

The Unimaginative Symbols of Salim Barakat

Aviva Butt¹

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Abstract

Kurdish poet Salim Barakat (b. 1951, Qamishli, Syria) in 1986 published a philosophical poem entitled *Haza'in Manhuba* (Glimpses of Spoliation), the whole of which I have translated from the original Arabic and included as annotated appendix. Barakat writes modern secular poetry in a genre I describe as modern Islamic literature, a genre that finds its roots in the Turkic poetry of Shah Isma'il I who founded the Safavid dynasty in Persia. Barakat's theoretical model for his philosophical poem within the aforementioned genre, and his use of meaning-making techniques of repetition is to be found in the arena of ancient Greek literature. It is, however, essentially his concept of history that affords him space to include these meaning-making poetic techniques as he strives to present to his readership an exact description of the revolts, uprisings and insurgencies that have been ongoing since the Abbasid caliphate. He explains the why and how of the wrongdoing, and the consequences on the Day of Judgment, the divine sphere of action functioning as part of his historical narrative. His symbols, in this particular poem, lean less on the Persian and Arabic Sufi poets. He rather creates symbols of his own, symbols that provide an aura of the scientific, and are as "unimaginative" as possible – being symbols of the most basic kind. As usual, his extraordinarily skilled and extensive use of devices of repetition reflect his Kurdish heritage.

Keywords: Salim Barakat, Unimaginative Symbols, Kurdish, Kurdish heritage, Haza'in Manhuba

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¹ Corresponding Author: Aviva Butt, Independent scholar, Tasmania, Australia: avivabutt@winshop.com.au

² See Appendix I for the entire poem

MOTTO

*Thus will keep me still, an aim that sights the truth
Its broken arrows in that same direction
Thus will allay the agonizing brilliance in the glittering blood.*

- *Salim Barakat, 1986*

If one takes the poems of Shah Isma'il I (founder of the Safavid Dynasty) as providing the starting point of modern Islamic literature, as differentiated for example from Arabic literature, then Salim Barakat's secular poem of 1986 *Glimpses of Spoliation* falls into place.² Islamic poetry, a genre not defined by language, but rather by cultural movements is considered by modern scholars to roughly speaking include the Turkic, Persian and Arabic, and for all practical purposes, the Kurdish. Barakat writes in Arabic, but his poetry is defined by culture, not language, except that from the linguistic viewpoint he is identifiable as a Kurdish poet.

Professor Vladimir Minorsky³ tells us that Shah Isma'il I (Shah of Azerbaijan in 1501 and Shah of Iran from 1501 to 1524) wrote poetry almost exclusively in a Turkish dialect akin to Azeri, rather than in Persian,⁴ whereas his contemporary, the Ottoman Sultan Selim I (reigned 1512 to 1520) chose to write in Persian, as a poet appealing to the inner circle of his intimates. Shah Isma'il, on the other hand, had in view a much larger auditory than he would otherwise have achieved with Persian.⁵ In his correspondence with Sultan Selim, his prose style is elegant, highly sophisticated, and infused with ardent religious feeling. In general the correspondence is full of poetical expression, as well as quotations from the Qur'an. Sultan Selim harshly criticizes the Shah saying what he has heard, and strongly objecting to Shah Isma'il's inclusive outlook in regard to Zoroastrianism, its doctrines and legends and in general Persian culture:

*He has laid waste to mosques, as it is said,
Constructing idol temples in their stead,
that you have rent the noble fabric of Islam with the hand of tyranny, and that you
have called the Glorious Qur'an the myths of the Ancients. The rumor of these
abominations has caused your name to become like that of Harith deceived by Satan.*⁶

³ On Minorsky, see [online] <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/minorsky-vladimir> [Accessed 16 Jan 2018]. He was a scholar of Persian history with a special interest in the role of the Kurds in Iranian culture.

⁴ Shah Isma'il also wrote in Persian of which we have virtually nothing. Minorsky does not see this as an issue of what we have extant.

⁵ See V. Minorsky et al (1942). *The Poetry of Shah Isma'il I*, p. 1007a. Critics have generally assumed that Barakat for a similar reason chooses to write in Arabic and not Kurdish, his first language.

