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Locating the World in Metaphysical Poetry

The Bardification of Hafiz

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Abstract

Discussions on world literature often imagine literary presence, movement, and exchange in terms of location and prioritize those literary traditions that can be easily mapped. In many regards, classical ghazal poetry resists such interpretation. Nonetheless, a number of nineteenth-century writers working in Urdu and English reframed classical ghazal poetry according to notions of locale that were particularly underpinned by ideas of natural essence, or genius. This article puts two such receptions of the classical ghazal in conversation with one another: the *naičral shāʿirī* (natural poetry) movement in North India, and the portrayal of classical Persian poet Hafiz as a figure of national genius in the scholarship of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Both these examples highlight the role that discourses of nature and natural expression played in nineteenth-century literary criticism, particularly with regard to conceptions of national culture. They also demonstrate how Persianate literary material that had long circulated in cosmopolitan ways could be *vernacularized* by rereading conventionalized tropes of mystical longing in terms of more worldly belonging.

Keywords

Ghazal – Indo-Persian – nature – Emerson – Hafiz – bard

Most debates, anthologies, and college courses pertaining to world literature employ geographical location as a necessary – even unconscious – parameter through which to understand a given text or the literary tradition it represents. In some regards, we might find that such models of reading offer a welcome respite from practices of interpretation that treat the text (and the text alone) as the primary object of analysis: by foregrounding the importance of cultural

and linguistic difference, classes and anthologies of world literature *necessarily* infuse contextual information into close reading. Yet, nationally conceived paradigms of cultural difference, of course, have their own limitations and history. Aamir Mufti's book *Forget English!: Orientalisms and World Literatures* outlines the role of colonial philology in the formation of world literature as a field and focuses on the particular plight of Urdu during this period. As a language that gets marked as too closely affiliated to Persian, which operated as a lingua franca rather than a vernacular in India, the case of Urdu lends particular insight on the crucial epistemological obstacles that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century trends in philology produced when mapping literary traditions according to what Mufti has described as the "chronotype of the indigenous" (143). While the complexity of envisioning a locale for Urdu has manifested itself across a plethora of genres, debates, and texts, the Urdu ghazal is especially recalcitrant to such interpretation and analysis.[1] Therein lies a most productive blind spot from which to address the themes of this special issue: Much like other minoritized languages such as Yiddish, the case of Urdu suggests that not all languages are equally poised to perform the 'locale' that nineteenth-century trends in colonial philology and folk literature valued. The same can be said for other literary genres and styles. It has become a mainstay of ghazal criticism that this form – and particularly its baroque or high style that was especially popular in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries called *tāza-gū'ī* (fresh speech) or *sabk-i Hindī* (Indian Style) – was uninterested in reflecting the realities and, accordingly, the *geographies* of its writers and readers.[2] To, then, aspire for practices of world literature that highlight locatedness potentially puts one of the oldest and most geographically far-reaching forms of world literature in a disadvantageous position – yet again.

In this article, I draw from two examples of nineteenth-century ghazal criticism and historiography that, I would contend, were responding to the very climate of philology Mufti describes in *Forget English!*. One is the famous *tazkira* (literary history/anthology) *Water of Life* (*Āb-e Ḥayāt*, 1880) by the Indian scholar Muhammad Hussain Azad (1830–1910), and the other is the American critic Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay (1803–1882) "Persian Poetry"

1 The ghazal is a poetic form comprised of couplets all ending in a shared "refrain" with the exception of the first couplet which employs the refrain at the end of both halves of the first couplet e.g. aa ba ca da ea. For a fuller historical and formal analysis of the ghazal as world literature, see Bauer and Neuwirth.

2 For a more detailed analysis of the *sabk-i Hindī* style, see Losensky, Faruqi.

For transliteration purposes I have used the Library of Congress Romanization scheme with the following amendments: ñ for nasalized n, ṫ instead of ṭ, ż instead of ẓ.

(1858). Both betray an interest in tying poetic expression to the location, particularly the *natural* environment, within which it emerges.[3] As I've argued elsewhere, literary debates in the late eighteenth—and nineteenth—centuries were so suffused with theories on natural expression that conceptions of nature came to be deployed as hermeneutical prisms through which to both interpret and *market* literary difference.[4] Location and *locatedness* were central to these conceptions of nature. What did such a climate of literary consumption mean for the reception of the Persian ghazal tradition, which had arguably unparalleled geographical reach in terms of the physical terrain within which it was produced and consumed but often reflected little of its geographical location in practice? The two examples this article traces suggest that even a form as cosmopolitan and *antimimetic* as the ghazal could be reconfigured in the second half of the nineteenth century in terms of more *locational* reading.

