ فقال: الذي أَقول: [من الطويل]

أَفي كلِّ يومٍ أَنتَ رامٍ بلادَها بِعينينِ إنسانا هُما غَرِقانِ
أَلا فاحْمِلاني باركَ الله فيكُما إلى حاضر الروحاءِ ثمَّ ذَراني

فقلت له: زِدني، فقال: لا والله ولا حرفاً.

❖ [89] أَخبرني علي بن سليمان الأَخفش قال: حدثني أَبو سعيد السكري قال: حدثني محمد بن حبيب قال: ذكر الكلبي عن أَبي صالح، قال: كنتُ مع ابن عباس بعرفة، فأَتاه فِتيانٌ يحملونَ بينَهم فتىً لم يبقَ منه إلَّا خيالُهُ، فقالوا له: يا بن عمِّ رسول الله، ادع له، فقال: وما به؟ فقال الفتى: [من الطويل]

بِنا من جَوى الأَحزانِ في الصدرِ لَوعةٌ تَكادُ لها نَفسُ الشَّفيقِ تَذوبُ
ولكنَّما أَبقى حُشاشةَ مُعْوِلٍ على ما به عُودٌ هناكَ صليبُ

قال: ثمَّ خَفَتَ في أَيديهم فإذا هو قد مات. فقال ابن عباس:

هذا قتيلُ الحبِّ لا عَقلٌ ولا قَودُ

ثم ما رأَيت ابن عباس سأَل الله - جل وعز - في عشيته إلا العافية، مما ابتلي به ذلك الفتى، قال: وسأَلنا عنه فقيل: هذا عروة بن حزام.

C.3 ʿAyyuqi (fl. 421/1030), *Varqa & Golshāh*

It is estimated that *V&G* was composed around the year 421/1030, making it the second romance to be composed (that we know about) after the trilogy by ʿOnṣori that is mostly lost. The author, who identifies himself as ʿAyyuqi, claims that he has found a story "from the Arabic chronicles and the books of the Arabs" (*ze akhbār-e tāzi vo kotb-e ʿarab*) that he will now transpose in the "Dari" language. What is interesting to observe is that the second half of the story is a very faithful retelling of the account given by Abu l-Faraj in its broad details, but a number of episodes have been expanded and added that resonate with the kind of "popular romances" we find in Arabic and Persian storytelling tradition. ʿAyyuqi's work is thus a useful example for us to track how a basic love-story could be developed into (a) lengthy narrative(s) and adapted into the relatively new genre of the "courtly" (i.e., something composed for an elite audience) romance in Persian literature.

The outline below is derived from the section headings in Ṣafā's edition of the poem.[19] After each heading, the page number for that section is given in parentheses. A full translation of the text into French is available in Melikian-Chirvani, "Varqe et Golšâh," 99–214.

Doxologies

1. In praise of God (may not have been part of the original poem)[20]
2. In praise of Sultan Maḥmud (2)

The "prequel"

Here we see some of the main tropes of the Greek novel, some of which already present in nuclear form in the previous recensions, receive further attention: Varqa and Golshāh grow up in the same household, go to school together, and fall in love, though they are ashamed to admit it. As they come of age, word of Golshāh's beauty spreads, and Varqa becomes a famous knight. Eventually, their parents find out that their children are in love and hurry to get them married, and the entire tribe assembles for a banquet. But in the midst of the celebration, an army from the Banū Żabba descends upon the tribe and kidnap Golshāh. We learn that Rabiʿ b. ʿAdnān, the leader of the Banū Żabba, had long desired Golshāh and had repeatedly requested her hand from her father, and could not see how Varqa's claim could trump his own, when he brings Golshāh back to his home, he treats her kindly and sings her a song (*ghazal a*); meanwhile, Varqa realizes that Golshāh has been kidnapped in the night's chaos, and spends the night searching for her, lamenting their separation (*ghazal c*). Varqa's father urges him to take action if he truly loves her, not to mourn Golshāh's loss, but to fight to recover her; heartened by this counsel, Varqa summons the heroes of the tribe, and sings a song in which he vows to mete vengeance and get Golshāh back (*ghazal c*).