⁶ From *The Exchange between Selim I and Ismail I: Letter from Selim to Ismail, 1514* [online] Available at: <http://www.shiachat.com/forum/topic/235020699-the-poetry-of-shah-ismail-i/> Edited 24 Feb 2014 by

In Shah Isma'il's poetry collection, known as the *Divan* of Khata'i (the appellation the Shah assigns to himself), the poet occasionally uses single-line verses with monorhyme, but generally uses the hemistich with monorhyme and meter as with classical Arabic prosody. He introduces himself as Shah of Iran in a resounding declamatory style, reminiscent of the steles of ancient kings announcing their presence: "My name is Shah Isma'il. I am God's mystery. I am the leader of all these ghazis."⁷ In another poem, he gives his lineage:

Know for certain that Khata'i [the poet's name]⁸ is of divine nature,
 that he is related to Muhammad Mustafa;
 He is issued from Safi, he is the scion of Junayd [and] Haydar,
 he is related to 'Ali Murtada.
 For the love of Hasan he has entered the arena, (for)
 he is related to Husayn of Kerbela. [He possesses the qualities of the other Imams.]
 He is like a beggar at the gate of Mahdi, Master of the Time.
 My name is Vali Shah Isma'il; my surname is Khata'i.⁹

In the last line of the above poem, we understand that his spiritual lineage has qualified him to be "Vali [Arabic: Wali]," that is, a guide for Muslims.¹⁰ In the next breath, he tells us that "my surname is Khata'i [Sinner]"¹¹ – reminding us that as Salim Barakat expresses it in his modern poem, his "contrition is complete." In her article *The Safavids in Iranian History (1501 – 1722)*, Kathryn Babayan says that "in effect, Isma'il's poetry fused Ali with Isma'il, God, and a host of holy kings and warriors from the Persianate cultural past that had been transmitted to Persian-speaking peoples, whether ethnically Turkish, Kurdish, or Persian, through a shared repertoire of Persian literary symbols and texts, including poetry, anecdotes, epics, etc."¹²

With the opening lines of his modern poem *Glimpses of Spoliation*, albeit the structure looks nothing like that of the classical qasida Shah Isma'il uses, Barakat likewise describes the spiritual experiences that qualify him to be a guide, that is, *dalil*, and concludes: "for I have the capacity / To guide you. . .".

*Let me have the potency of a parrot so that I echo the earth. Let me have a fixed time
 For worship. Let me have that radiance, the leash on first the dog and then the ostrich.
 Let me have whatever the forgotten of the detours over the horizon – the lost. Let me be there
 In the diversion for the dragon's blood to topple its ash conjurers, for I have the capacity*

Saintly_Jinn23 [Accessed 11 Jan 2018]; included in this edit is the editor's *A Brief Biography of Shah Isma'il* and some of V. Minorsky's translations of Shah Isma'il's poems in V. Minorsky et al (1942). I thank the editor for directing me to Shah Isma'il's poetry translations.

⁷ V. Minorsky et al (1942), *The Poetry of Shah Isma'il I*, p. 1042a. Poem No. 15, line 1.

⁸ My parenthetical – A.B.

⁹ V. Minorsky et al (1942), *The Poetry of Shah Isma'il I*, p. 1043a. Poem No. 22.

¹⁰ The concept of guidance is intrinsic to both Shi'ism and Sufism. In this period of history, Islamic mysticism was as one, Shi'ism feeding Sufism and vice versa. See e.g. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1970), *Shi'ism and Sufism: Their Relationship in Essence and in History*; also Agha Shabbir Abbas (30 Apr 2015), *A Glimpse into the Relationship of Shi'ism and Sufism: With a Special Emphasis on the Works of Mawlana Rumi*.

¹¹ My parenthetical – A.B.

¹² Touraj Daryaee, edited by (2012). *The Oxford Handbook of Iranian History*, p. 286.

*To guide you to a golden lair that seduces the blossoms, and they abide through me.
They perpetuate the torrent that we expand in the blast of the lifelike clay sensing the twilight
In its plentitude; and they smiled. A little. And then completion penetrated, like with the
Garden's orchard, unto our anthem. They smiled as my contrition was complete
Of the freewill that cauterizes unto the bone.¹³*

Simultaneously, in the first two lines, the poet sets in motion a prayer for his personal strength and ability to remain in a state of prayer, so that his message will resound among the Islamic collective. This is done in a series of kaleidoscopic repetitions dispersed throughout what could be called the first "act" of the poem's narrative:

1. *Let me have a fixed time / For worship.*
2. *And in me is a fixed time for worship. / In me the situation heralds the situation,*
3. *. . . and the Section is fixed for worship,*
4. *And the pawnbroker fixes the Section for worship*

The "fixed time" for worship (*wirdan*) the poet is thinking about could be the five times a day for prayer and the discussions in Islamic jurisprudence concerning the fixing of the prayer itself and its times.¹⁴ But this meaning soon undergoes a metamorphosis when the poet adds the words "And in me." It is his own personal prayer that concerns him. And a little later in the poem, the word "fixed" takes on a new meaning, and it becomes clear that the poet needs to remain in a state of prayer. It is only then that the poet's attention turns to events in the world outside, and he exclaims: "So beware of me!"