1 National Consciousness and Its Forms

A primary method for the modernist repackaging of ghazal poetry in both India (Azad) and the United States (Emerson) was to reterritorialize literary figures and traditions by anachronistically affiliating (and unaffiliating) past writers to emerging conceptions of national community that had a much narrower geographical scope than the literary communities within which these writers had been memorialized for centuries.[5] In light of this reterritorialization and balkanization of Indo-Persian literary history, to insist that academics take critical note of the *forms of spatial awareness* that world literature privileges – as this special issue does – requires more than just pluralizing our range of imagined

3 The *tazkira* is a form of poetic anthology that developed out of poetic notebook. These anthologies were arranged according to various organizational schema. Like a number of other influential *tazkiras*, *Water of life* was arranged chronologically and, thus, read as a kind of literary history too; see Azad.

4 I have made this argument in my PhD dissertation, *The Inside Outdoors: Return(s) to Nature in Urdu and Anglophone Poetry*, which analyses the writings of Sir William Jones, S.W. Fallon, John Gilchrist, Walt Whitman, Altaf Husain Hali, Jamal ul-Din Afghani and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe to illustrate how conceptions of nature were deployed in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary culture; studies of comparative romanticism that highlight the conceptualized use of nature by folklorists and literary modernists include Ritter, Karatani, and Gelbart.

5 On the geographic scope of literary "communities" imagined through the *tazkira*, see Schwartz.

geographies. We must also historicize the emergence of the globe *as form* and elucidate the literary and artistic movements that enabled and complemented such a view of the world. Sumathi Ramaswamy's latest book, *Terrestrial Lessons: The Conquest of the World as Globe*, is helpful in this regard as it traces the production, employment, and associations of the terrestrial globe across the long nineteenth century. She writes:

> [W]e are schooled from a very young age to size each other up—as individuals, but more often as denizens of bounded territories, colored pink, green, yellow, and so on—from our carried locations on this spinning sphere that we learn to call Earth. Such schooling is essential to what literary scholar Mary Louse Pratt so felicitously described as "planetary consciousness" focused upon Earth as a knowable subject. Such schooling also helped underwrite the conquest—literally, but also cognitively and epistemologically—of most arts of our world in the centers of European imperial expansion through a process that Gayatri Spivak, following Heidegger, characterizes as "Worlding."
>
> RAMASWAMY xvi

Ramaswamy's attention to the *forms of worlding* is useful for debates on world literature which have congealed around specific literary forms, particularly the Anglophone novel. In much of classical ghazal poetry, by contrast, references to the world have far more metaphysical rather than geographic connotation. The world is imagined in terms of the hierarchical planes of heaven and earth rather than the spherical and multicolored globe. To circulate ghazal poetry as a reflection of the globe and of "worlding," then, entailed new practices of reception and interpretation. In some ways, we might argue that both the nineteenth-century Urdu and American modernist reformulations of the ghazal that I will compare sought to realign the referentials of poetry from a *vertical* axis of metaphysical/mystical tradition, to a *horizontal* axis of the world imagined as a global fraternity. This was a highly industrious recalibration of a what was a cosmopolitan, and often courtly, literary tradition within an intellectual climate enthused by the politics of representational democracy. Much of the criticism that has been directed at more utopian visions of world literature is, in effect, needling against the "horizontal" premise which imagines the surface of the globe as an easily traversable space and the citizens of "pink, green [and], yellow" spaces as *equal* inheritors of the world.[6] Classical Persian

6 Aamir Mufti's argument that debates and discussions of world literature must *also* address

and Urdu ghazals rarely (if ever) offer such a naïve vision of the world and instead portray it as an ephemeral and cruel place that enlightened readers should have no wish to claim.

2 After All, What Is the World?

To begin considering how ghazal poetry gets marketed as world literature, we might ask how "the world" – or more appropriately "worldliness" – is depicted in ghazals. In Urdu poetry and *particularly* ghazal poetry, *dunyā*, which is the word most commonly used to mean "world," often carries a connation of lack; it is something which is *simply* worldly rather than eternal, like the divine. If I were to say in an Urdu poem "*dunyā kyā hai?*" (What is the world?), many poetry connoisseurs might already interpret the phrase as "*ākhir yeh dunyā kyā hai*" (after all, what is *this* world?) because within the logic of the classical ghazal the world is invariably fleeting. Accordingly, to be fully concerned with the world is to have lost sight of the ultimate and eternal truth(s) which go beyond the physical realm of perception.

The convention of shedding doubt on the nature of reality was one of the many ways in which ghazal poets contemplated and commented on the metaphysical and philosophical dimensions of mystic love. We may trace this strain particularly through the discussion of *ālam* (realm) *or jahāñ* (worlds/realms), terms which are often invoked to consider the dream-like and temporary nature of the world. For example, in the following couplet (*sheʿr*) by the Indian poet Asadullah Mirza "Ghalib" (1797–1869), the "realm" in question is portrayed as inherently unstable. This *sheʿr* can be read as declaring the pleasures of this world to be both as insignificant as dust and/or literally 'dust':

> the pleasures of the world, in my own view, are but dust
> except for the blood of the liver, there's nothing in the liver but dust.[7]
>
> GHALIB

The following *sheʿr* by the Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz is a popular variation of this theme in modern Urdu poetry:

global conditions of immobility that persist especially for refugees, migrant workers, and stateless people is an especially astute example of such criticism (*Forget English* 8).