Boasting of his martial prowess (*ghazal d*), Rabiʿ repels the attack and kills Varqa's father Homām; the battle stops and Varqa recites a poem of lament (*ghazal e*). At this moment, the narrative shifts to Golshāh, who has disguised herself as a man, taken up arms, and gone to the battlefield. She arrives to find that Rabiʿ has beaten Varqa and is preparing to kill him, but Varqa surrenders and begs for a final

19. See Melikian-Chirvani, "Varqe et Golšâh," 17–18 for a similar outline, and Dankoff, "The Lyric in the Romance," 10–11 for a list and discussion of the embedded ghazals.

20. ʿAyyūqī, *Varqa va Gulshāh*, 1.

glimpse of his beloved before he dies. Furious, she pulls off her helmet, revealing her identity, and kills both Rabiʿ and his son. She is eventually brought down by his other son, Ghāleb, who takes her prisoner and falls in love with her. Varqa, however, infiltrates the enemy camp, kills Ghāleb, and rescues Golshāh. The Banu Żabba surrender, but Varqa is disconsolate, having lost his father and knowing he cannot ask for Golshāh's hand unless he has more money. Although these events are decidedly within the "feasting and fighting" (*bazm o razm*) mode of storytelling, certain novelistic elements are still at work: we have multiple abductions and attempts by various men to seduce or rape Golshāh, who uses every weapon at her disposal to defend herself. The symmetry between the two lovers as heroic warriors is also notable, although this motif is more visible in the ancient Iranian sources than in the Greek.

3. The beginning of the story (4)
4. Golshāh is abducted from her tribe (11)
    a) Rabiʿ sends a love-poem to Golshāh (13)
    b) Varqa on his separation from Golshāh (15)
5. Varqa's speaks with his father and his father's response (16)
    c) Varqa swears he will get Golshāh back (17)
6. Varqa's men march against the Banu Żabba (18)
    d) Rabiʿ boasts of his prowess in battle (20)
    e) Varqa laments the death of his father (27)
7. The battle between Golshāh and Rabiʿ (37)
8. Golshāh is taken captive by Ghāleb b. Rabiʿ (43)
9. Golshāh is is rescued by Varqa (46)

The Abu l-Faraj narrative

Here the narrative in the *Book of Songs* resumes, with many expansions and digressions. Now that Golshāh's beauty is world-famous, all the noble kings and princes have their eyes on her. Disregarding his servants' advice to go find something else to do, Varqa summons Golshāh's parents and complains that they are not honoring their promise to him. His uncle agrees not to marry Golshāh to anyone until Varqa can round up some money, and suggests that he go visit another uncle in Yemen who is childless and will surely make him his heir. The lovers make a pledge to be faithful, and Varqa sets off to seek his fortune.

In the Arabic tales, ʿUrwa gets his money and returns back to Wadi'l-qura within a few lines; here, however, we are treated to another round of heroic exploits before this happens. It turns out that Varqa's uncle has been taken prisoner by the kings of Bahrain and Aden; but Varqa single-handedly kills dozens of men, rallies the Yemenis, and leads them to victory. Meanwhile, the King of Syria (the scion of the Umayyad family Abu l-Faraj's version) has decided he will have Golshāh for himself, and wins first the mother and then the father over to his side with his impressive displays of wealth. When Golshāh learns that she is to be wed to the king, she recites a poem accusing her family of treachery (*ghazal f*). When Varqa returns in triumph from his voyage, he finds Golshāh is gone, and her parents in mourning; her father takes him to a false grave and tells him that his fiancée has died. Grief-stricken, Varqa sends back his caravan of treasure (much to his in-laws' chagrin) and sings a lament for Golshāh (*ghazal g*).

However, a girl from the tribe tells him the truth, and after raging at his uncle, Varqa sets off to Damascus. En route, he is assaulted by bandits and is wounded, and when he arrives to the king's court and supplies him with a false name, the King has Golshāh's servant tend to his wounds. Varqa gives the servant his signet ring to put in Golshāh's cup, and once his presence is known, the two lovers reunite and

lament their misfortune. Through the use of spies, the king realizes that the lovers are chaste and offers to give up Golshāh so that she can marry Varqa, but Varqa, humiliated, returns back to his tribe. He dies not long thereafter, although not before he meets with the doctors who are unable to cure his disease and reciting some poems lamenting his separation from Golshāh (*ghazals h* and *i*). When the news of his death reaches Golshāh in Damascus, she too recites a lament (*ghazal j*), goes to Varqa's tomb, and perishes. The lovers' tomb becomes a site of pilgrimage.