As does *Glimpses of Spoliation*, Barakat's modern prose poems often have irregular lines. As he does not use rhymes or meter, it is the fact of his writing in lines that differentiates from what would otherwise be poetic prose. His highly developed techniques for utilizing repetition, not only help to hold in place the structure of the poem, but also serve as a device to create subtleties in language and above all shifts in meanings. He accordingly echoes Kurdish linguistic peculiarities and poetics, and of interest is what I assume to be a parallel development reminiscent of linguistic techniques of the ancient Greeks from which a method of evolving exact philosophical vocabularies came into being.

Barakat's techniques of repetition enable Barakat to glide into philosophical discourse in the course of his poetic narrative. *Glimpses of Spoliation* is in fact a philosophical poem; it is the poet's passionate plea for his message to spread in terms of the combined Shi'ism and Sufism that found its strong historical bias during Shah Isma'il's reign. *Glimpses of Spoliation* is a philosophical poem, but not in the sense of being embedded in the thought of Western philosophers. On the contrary, it is philosophical in the sense of evolving from the same Greek rationality that entered Islam and Judaism as "religious philosophy." Barakat's poem

¹³ For the original poem in Arabic, see Salim Barakat (2007), *Al-A'mal al-Shi' riyah Salim Barakat* (The Poetry Works of Salim Barakat), pp. 373-384.

All translations from the Arabic are by Aviva Butt.

¹⁴ It is indeed the five times a day prayer schedule (instead of three times) that Prophet Zarathustra struggled to establish. It seems that prayer times forever remain an issue for people and for jurisprudence!

retains what Kappagoda describes as the ancient method of invoking the divine sphere of action into rationality, “reasoning that appears to be quite alien to modern Western thinking.”¹⁵ As the senses are our touchstone with rationality or as Kappagoda says, the senses create rationality, whereas linguistic systems stop at creating and combining meanings, therefore Barakat, in his philosophical poem, deliberately calls the senses into play; he will then be able to convince!

As regards the subject matter of Shah Isma’il’s poetry, what Minorsky translates as “pre-eternity,” perhaps better translated as “meta-eternity” or “transcendental eternity,” contrasts with what Barakat calls “sempiternity,” the seeming eternity of a created world that has a beginning and also a pending end. With the distinction between sempiternity and transcendental eternity clarified, the doctrine known as the Day of Judgment or the Day of Resurrection that is all pervasive in Shah Isma’il’s poetry will likewise preoccupy Barakat in his modern secular poem – a preoccupation that adds suspense to his narrative and assures interest in his message.

In the poem *Glimpses of Spoliation*, the speaker, the “I” of the poem, coming into the foreground of the drama, says that he himself is waiting in expectation:

*And I wait for the familiar with its weighty advent at its weighty breasts, signaling to you
As if an ash conjurer; to the space hung from its lungs for the fig-tree, there, wherever
There are archers that shoot radiance and the radiant sleeping on jewels. . .*

In describing the pending end of days as emerging at the “weighty breasts” of the god Shiva, the speaker alludes to ancient Indo-Iranian times which link with beliefs of ancient (Vedic) India, and which “survive as a subordinate part of what is the earliest known revealed religion;”¹⁶ it seems that the allusion to Shiva also points to the contents of the pre-Islamic Kaaba and the divine feminine.¹⁷ In any case, Shiva is depicted with the sun and moon, which the Qur’an tells us will be joined together, as a sign. Such signs, when depicted in sculpted images or graphic representations, or in poetry for that matter, become symbols. This is the simplest kind of symbol, the most basic.

Boyce traces the doctrine of the Day of Judgment as far back as Zoroastrianism, saying that Zoroaster taught “the doctrines of an individual judgment, Heaven and Hell, the future resurrection of the body, the general Last Judgment, and life everlasting for the reunited soul and body. . . Zoroaster insisted both on the goodness of the material creation, and hence of the physical body, and on the unwavering impartiality of divine justice. .

¹⁵ See Astika Kautilya Kappagoda (July 2004). *Semiosis as the Sixth Sense: Theorising the Unperceived in Ancient Greek* (doctoral dissertation), p. 3. [Online] Available at: <http://www.isfla.org/Theses>.

¹⁶ Mary Boyce (1979, 2001), *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, see the foreword and pp. 2-3.