7 *maze jahān ke apnī naẓar meñ ḳhāk nahīñ / sivāe ḳhūn-e jigar so jigar meñ ḳhāk nahīñ.*

> Having lost out both worlds in his love for you
> Having spent a night of sorrow someone bids adieu.[8]
>
> FAIZ

Faiz's mention of *both* realms makes explicit the subtext of this wider discussion of realms, namely that the ghazal (and its characters) are almost always working across two planes of reference – the worldly and the transcendent, or the visible and the hidden. This is perhaps most widely evident in the state (*ḥāl*) of the ghazal's protagonist or lover (*ʿāshiq*) who is brought to the brink of financial, social, and even spiritual destitution by the torture of love. Yet, while the ghazal's protagonist is usually a loser of sorts – socially, financially, and even morally destitute – these failings usually pertain only to the physical realm of life. The seasoned ghazal reader knows that the *ʿāshiq's* "failure" is purely illusory; his steadfastness towards a cruel and often absent beloved is beyond regular understanding except to an enlightened few. In fact, as Harbans Mukhia has noted, in many instances the *ʿāshiq* is jubilant and ecstatic in the face of his own infamy; what his detractors see as "madness" is a transcendent knowledge which, according to some Sufi practice, can be arrived at through renunciation (*zuhd*) and poverty (*faqr*). When Faiz's *ʿāshiq* loses in *both* realms, this does not subvert the ghazal's logic so much as it exaggerates the effect – thus outdoing all other *ʿāshiqs* and other ghazals.

Classical ghazal practice, thus, not only differentiated between worldly or outward knowledge (*żāhir*) and hidden or divine knowledge (*bāṭin*) but invariably prioritized the latter. This is why the stock narratives of this literary genre consistently draw a relationship between "inner" enrichment and "outer" impoverishment. Interpreting classical ghazal poetry also entailed transcending basic meanings to arrive at more complex, sophisticated meanings. The primary object of ghazal poetry, we can argue, is to see beyond the surface reality of things and achieve the truths of a higher realm, much like the ghazal's protagonist himself. It's important to note the distinctly hierarchical structure of this dynamic, particularly for the ways in which it gets reread by later scholars and critics like Emerson.

What do classical ghazals have to say about location or their locatedness? Not much. Firstly, the metaphors, tropes, characters, and subplots of the ghazal are often so highly conventionalized that the poetic practice is primarily concerned with recasting and refining established poetic principles rather than representing the reality of its particular author. This has been the topic of many studies on Urdu poetry, particularly by Frances Pritchett and Shamsur Rah-

8 *donoñ jahāñ terī moḥabbat meñ hār ke, | vo jā rahā hai koʾī shab-e ġham guẕār ke.*

man Faruqi. I will not repeat their arguments here except to say that it is no coincidence that Pritchett turns to the late nineteenth-century natural poetry (*naičral shāʿirī*) movement in her book *Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and Its Critics* to explain both the classical ghazal tradition and its radical revision by these reformists.[9] At the risk of condensing the matter too much, I argue that in part this literary reform movement sought to reorient Urdu writing towards poetry that could speak not simply to "real life" but to their *located* human experience. For example, one of the most illuminating criticisms that the reformer Muhammad Husain Azad levelled against classical Urdu poetry in his literary history *Āb-e Ḥayāt* (1880), was that Urdu poets versified the seasons and topography of Iran rather than that of India.

> Looking at these themes, first of all we remember the universal rule that the literature of every country is a picture of its geographic and physical condition – and in fact even a mirror of its customs and habits, and its people's temperament … it seems that just as in the lands of Iran, Khurasan, and Turan the spring season makes hearts blossom, here the rainy season gives rise to relish and desire. There, the nightingale with its thousand tunes appears in spring; here, the koyal and the papiha. The writers of Braj Bhasha depict the pleasures and moods of the rainy season extremely well. Jahāngīr, in his *Tuzuk*, has rightly said, 'The rainy season of India is our springtime, and the koyal is the Indian nightingale.'
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This seeming mislocation of Urdu verse was, in Azad's estimation, both a symptom and a cause of the perceived decline in Muslim sovereignty in North India (83). The salient point about both the classical ghazal tradition and the reform that the natural poetry (*naičral shāʿirī*) movement attempted to introduce is that there are indeed multiple and diverse conventions of writing about the world and worldliness. Even within the ghazal tradition itself, the connotation of "world" has been renegotiated over the centuries.