10. Varqa's servants give him advice (49)
11. Varqa calls Golshāh's mother and complains (50)
12. Varqa and Golshāh make a pledge of fidelity (54)
13. Varqa goes to Yemen (55)
14. Varqa fights against the armies of Bahrain and Aden (59)
15. The King of Syria goes to see Golshāh (67)
16. Golshāh's lament (74)
    f) Golshāh laments her betrothal to the king of Syria (75)
17. Golshāh is brought to Damascus (77)
18. Varqa returns to his tribal lands in Wadi'l-qura (79)
    g) Varqa recites a poem over Golshāh's (false) grave (81)
19. Varqa's torment (82)
20. Varqa realizes his uncle's deceit (84)
21. Varqa goes to Syria (87)
22. Varqa and Golshāh see each other (95)
23. Varqa returns from Damascus (102)
    h) Varqa laments his separation from Golshāh (108)
    i) Varqa begs the doctor to cure him of his love-sickness (110)
24. Varqa's death and the news reaches Golshāh (110)
    j) Golshāh recites a poem over Varqa's (real) grave (112)
25. The king of Syria goes with Golshāh to Varqa's grave (113)

A happy ending

In the Arabic tales, the story ends here; but 'Ayyuqi saw it fit to add a coda, probably drawing from popular tradition, that reverses the sad ending and concludes the narrative with a marriage and mass conversion, similar to what we see in tales like *Floire & Blancheflor*. The Prophet, having learned of the story, arrives at the shrine and promises the king of Damascus that he will revive them if he will help him convert the Jews of his city. Moved by the sad tale of the lovers' suffering, the Jews convene at the site of the grave, the king gives up half of his remaining years to bring the lovers back to life, and everyone converts to the new faith. The king marries the couple together, and they live out their lives happily ever after.

26. The poet's complaint (116)
27. The rest of the story of *Varqa & Golshāh* (116)

Appendix D

The Tale of Fakhri and the Slave-Boy (Persian)

حکایت فخرالدین گرگانی و غلام سلطان

به گرگان پادشاهی پیش‌بین بود
که نیکوطبع بود و پاک‌دین بود
چو بودش لطفِ طبع و جاه و حُرمت
درآمد فخرِ گرگانی به خدمت
زبان در مدحتِ او گوش می‌داشت
که آن شه نیز بس نیکوش می‌داشت

غلامی داشت آن ماهِ زمانه
چو یوسف در نکورویی یگانه
دو زلفش چون دو ماهی بود مشکین
چه می‌گویم دو هندو بود در چین
رخش چون ماه بود و زلف ماهی
ز ماهی تا به ماهش پادشاهی
اگر ابروی او چشمی بدیدی
چو ابروی کژش چشمی رسیدی
دو نرگس از مژه هم‌خانهٔ خار
دو لب همشیوهٔ یک دانهٔ نار
لبِ شیرینْش چندانی شکر داشت
که نَی پیشِ لبش بسته کمر داشت
دهانْش از چشمِ سوزن تنگ‌تر بود
ازان چشم از دهانش بی‌خبر بود

مگر یک روز آن شاهِ سرافراز
سپه را خواند و جشنی کرد آغاز
نشسته بود شادان فخر آن روز
درآمد آن غلامِ عالم‌افروز
به خوبی رهزنِ هر جا که جانی
به شیرینی شکرریزِ جهانی
هزاران دل به مُژگان در ربوده
به هر یک موی صد جان در ربوده
کمندِ زلفِ بر خاک اوفکنده
به لب شوری در افلاک اوفکنده
چو دیدش فخر رویش تن فرو داد
همه جانش برفت و دل بدو داد
ولی زهره نبود از بیمِ شاهش
که در چشم آوَرَد روی چو ماهش

برفته هوش ازو و هوش می‌داشت | به مردی چشمِ خود را گوش می‌داشت
به جای آورْد حالی شاه آن راز | ولی پرده نکرد از روی آن باز