¹⁷ “Ancient Indian Vedic texts refer to Makkah as a place where Alla The Mother Goddess was worshiped. In Sanskrit, Alla means 'mother.' This name was connected to the Hindu Goddess Ila. She was the consort of the Hindu God Siva in his form known as Il, and this form of Siva was known and worshiped in pre-Islamic Makkah.” See Lawrence Galian (2003), *The Centrality of the Divine Feminine in Sufism*. [Online] Available at: http://www.adishakti.org/_centrality_of_the_divine_feminine_in_sufism.htm.

.”¹⁸ Therefore, it is no surprise that Barakat corresponds with extant Zoroastrian sources, most likely the Greater Bundahishn (Knowledge from the Zand),¹⁹ and possibly the Zadspram, from which he finds imagery for his portrayal of the processions of souls in expectation of their restoration to the perfection of their initial creation. This imagery becomes symbols, again symbols of a very basic kind, when we, his readership or auditory, understand that the list of plants he names include plants mentioned in the aforementioned sources, plants of special value. And, as the lengthy recitation progresses, by way of meaning-making, we come to understand that they have a common denominator, that is, they are rare and almost extinct, dying. All in all, the selection of plants mentioned is done with care; each plant or tree bears specific characteristics that make it a suitable, if unimaginative and otherwise seemingly realistic and scientific symbol for what the poet has to say.

Barakat does not quote or allude to the verses of Surah al-Qiyamah, “al-qiyamah” meaning resurrection, renewal, renovation or, as equivalent term in Zoroaster’s Gathas, *frashokereti* means “making wonderful.”²⁰ The first fifteen verses of Surah al-Qiyamah – so familiar to every Muslim – nonetheless resound in the background, guidelines for the unfolding of the saga on hand, a tale of revolts, uprisings and insurgencies. In the following lines, Barakat portrays the Resurrection as both ongoing and imminent:

*And in me or in you (no difference), I will observe the quietude of the victims, there,
With their reeds, absenting the tragedy of those selfsame wolves, mumbling what they expect,
Surrounded by disgrace, in front of the gate of Allah, intoxicated from what preoccupies me
In which is the so very ancient, like my being in you, or in me. I will make an opening
For them to relax whenever saffron extols the wind’s names, and the flamingo guides
Its wings towards lavender, musing on the musing within it. The poppy joins me confident,
And the mustard tree competes for my limbs without jostling. And the rest?*

In the above quoted lines, we see that Barakat in writing a philosophical poem, transfers his literary symbols and images into the context of a rational, abstract discourse, a discourse in the context of experiences significant to human existence.²¹ In the next lines, the poet gives us a logical reason for why we want to stay alive here in this world, and what should accordingly guide our behavior:

*In you, or in me, there is no difference: accordingly, non-being invites us in that it is disposed
Towards isolation, and the dust particle lurks in our narrative in the shadows.
Let alone the violet’s providing visualization of what is invisible to us. And asleep in us
The wild bramble, the radiance of the divine. And the rest? The carnation has its doubts.*

¹⁸ Mary Boyce (1979, 2001), *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, p. 29.

¹⁹ See E. W. West, trans. (1897). *The Bundahishn* (“Creation”), or Knowledge from the Zand. [Online] Avesta – Zoroastrian Archives available at: <http://www.avesta.org/bundahis.html> (Accessed 31 Jan 2018); see esp. Chapter 30: *On the Resurrection and Future Existence*.

²⁰ See Hintze, Almut (2000). *Fraso.Kereti*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/frasokrti> (updated 31 Jan 2012).

²¹ Hans Meyerhoff in his book *Time in Literature* (1960: Berkeley and Los Angeles) defines the philosophical poem.

The poet repeats and amplifies this same philosophical idea later in context of prophetic vision:

*In you, or in them (no difference), haste will universalize a feverish joy, you will be various,
Due to the power of the truth that made you two. And you view one another with sympathy,
Opening the gates to encompass pain, which given voice leads back to glimpses of spoliation:*

Unfortunately, as we are told in Surah Al-Qiyamah, there are people who likewise have their doubts. They are deceived once more, and again suffer greatly, and so on and so on.²²

APPENDIX I

SALIM BARAKAT

*Glimpses of Spoliation*²³

*Let me have the potency of a parrot so that I echo the earth. Let me have a fixed time
For worship.²⁴ Let me have that radiance, the leash on first the dog and then the ostrich.²⁵
Let me have whatever the forgotten of the detours over the horizon – the lost. Let me be there*

²² An excellent translation of Surah Al-Qiyamah is to be found in *The Noble Quran, Interpretation of the Meanings*, trans. Dr. M. M. Khan et al. Available at: <http://www.noblequran.com>. In his poem, Barakat does not quote this Surah; however, he corresponds with the first fifteen verses:

1. I swear by the Day of Resurrection;
2. And I swear by the self-reproaching person (a believer).
3. Does man (a disbeliever) think that We shall not assemble his bones?
4. Yes, We are Able to put together in perfect order the tips of his fingers.
5. Nay! (Man denies Resurrection and Reckoning. So) he desires to continue committing sins.
6. He asks: "When will be this Day of Resurrection?"
7. So, when the sight shall be dazed,
8. And the moon will be eclipsed,
9. And the sun and moon will be joined together (by going one into the other or folded up or deprived of their light, etc.)
10. On that Day man will say: "Where (is the refuge) to flee?"
11. No! There is no refuge!
12. Unto your Lord (Alone) will be the place of rest that Day.
13. On that Day man will be informed of what he sent forward (of his evil or good deeds), and what he left behind (of his good or evil traditions).
14. Nay! Man will be a witness against himself [as his body parts (skin, hands, legs, etc.) will speak about his deeds].
15. Though he may put forth his excuses (to cover his evil deeds). . . .

²³ In Salim Barakat (2007), *al-A'mal al-Shi'riyah Salim Barakat* (The Poetry Works of Salim Barakat), pp. 373-384. The original poem was composed in 1986 in Arabic.

²⁴ Literally, "a fixed time for praying *wirdan*." *Wirdan* is personal prayer, which can be from the Holy Qur'an or any words within the context of worship.

²⁵ The ostrich is a "flightless bird," equated with the mythical simorgh as described in the epic poem *The Conference of the Birds* by Persian theoretician of mysticism Shaykh Farid al-Din al-Attar²⁵ (b. ca. 540/1145-46 at Nisapur d. 618/1221). In the period of the Safavid dynasty, an ostrich was considered to be a suitable gift for kings.

*In the diversion for the dragon's blood²⁶ to topple its ash conjurers,²⁷ for I have the capacity
To guide you to a golden lair that seduces the blossoms, and they abide through me.
They perpetuate the torrent that we expand in the blast of the lifelike clay²⁸ sensing twilight
In its plentitude; and they smiled. A little. And then completion penetrated,²⁹ like with the
Garden's orchard, unto our anthem. They smiled as my contrition was complete
Of the freewill that cauterizes unto the bone.³⁰
And in me is a fixed time for worship.
In me the situation heralds the situation,
As if a butterfly³¹ were trying out what they had set aside for it.
Indeed that which transformed me surrounds me: predecessors paved the way with
A different intention with their hard steel,
As I looked on, from here, from under the great shade of the wings of the great falcon,³²
They endangered the Karanis corn;³³ but tomorrow will see the scoundrels as I see them
And I will glimpse the state of their footnotes when the long-suffering inherit the gist of
Their deviance. . . and the Section is fixed for worship,
As if death were conversant with the formation of a semblance of a living microbe;
As if a baligh's³⁴ vigil would dictate sleep, near to a millennium. . . the clang of a crown
That is Hui.³⁵ And that which is recorded of civilization now creates despair,
Like the microbe. . . semblances of merriment?
In me the situation heralds the situation,
And the pawnbroker fixes the Section for worship
So beware of me!
Not with the sword of grace in mind; not that, exegesis is exacerbated by such stories;
Beware of me by keeping still,
Beware of me, by chance the donkey is as unwieldy as his rump;*

And let subterfuge upon subterfuge now settle down, its display dwell to the north,

²⁶ Dark red resinous substance from a dragon tree, the world tree or cosmic tree in myths and legends.

²⁷ Such as the phoenix or simorgh.

²⁸ See e.g. Qur'an 3:49.

²⁹ Completion (*al-kamal*). Here, the poet alludes to "the doctrine of the universal man (*al-insan al-kamil*) expounded by Ibn 'Arabi" (see Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1970), *Shi'ism and Sufism: Their Relationship in Essence and in History*, p. 235).

³⁰ The poet is talking about undergoing the process of *tawba* (repentance), *inaba* (sincere penitence), and *awba* (turning to God in contrition). Contrition is the last step and at that point a kind of refraction of light takes place; see the Qur'an, ". . . Perfect our light for us" (66:8). . . (see online: <https://www.thewaytotruth.org/heart/tevbe.html>). The poet tells us that due to the refraction of the light from the Divine presence, suffering is so-to-speak "cauterized."

³¹ The Arabic is "abatira," a species of butterfly.

³² The great falcon. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emblem_of_Iran Main article: *Faravahar*: "The Faravahar is one of the best-known symbols of Zoroastrianism. This religious-cultural symbol was later adopted by the Pahlavi dynasty to represent the Iranian nation, and after the Iranian revolution it has remained in use in contemporary Iranian nationalism." See also: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pahlavi_dynasty

³³ The food supply.