9 The natural poetry "movement" is a term used by Urdu scholars and critics to refer to a loosely defined intellectual trend in poetic circles in the late nineteenth century in which British and North Indian litterateurs and government officials, including Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817–1898), Muhammed Husain Azad (1830–1910), Altaf Husain Hali (1837–1914), Colonel W.R.M. Holroyd (1835–1913), and Dr Gottlieb Wilhelm Leitner (1840–1899) participated in advocating for more realistic poetry. I would argue that each of these individuals used the term to varying effect, and that the connotations of *nečar* in their writings is multilayered and should not be simplified; for studies grappling with the varied connotations of *nečar* in this context, see Kamran, Lelyveld, Majeed "Nature," Pritchett, and Ritter.

We might in fact say that the classical ghazal – and particularly styles that privileged ambiguity (*ihām-goī*) and word play – was actually more interested in articulating *dislocation*: as a genre especially centered on unrequited love, the extreme power imbalance between the ghazal's protagonist (the lover or *ʿāshiq*) and his beloved is regularly versified as separation (*hijr*) from the beloved or as alienation (*ġhurbat*). Since it is through suffering a profound longing that the ghazal's lover achieves an enlightened understanding of love, ghazal poets regularly employ the use of distant and hidden meanings as allegories of the way that divine truth requires practiced unveiling. Just as the ghazal's lover attains *true* union (*viṣāl*) even as he is outwardly deprived of his beloved, a practiced reader knows how to grasp distant (*baʿīd*) meanings where others see only the "more obvious or proximate (*qarīb*)" (Hakala 230). While in ghazal practice we do not have representations of material *location* or space, we do have a rather philosophical and mystical discussion of absence. Again, this becomes important for how modern writers would recast these themes of mystical longing into distinctly national registers in both Urdu and English-language criticism.

3 Persian Genius and the Bardic Hafiz

While there was no single interpretive mode for classical ghazal poetry in the early discussions of world literature, some broad patterns are certainly worth noting. A not uncommon interpretative habit we come across in the writings of European translators and ghazal enthusiasts is the idea that the highly conventionalized language of "Asiatick" poetry sprang from particulars of the geography within which it emerged.[10] This trend in literary criticism is particularly perceptible in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discussions of "genius," a concept which held particular currency in the circulation of world literature and which in its earlier manifestations connoted the ability of a writer to reflect the "local spirit" of his place of origin rather than his individual virtuosity. Modern usage of the term genius is often forgetful of the fact that this term originated from the classical Latin notion of *genius loci*, understood as the guardian spirit of a place. Over time an enchanted view of genius gave way to a more secularized concept of "local spirit" as meaning the *essence* of a place. Unsur-

10 "Asiatick" was a term commonly used in the eighteenth century to collectively refer to the cultures, languages, and regions in Asia much like the term "Asian" does now. For example, the name of the society founded in 1784 by Sir William Jones was The Asiatick Society. The term fell out of favor by the mid twentieth century.

prisingly, a fair number of essays on poetry written from the early eighteenth century routinely draw on descriptions of natural terrain and topography as the primary indicators of national essence. In his essay "Persian Poetry" (1858), American poet and critic Ralph Waldo Emerson begins his explanation of Persian verse with this very prism:[11]

> Life in the East is fierce, short, hazardous, and in extremes. Its elements are few and simple, not exhibiting the long range and undulation of European existence, but rapidly reaching the best and the worst … All or nothing is the genius of Oriental life … The prolific sun and the sudden and rank plenty which his heat engenders, make subsistence easy. On the other side, the desert, the simoon, the mirage, the lion and the plague endanger it, and life hangs on the contingency of a skin of water more or less. The very geography of old Persia showed these contrasts … The favor of the climate, making subsistence easy and encouraging an outdoor life, allows to the Eastern nations a highly intellectual organization, – leaving out of view, at present, the genius of the Hindoos (more Oriental in every sense), whom no people have surpassed in the grandeur of their ethical statement.
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> 238–39

As this example illustrates, Emerson speaks of "genius" in communal terms (e.g. "Oriental Genius" and "genius of the Hindoos") and suggests a causal link between the climate and geographical elements of Asia and the poetic material that its inhabitants produce. In this regard, Emerson's scholarship bares special resemblance to Sir William Jones' pioneering essays on Asiatick poetry that were written in the mid eighteenth century.[12] The idea of natural surroundings

11 Emerson's scholarship on Persian literature and understanding of Persian literary convention drew primarily from the body of German translations and critical receptions that were already in circulation amongst European litterateurs, in particular, Joseph Von-Hammer's translation of Hafiz's divan and Goethe's homage to Hafiz, the *West-östlicher Diwan*. Emerson also produced an impressive corpus of secondary translations into English from these German sources. The classical Persian poet that arguably most captivated Emerson's attention was Sa'di, a thirteenth century poet from Shiraz. In 1842, Emerson published an original poem titled "Saadi" in the literary magazine, *The Dial*. For more on Emerson's reception of Persian poetry see Yohannan.