چو اهل جشن مستِ باده گشتند | در آن مستی ز پای افتاده گشتند
در آن مجلس ز مَی وز روی دلدار | به فخر اندر دو مستی شد پدیدار
چنان جانش ز آتش موجزن شد | که جانش در سرِ آن سوختن شد
میانِ سوز در شوریده جمعی | نگه می‌داشت خود را همچو شمعی
شهِ گرگان چو فخری را چنان دید | دلش با عشق و آتش در میان دید
غلامِ خود بدو بخشید در حال | سخن‌ور گشت از شادیِّ آن لال
ز سوزِ عشق و شرمِ شاهِ عالی | بگردید ای عجب صد رنگ حالی
شهش گفتا چه افتادت که مُردی | غلامِ تست دستش گیر و بُردی
غلام و فخر هر دو شادمانه | شدند از مجلسِ خسرو روانه

اگرچه مست بود آن فخر و بی‌خویش | به کار آورد عقلِ حکمت‌اندیش
بزرگانی که پیشِ شاه بودند | همه از نیک و بد آگاه بودند
به ایشان گفت امشب شاه مست است | ز مَی نیز این غلام افتاده پست است
گر امشب این غلامم از برِ شاه | برم با خانهٔ خود تا سحرگاه
چو گردد روزِ دیگر شاه هشیار | اگر باشد پشیمانش ازین کار
وگر کرده بُوَد بر دل فراموش | وگر از غیرت آید خونْش در جوش
غلامش گر برِ من بوده باشد | اگر گویم بسی بیهوده باشد
به تهمت خون بریزد بی‌گناهم | به پیشِ سگ دراندازد به راهم
مرا گوید ندانستی تو جاهل | که نبْوَد مست را گفتارِ عاقل
چرا یک شب نکردی صبر تا روز | که تا هشیار گردد شاهِ فیروز
کنون او را نخواهم بُرد با خویش | که وی مست است نیک و بد نیندیش
همه گفتند رای تو صواب است | که امشب نزدِ شاهش جای خواب است

به زیرِ تختِ آن شاهِ معظّم | یکی سردابه بود از سنگ محکم
در آن سردابه سنگی بود زیبا | برو ده دست جامه جمله دیبا
غلامِ مست را در پیشِ آن جمع | بخوابانید آنجا با دو سه شمع
به اعزازش سه شمع آنجا برافروخت | برون آمد ولی چون شمع می‌سوخت

درِ سردابه را پس فخرِ گرگان
ببست القصّه در پیشِ بزرگان
کلید آنگه به ایشان داد و تا روز
بر آن دَر خفت بر عشقِ دل‌افروز

به مَی چون شاه دیگر روز بنشست
درآمد فخر و خدمت را کمر بست
بزرگان در سخن لب برگشادند
کلید آنگه به پیشِ شه نهادند
ز کارِ فخر گفتندش که چون کرد
که الحق احتیاط از حد فزون کرد
به مستی چون که شه داد آن غلامش
نگه می‌داشت الحق احترامش
به شب موقوف کردش پیشِ ده کس
که تا شاهش چه فرماید ازین پس
شهش گفت این ادب از وی تمامم
ازانِ اوست خاصّه این غلامم
بغایت فخر شد زین شادمانه
دلش می‌زد ازان شادی زبانه

به آخر چون سرِ سردابه بگشاد
ز هر چشمی بسی خونابه بگشاد
که دید آن ماه‌رخ را زشت گشته
ز سر تا پای او انگشت گشته
مگر درجسته بود از شمع آتش
فتاده در لحافِ آن پری‌وش
به یک ره سوخته زارش سر و پای
نه جامه مانده و نه تخت نه جای
ز مستیِّ شراب و مستیِ خواب
شده در آتشِ سوزنده غرقاب
چو روی دلستانش را چنان دید
جهانی آتش آن دم نقدِ جان دید
چو در آتش فتاده بود یارش
در آتش اوفتادن بود کارش
چه گویم من که چون دیوانه دل گشت
بسی دیوانگی بر وی سجل گشت
در آن دیوانگی در دشت افتاد
چو گردون روز و شب درگشت افتاد
چو عشق از حد بشد با دردِ خود ساخت
حدیثِ ویس و رامین وِردِ خود ساخت
غمِ خود را به انجامی فرو گفت
اگرچه قصّه را بر نامِ او گفت
به صحرا روز و شب می‌گفت و می‌گشت
میانِ خاک و خون می‌خفت ومی‌گشت

تو کار افتادهٔ این ره نبودی
ز سرِّ عاشقان آگه نبودی
چه می‌دانی که عاشق در چه کار است
که سجده گاهِ او بالای دار است
بباید کرد غُسل از خونِ خویشت
که تا آن سجده گاه آرند پیشت

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