³⁴ "Baligh" is a term in Muslim jurisprudence on slaves and converts; see e.g. www.ShiaChat.com.

³⁵ The Hui are a mostly Muslim Chinese tribe, whose Mandarin language has some Persian and Arabic words.

*Thus will keep me still: an aim that sights the truth, its broken arrows in that same direction,
Thus will allay the agonizing brilliance in the glittering blood, not I remind you,
A commentator's exegesis, or the at-work disconnect due to verbose speech-making,³⁶
Not even the flutter of a whimper in regard to their beguilement.
All this is brought upon you by panegyric's shaping, molding; to set the record straight,
The guidelines in mobilizing, the unctuous.³⁷ To make a mockery of the initial record,
The historian manipulates, revives the hallucinations of the blind. To put before you
What you ponder about, a simple life, words can only espouse by detailing the problem
Step by step. The pledge of the treasure, the sympathizers, is ultimately at stake, the golden³⁸
The golden,
 The golden,
 The golden,
All the same he spares the loaves,
Groping, wreckage on either side, with sumac on his tongue.³⁹
And the truth makes them thin, in their loins, too,
And when digging, deep, behold! The metallic trench for their beetles.⁴⁰
Moreover, the abeyance⁴¹ that walks the pyramids, midst a battle-hardened infatuation
Gone sour, silences the call for help coming from there. Due to the problem, its gravity,
The more so as exchanges of envoys turn to dust in Juba.⁴² And the scripture of scribes is
Subject to the same inconsistencies,⁴³ be that as it may, the plain sense is that the morrow
Bespeaks its unraveled interface.
And the departure of the golden, the dying:⁴⁴
A golden knee cap. Golden cartilage.
And a coming and going. A vanishing claw.
And a golden paradise. A golden fissure.
A golden Adam's apple. A golden arm.
A golden skull. A golden loin.*

³⁶ The fighters feel a sort of disconnect while carrying out the work, especially after lengthy indoctrination.

³⁷ Unctuous means characterized by a smug, smooth pretense of spiritual feeling, fervor, earnestness, as in seeking to persuade.

³⁸ The golden treasure the poet is talking about is the body. The word "golden" will be repeated in relation to the body parts in the forthcoming sequence, and their importance on the Day of Judgment. In fact, the word "golden" is repeated throughout the poem, unifying the structure, similarly to the way the words "dear country" are repeated throughout a later poem *Surya* (Syria) (2014) – see A. Butt (January 2018), *Empire, Split Identities, and an Explosion of Poetry*.

³⁹ Sumac will poison his throat; he has to be starving to put it in his mouth.

⁴⁰ Beetles have natural weaponry for fighting. The scarab (an image of a beetle) is a symbol of rebirth or regeneration connected to the significance of the Egyptian god Khepri. It has often been used as an amulet.

⁴¹ Abeyance: the Arabic word used has previously been translated as "keeping still." Here there is a shift in meaning, a technique characteristic of Barakat's writing. The "keeping still" implies a cessation or ceasefire.

⁴² Juba, Sudan.

⁴³ Instances of *furuq* (inconsistencies) are discussed in Islamic jurisprudence.

⁴⁴ The poet is pointing to the period of the Abbasid caliphs who faced revolts of the Shi'a. In our modern times, we would say insurgencies. *Al-Risala al-Dhahabia* (The Golden Treatise), a treatise on medical cures and the maintenance of good health is attributed to Imam Reza, descendant of Prophet Mohammad and eighth Shi'a Imam (b. 765 – d. 818). Imam Reza was murdered by what we would call a political assassination

*A golden scrotum.
A heel and golden decomposition,
And posterity lies hidden unto the miracle with the portion of the dead.
Thus the golden, exposed. . . as if a protracted resurrection step by step.
Thus the ennui of rage and its dragging on and winding up at its height.
And may the rest remain with me
May the exhausted remain with the emaciated, as a matter of course, in friendship.
And may the pounding on the gate remain at the gate, but needless-to-say, you will open it,
You will open it for the sparkle of a fresh scheme, together with your comrades whom you
Entice at twilight, as if I had not warned you of the land of valor, you disregard death,
Satisfy caution by guarding the benumbed. Let the rest remain. Let them wait!
You. . . supplicating, wailing like the plane tree to the ruminating cow.⁴⁵
Let remain those awaiting your arms. Let remain predestinations in letters, not configured
In metal in readiness for futile chiseling of purification.⁴⁶ Will I distress the remainder of
You?
Will I distress you with a loud clamor like a father's shock when led to the carnage?
It is burdensome your girding darkness. And the grape strives for the touch that is oblivious
Beyond my control.⁴⁷ Yet, thinking of you, I cite the debate, between the seas and radiance,⁴⁸
And I wait to be among them, after it chases away, removes iron hooks that are obsolete;
And I wait for the familiar with its weighty advent at its weighty breasts,⁴⁹ signaling to you
As if an ash conjurer; to the space hung from its lungs for the fig-tree, there, wherever
There are archers that shoot radiance and the radiant sleeping on jewels,⁵⁰ and hostilities
Are stripped away; wherever captives are fettered with straps of exuberance; wherever
The tale, all of it, affords shade, on arousal, for mobilizing sword lilies.⁵¹ Accordingly,
Let remain with me,
Whenever the bell-whether⁵² shows you the message that for certain will arrive;*