12 For example, Jones begins his essay "On the Poetry of the Eastern Nations" with a drawn-out description of the geographic conditions of Eastern lands, and subsequently draws comparisons between the climate of a region and the poetry that its inhabitants produce. About Yemen he writes: "Arabia, I mean that part of it, which we call the Happy, and which the Asiaticks know by the name of Yemen, seems to be the only country in the world, in

shaping the poetry of nations was not only widespread in this period but also, we may argue, particularly attractive for treatises on "Asiatick" poetry, which was otherwise so foreign to European and American readers.[13]

Emerson's philosophical and literary contemplation of nature is, of course, well established and features both prominently and problematically in the American nature writing tradition, which was often disturbingly entwined with the settler colonial genocide of native Americans. Emerson's tendency to interpret Persian through a philosophy of environmental determinism has a less violent context but still expresses distinctly colonial ideas about "Oriental" culture. At the very least, we can say that this posture had much more to do with the trends in cultural criticism of Emerson's intellectual climate than with how Persian and Urdu writers working within these traditions might have understood their craft. Nonetheless, Emerson's broader interest in nature found ways to integrate world poetry, and in this case Persian poetry, into its programme. Another striking example can be found in Emerson's 1858 lecture "Country Life," in which he promotes the country walk as a beneficial exercise for bringing man closer to nature:

> Nature kills egotism and conceit; deals strictly with us; and gives us sanity; so that it was the practice of Orientals, especially of the Persians, to let insane persons wander at their own will out of towns, into the desert, and, if they liked, to associate with wild beasts, especially gazelles, collect around an insane person, and live with him on a friendly footing.
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What Emerson cites as a practice of healing the insane sounds in fact rather much like the figure of Majnun from the Arabic love story of Majnun and his beloved Layla. According to the story, when young Qays is driven mad by the

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which we can properly lay the scene of pastoral poetry; because no nation at this day can vie with the Arabians in the delightfulness of their climate, and the simplicity of their manners" (75).

13 Hafiz's *Diwan*, first translated into German by von Hammer, was undoubtedly one of the most popular of the first Asian materials. After him, a number of other translators retranslated Hafiz into other European languages (see Loloi for eighteenth-century translations and imitations of Hafiz in English). Emerson must have used von Hammer's translations and begins this essay with a footnote crediting his scholarship. Both Goethe's (1749–1832) famous *West-östlicher Divan* (1819) and the ideals of *Weltliteratur* that he espoused can be directly attributed to the impact that von Hammer's translations had on him, too.

separation from his beloved, he wanders into the desert, spurred by a kind of spiritual ecstasy, and eventually becomes known as the "mad one" or Majnun.[14] This prototype of the madman who wanders into the desert and develops an affinity with nature, particularly gazelles, is conventionalized in Arabic, Persian, and Urdu poetry, and especially ghazal poetry. While the mystical concepts associated with the literary figure of Majnun were also a part of ascetic practices in Central Asia, the Middle East and the subcontinent, it's unlikely that this was ever a practical method of healing the insane. What is telling about this passage is how Emerson employs a poetic trope that was largely about unrequited love and exiled lovers to make a claim for the powerful effects of nature. Such, we might say, is the scholarly appeal of nature for Emerson that it can be used as a *reorganizing* principle to resituate and reshape cultural, and particularly poetic, material towards new kinds of historiography and spirituality.

A second, and perhaps more illuminating, symptom of Emerson's *naturalizing* reading of Hafiz can be traced in his designation of the Persian poet as a "bard." Though seemingly innocuous, this re-characterization of Hafiz encapsulates a major transformation that takes place between Hafiz's canonic position in the Persian literary world or *adab*, and his reincarnation as a figure of nineteenth-century models of world literature. Emerson writes:

> [Hafiz] asserts his dignity as bard and inspired man of his people … Hafiz is the prince of Persian poets, and in his extraordinary gifts adds to some of the attributes of Pindar, Anacreon, Horace and Burns, the insight of a mystic, that sometimes affords a deeper glance at Nature than belongs to either of these bards.
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> "Persian Poetry" 244–54

The term bard, of course, originates as a Gaelic designation for the professional caste of poets that composed and performed the oral histories of their respective communities across parts of current-day Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. As Katie Trumpener explains in her book *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire*, the term became quite popular in the late eighteenth-

14 Majnun's retreat into the desert is conventionally read as a gesture of social and sexual renunciation but born – as it were – from a mystical awakening that affords secret kinds of transcendence. In over a thousand years of literary development – which the ghazal has experienced across an expanse of languages – writers, singers, saints, and philosophers have taken this potent moment of Majnun's renunciative transcendence and splintered it into myriad forms, affects, and philosophical questions.

and nineteenth-centuries to imagine all kinds of important poets who could be read as ambassadors of their respective national genius, as bardic figures. Rabindranath Tagore, for example, is regularly referred to as the bard of Bengal, while Australian poets Henry Lawson (1867–1922) and Andrew Barton "Banjo" Paterson (1864–1941) are often commemorated as the "bush Bards."[15] Emerson's characterization of Hafiz as one such bard also participated in recasting the bard as a universal prototype for any poet that could channel the essence of a *place* and its "people."

While professional poets with poetic responsibilities comparable to the Celtic bards have undoubtedly practiced across the globe, the casual deployment of 'bard' to refer to modern, non-Celtic poets often creates an inaccurate and overly "rustic" image of the poet concerned. Emerson's reformulation of Hafiz as a bard, for example, reframes his poems in terms of folk literature rather than of the elite, cosmopolitan tradition that these poems were part of across broad swathes of Asia for centuries.[16] In the expansive and diverse territories where Persian circulated as a lingua franca (Persia, India, Turkey, Central Asia) from as early as the thirteenth century, Hafiz was a canonical figure. After all, it was through Hafiz's poetry – and other ethico-didactic texts like Saʿdi's *Gulistān*, – that young men of genteel birth learnt the Persian language and the sociability associated with elite Persianate culture (Kia). Recharacterizing Hafiz as a bardic figure entailed refracting Persian poetry through ideals that amplified certain aspects of this literary history and obscured others. For example, Emerson compares ghazals to odes and ballads and suggests that the movement of Hafiz's work could be attributed to travelling "muleteers and camel-drivers" ("Persian Poetry" 254).[17] This characterization seemingly

15 Few scholars have offered a comparative or global analysis of this trend, yet bardic nationalism certainly had effects *outside* Britain too; Rosinka Chaudhuri's *Gentlemen Poets in Colonial Bengal* and Mary Ellis Gibson's introduction to *Anglophone Poetry in Colonial India, 1780–1913* examine the tropic use of "bard" in English language poetry from India.

16 I am using the term cosmopolitan in the way that Sheldon Pollock has theorized in his work and especially in his article "Vernacular and Cosmopolitan." Pollock compares the two as "modes of literary (and intellectual, and political) communication directed toward two different audiences, whom lay actors know full well to be different. The one is unbounded and potentially infinite in extension; the other is practically finite and bounded by other finite audiences, with whom, through the very dynamic of vernacularization, relations of ever-increasing incommunication come into being" (593–94). Pollock's conception of the vernacular/cosmopolitan as *processes* rather than objects is uniquely helpful to the example at hand because materials that once circulated as cosmopolitan culture can just as well be redeployed towards vernacular ends, a process that Pollock describes as vernacularization.

17 Emerson also characterizes ghazals as songs. This designation is not incorrect but, in light

ignores the long history of textuality and penmanship that equally, if not primarily, diffused and canonized the poetry of Hafiz throughout the Persianate territories. While the ghazal was indeed practiced in oral form both through recitation and in musical arrangement, Hafiz's poetry did not reach its world audience, or even some of its primary translators (like Joseph von Hammer), in aural form. The "bardification" of Hafiz by critics like Emerson was in part an effort to reimagine him through a seemingly more immediate, intimate, and *natural* mode than the manuscript form in which his poetry had circulated for centuries, or the print form in which new translations and imitations of Hafiz were beginning to emerge; this mode, of course, was voice.

Numerous scholars of folk studies have sought to explain why antiquarian trends that especially valorized orality gained currency in the eighteenth-century, just as modes of authorship and literary reception were swiftly being reshaped by improved technologies of print and travel. In his article "James Macpherson's Ossian Poems, Oral Traditions, and the Invention of Voice," James Mulholland has credited the success of MacPhearson's (in)famous publication of *The Poems of Ossian, the Son of Fingal* to a generative nostalgia for "printed voices" and suggests that the figuration of "oral voicing [was] … an illusion intended to offset print's potential for solitariness and alienation" (410).[18] Susan Stewart makes a similar point when she writes that "the decline of patronage [in the eighteenth century] is tied to a nostalgia for a waning feudalism and its aesthetics of the local. The emergence of commercial publishing, of a writing destined for strangers, effects a compensation in the form of the encapsulated sense of 'community' implied in the reproduction of folkloric forms" (7).

To these observations I would add that the eighteenth-century privileging of orality and speech genres – which might also be understood more cogently as the naturalization of orality – redefined the terms of literary and cultural belonging. If Persian was not a spoken language in India, how could Indo-Persian culture, including the Urdu ghazal tradition, be considered local or

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of the broader appeal for "printed voices" and natural expression, wittingly *understates* the textual dimension of the Persian poetic tradition.