⁴⁵ The fighters gather by clusters of sycamore trees, here depicted as plane trees, a kind of sycamore. The women and children await their return in supplication. But, the poet says, the plane trees wail to the cow grazing peacefully, ruminating. The cow is a Zoroastrian symbol for the "soul of the earth."

⁴⁶ The metal is in readiness, that is for the ordeal of molten metal on the Day of Judgement. Here the poet is alluding to the Zoroastrian account; see e.g. Almut Hintze, *Fraso.Kereti*. In: Vol. X, Fasc.2, *Encyclopedia Iranica*, pp. 190-192.

⁴⁷ Probably meaning a black grape, a symbol of fear and trouble.

⁴⁸ The Sufi poet Rumi (b. 1207 – d. 1273) clarifies: "Woman is the radiance of God; she is not your beloved. She is the Creator – you could say that she is not created." In: Jalaluddin Rumi. *The Mathnawi Jalaluddin Rumi*. Trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (2002). Gibb Memorial Trust, I:2437.

⁴⁹ The weighty breasts of the Vedic god Shiva, whose consort is the goddess Durga, depicted with bow and arrow. Shiva (still worshipped by Hindus in India) is known as the Destroyer; he brings about creation anew.

⁵⁰ Here the word radiance takes on a new meaning to signify the divine feminine. Galian on the significance of the divine feminine writes: ". . . at the center of Islam abides the Divine Feminine." In the same article, Galian he says: "Ancient Indian Vedic texts refer to Makkah as a place where Alla The Mother Goddess was worshiped. In Sanskrit, Alla means 'mother.' This name was connected to the Hindu Goddess Ila. She was the consort of the Hindu God Siva in his form known as Il, and this form of Siva was known and worshiped in pre-Islamic Makkah." In: Lawrence Galian (2003). *The Centrality of the Divine Feminine in Sufism*. [Online] Available at: http://www.adishakti.org/centrality_of_the_divine_feminine_in_sufism.htm.

⁵¹ An alternate name for gladiolus flowers.

*For the sake of showing you the prognosis, ascending, like bindweed,⁵³ pageantries of cement,
Jeering because of the summons for those advancing with their secrets to the comedy.*

*And in me or in you (no difference), I will observe the quietude of the victims, there,
With their reeds, absenting the tragedy of those selfsame wolves, mumbling what they expect,
Surrounded by disgrace, in front of the gate of Allah, intoxicated from what preoccupies me
In which is the so very ancient, like my being in you, or in me. I will make an opening
For them to relax whenever saffron extols the wind's names, and the flamingo guides
Its wings towards lavender, musing on the musing within it. The poppy joins me confident,
And the mustard tree competes for my limbs without jostling.⁵⁴ And the rest?*

*In you, or in me, there is no difference: accordingly, non-being invites us in that it is disposed
Towards isolation, and the dust particle lurks in our narrative in the shadows.*

*Let alone the violet's providing visualization of what is invisible to us. And asleep in us
The wild bramble, the radiance of the divine. And the rest? The carnation has its doubts.
The berry has its doubts. The hemp, the mercury,⁵⁵ the fenugreek, the fir, and the grace. . . .*

*We have our doubts, likewise the roe deer dripping blood due to spring's stone.⁵⁶ As for
Resurrection, it is ready in its braided disguises for the perishing afloat on the seas,⁵⁷
For the birch tree, the peacock watching over ascendancy, the diffident strong, for the
Trumpeter tree a master of long-windedness, for the boxwood, for the fir, for the gaurs,⁵⁸
For the sweet clover, for the dawn redwood that hisses like the adder⁵⁹ near the grace,
For the anacardium, for the flax, for certain, together with shrill sounds of the exhausted,
The racing towards the morrow of their doubts.*

Thus: doubts about the aim for the guffaw;

Doubts about the aim for the gold.