18 As is well known, Macphearson's collection was a watershed moment not only for bardic revivalism but also for popular and scholarly trends in folk poetry, antiquarianism, and ideas of national culture on a global scale. Folklorist Matthew Gelbart has even framed the "Ossian scandal" as a starting point for the "invention of folk poetry," and Johann Gottfried Herder's monumentally impactful writings on *Naturpoesie* were also precipitated by the Scottish phenomenon. Yet, as widely accredited as Macphearson's work has been within European folk studies, the influence of this collection (and the debates it precipitated) on postcolonial literature of global and multilingual consequence has only been considered by a small handful of scholars such as Rosinka Chaudhuri and Mary-Ellis Gibson.

natural? The naturalization of specific styles, authors, languages, and forms entailed an inverse denaturalization of others. Although the "bardification" of Hafiz helped in imagining bonds of historical and aesthetic familiarity between Anglophone and Persian poetic audiences, it also produced fractures of literary and social consequence elsewhere. This recasting of Hafiz as a bard effectively rebranded him as a national poet of the Persians and rendered his poems – that had shaped and circulated within the Indian poetic landscape for centuries – as local and natural *only* to Persia. Such a preference towards the "native" or vernacularized reception of Hafiz ignores the long and rich history of Persian verse in India and played a major role in making the Persianate corpus of Indian poetry "homeless," to use the term employed by Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi. It is in keeping with these trends in historiography that theories of fundamental cultural difference took on an alarming sectarianism in India. This was so much the case that in in his eleven-volume *Linguistic Survey of India* (1898–1928), the renowned British lexicographer and philologist George Abraham Grierson included 364 languages and dialects but neglected to add Persian and Arabic – languages that had been practiced in spoken and written form by Indians for centuries. More disturbingly, in his entry on Urdu – a language practically indistinguishable from Hindi and spoken by millions as a mother-tongue – Grierson questioned its inclusion at all on account of its "uncertain citizenship" in India (Majeed "Grierson's," see also Majeed *Nation*).[19]

4 Devotion Realigned

The nineteenth-century model of world literature was, to use Walter Hakala's words, a climate of "mother tongues, nationalism and … representational democracy" (616). In this environment, the rhetoric of "nature" was deeply enmeshed with ideas of locale, and served to promote vernacular expression and folk culture in particular. Yet a productive irony of this idealization of nature and location is that just as it produced nativist claims on the powerful effects of "origin" and "soil," it was simultaneously one of the most mobile and reproducible trends of modern literature. As a number of recent studies on Persian, Hindi, and Urdu poetry have demonstrated, modern writers working in these languages also revised and reorganized older literary materials towards new literary historiographies that imagined located communities and mono-

19 I owe this observation to Javed Majeed's talk on "Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India and the Colonial Archive."

lingual homelands. In addition to the natural poetry movement that I mentioned in this article, Kevin Schwartz's research on the Iranian critic Muhammadtaghi Bahar's notion of "literary return" (*bādgasht-i adabī*) and Valerie Ritter's work on *chhāyāvād* poetry in Hindi are further examples of this trend. The fact that nineteenth-century European and American audiences could consume as folk literature the same Persian poems that had until recently circulated in Asia as cosmopolitan culture, and had done so for centuries, is striking but becomes less so when juxtaposed to comparable literary trends taking place in India and Persia. Finally, it is important to note that Emerson was not alone in – consciously or unconsciously – converting tropes of *ġhurbat* (alienation) into a kind of nostalgia for a homeland. A number of twentieth-century Urdu poets like Faiz Ahmad Faiz (1911–1984) and Muhammad Allama Iqbal (1877–1938), and even the Kashmiri-American poet Agha Shahid Ali (1949–2001), can be credited with making similar adaptations, though with varying poetic and political effect.[20] Nor should we miss the ways in which Emerson's proto-democratic portrait of Hafiz drew from qualities that ghazal poetry typically exhibits. In fact, this final point is crucial for noting the micro-shifts that poets, critics, and reformists made to classical Persian poetry so that it could be effectively rebranded as world literature.

Emerson's conflation of the mystical dimension of the ghazal with notions of genius was – as with much of his comparative poetics – rooted in highly conventionalized aspects of the ghazal. As I outlined in the first section of this article, the ghazal speaker often, if not usually, adopts a transgressive spiritual and religious attitude. We might read such poetry as embodying individuality rather than conventionality. Emerson's scholarship certainly betrays such an interpretation when he portrays these moments of customary unorthodoxy or "liberalism" as a kind of social egalitarianism. Yet it seems that part of what allows Emerson to read Hafiz as a bardic figure is the very quality of dislocation that is characteristic of the ghazal's *ʿāshiq* as a man who lives on the peripheries of society. For example, Emerson writes:

> Hafiz defies you to show him, or put him in a condition inopportune and ignoble. Take all you will and leave him but a corner of Nature, a lane, a den, a cow-shed, out of cities, far from letters and taste and culture, he promises to win to that scorned spot, the light of moon and stars, the love of men, the smile of beauty, the homage of art.
>
> "Persian Poetry" 413

20 For an analysis of Faiz's reconstitution of classical tropes see Mufti *Enlightenment*; on Iqbal's poetry see Majeed *Muhammad Iqbal*; for Ali see Woodland.

And in another passage he writes:

> His complete intellectual emancipation he communicates to the reader. There is no example of such facility of allusion, such use of all materials. Nothing is too high, nothing too low for his occasion. He fears nothing, he stops for nothing. Love is a leveller, and Allah becomes a groom, and heaven a closet, in his daring hymns to his mistress or to his cupbearer. This boundless charter is the right of genius.
>
> 248

The construction of Hafiz as a man with no need for "letters and taste and culture" but simply a "corner of Nature" is closer to the character of the exiled lover that we see in Persian poetry then of the actual poet who wrote under the patronage of different rulers and, possibly, at the court of Toga Timur, the last of the Mongol Il-Khan rulers to govern Shiraz.[21] Hafiz was undoubtedly a man of letters. In the second extract, Emerson states that "nothing is too high or low … Love is a leveler." While Hafiz routinely commented on the hypocrisies of religious orthodoxy, it is important to question whether this was the kind of egalitarian gesture that Emerson reads it to be. The variety of social and religious dissent that we find in Hafiz's poetry is, to a certain degree, quite customary in Persian ghazals and is related discursively to the actual ascetic practices of saints, holy men, and mystics (often known as *jogī* or *faqīr*) in the Middle East and South Asia. In his research on the role of *faqīrs* in the colonial British army, Nile Green suggests that the unorthodoxy of these religious figures did not so much entail a rejection of hierarchy or a political philosophy of liberty and fraternity. Rather, it would be more accurate to say that such paradigms of mystic unorthodoxy claimed madness as a privileged and exclusive condition of exception, since, as Green notes,

> implicit in the Islamic notion of 'sainthood' (*wilāyat*) is a hierarchical model of differentiated humanity that stands in direct contrast to the egalitarian conception of making that underlay the Enlightenment origins of professional history. In the historical sensibility of his followers, the Muslims saint or *walī* was conceived as a person who, while part of the same spectrum of human life as other men nonetheless inhabited the end of that chain of being and command that was closest to God.

21 Many thanks to Renata Stauder for helping me better understand the geopolitics of this period.

> The position of 'closeness' (*qurbat*) of the *faqīr* to God that underpinned his intercessionary role was untenable to the democratizing ideology of intrinsic human equality that fostered both Islamic reform and the liberal project of 'history.'
>
> 138

Considering the many ways in which the classical ghazal upheld conceptions of hierarchy both thematically and hermeneutically, it would be fair to say that in its premodern context the "mad mystic" of ghazal poetry reflected much of the paternalistic, feudal culture of which it was a product. Where the classical *'āshiq's* love is decidedly hierarchical, Emerson's bardic Hafiz becomes very much a proto-democratic figure that represents his people. This is a primary moment of refraction in Emerson's reading. By interpreting Hafiz as a representative of native Persian genius – by which he meant an essential and timeless folk tradition rather than literary convention –, Emerson realigned the conventionalized language of mystic love towards a kind of socio-political devotion towards the common, folk people. We may reasonably describe such a reshaping of the classical tropes of exile and dispossession into – paradoxically – scripts of national belonging and democratic representation as the *vernacularization* of Hafez.

To reconceptualize world literature according to improved and pluralized models of global imaginaries is, of course, necessary. In this effort, the long and varied history of ghazal practice offers both a pertinent case study (as Thomas Bauer and Angelika Neuwirth's anthology *Ghazal as World Literature* offers) and, perhaps more importantly, a word of caution. On the one hand, to analyze classical ghazals in terms of located views of the world is complicated by the fact that this is quite contrary to the philosophical thrust of much of this poetic corpus. Yet, a significant strand of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ghazal criticism and historiography – such as the scholarship of critics like Sir William Jones, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Ralph Waldo Emerson – repurposed and repackaged ghazal poetry precisely towards this end. As curious as this shift from a more mystically-inclined classical ghazal model to modern interpretations of these poems as *Naturpoesie* or folk poetry may be, I am not in favour of reading this transition as a *mis*translation or as the corruption of an otherwise long, uninterrupted tradition. In fact, this example should help soften our characterization of the classical ghazal as a form that was removed from social life. There are many reason to push back against such a hermetic portrait of the ghazal, one being that in practice ghazal couplets rarely signified a singular or fixed meaning and instead reflected philosophically on the different scenarios in which they were cited. The conventionalized and highly

metaphoric language of the classical ghazal was thus poised to take on new significance in light of its situational context but historically did so in accordance with a predetermined and gradually evolving system of hermeneutics.[22] While the shape-shifting that Hafiz's poetry underwent in nineteenth-century European receptions was a very different kind of situational and socially determined reading, it nonetheless creates an opportunity for scholars of ghazal poetry to consider the role of adaptation and flexibility in both the histories and practices of this poetic form.

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22 Pritchett has described the practice of such interpretation in the case of eighteenth-century Indo-Persian ghazals with much detail and often refers to it through shorthand as *maẓmūn āfirīnī* or "proposition creation" (Pritchett 91–106).

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