*And we are what are we due to them: captives in a winter tempered by storm after storm,
Meantime claiming to prolong transmutation of the problem for the sake of its vindication.*

*And the rest? Thus: the land casts its shadow,⁶⁰ aware of our effect on it. And then
What paroxysm of the seas would run the rest? What repercussion entices the fool's
Immortality? Into the mounting love enveloping it, we would whisper to you*

With our remaining breath for our intercessor;⁶¹ we would whisper: The city. Supporters

⁵² Bell-whether: head ram with a bell hung on its neck.

⁵³ Bindweed has a trumpet-shaped flower, and the bindweed plant climbs.

⁵⁴ A tree affording shade in dry parched land. The imagery is the spread out limbs of the mustard tree and the person's relaxed body.

⁵⁵ A plant known as "dog mercury."

⁵⁶ On the near-eastern relic population of roe deer, see [online] http://www.museoscienzebergamo.it/web/images/stories/museo/Biogeografia/21/XXI-2000_14_Masseti.pdf .

⁵⁷ Braided: "When Hafiz speaks of the hair of his beloved, he is interpreted as indicating the grace of God which emanates multiplicity, just as the strands of hair are a multiplicity," (see [online] *On the Symbolism of Religious Poetry*. <https://www.al-islam.org/wine-love-mystical-poetry-imam-khomeini/appendix-symbolism-religious-poetry> [Accessed 12 Jan 2018].

⁵⁸ The gaurs, i.e. the bovine.

⁵⁹ A variety of venomous adder.

⁶⁰ The words "the land casts its shadow" as implied in the choice of vocabulary in the Arabic means that the earth takes umbrage.

⁶¹ That is, they want an Intercessor to address Heaven on the Day of Judgment.

*For the bulldozer to bring on the most likely fall. The end, a stratagem of high caliber ploys.
And as such the given expertise is fantasy but its tone well-versed relief from the
Sempiternity of fleeing with scraps adorned in flour. And in me, or in you (no difference)
We would persist, with what there is, our argillaceous earth from humus⁶²(ultimately ash),
Our turbulence justified by their anthem. We would wink at one another, babbling:
“Like a thief draws solidarity. Ink sacrifices space!”⁶³ And meantime we abandon ourselves to
Recitation of the precept such as it is, the blunt edge of possibility circulating; we make
The boxwood the coming euphemism for daytime and the tempest a sort of succulent date.⁶⁴
No! Then a stench also circulates the botanical problem. There is a bramble with the exposé,
A life-style accosting suave snakes for ambushing the beginner. There is an excess of
Glamour conjuring up rumors that stir up the winds. And we are onto what we are into:
A fatwa from the palm-tree distributes burnt bread-rolls among the captives.
An orange, whenever,
An orange is over yonder.
Bergamot and Juniper.
A weak snicker,
A bun and an apple,
A nook for goldfish,
A whisper stirs them, fingertips that cause shadow,
Unawares like the cannabis,
Unawares like the needle,
Unawares rugs
Unawares like squill,
Like a bonfire
Like al-Behrman
Like the dacha
Like a sentry,
Unawares over yonder,
Legumes
Baked bread
Grass pea
And the almighty skies⁶⁵ bombard the tents near to truth,
And a valued part of each community are flung into the veiled,
Hence, over yonder is that over yonder:
Frogs leap from Allah’s sign to Allah’s sign.
And we are what we know: captives in the torn mesh of gorgeous impetuosity,*

⁶² I understand this to mean that we are soil ever in the process of the making. Our soil being argillaceous (full of minerals) is sparkling – the poet’s sense of humor!

⁶³ In the Arabic, there is a play on words that makes what is more-or-less a nonsense saying hold together. The poet wrote in a question mark as if to say: What’s this!

⁶⁴ Boxwood is often used to make musical instruments.

⁶⁵ Skies: Barakat wrote the Sanskrit word *Akasara* (sing. *Aksara*), which means “imperishable.” In Vedantic philosophy it can be used to denote God, or the three gods Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahman and in any case has a highly mystical connotation. See [online] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aksara>.

*Moreover no one awaits us;
No one awaits us.
And the sects are not preoccupied with errant speculation about the dead,
The situations are as one,
The sighs are as one,
The lungs that exhale are as one.
Yet we gaze at you holding our breath;
At you,
You are connected to the common dilemma,
Like being an intercessor for the dead through reciting Quraysh,⁶⁶
Or rejecting that illustration, the preoccupation with the grinding of bureaucracy.
Over yonder, then, there is nothing over there?
Exuberance will return to you;
Hasty flight, like a tiger, will return to you;
You will return, to you, all-put-together as if the work of the Blind Barber.⁶⁷ And you will be
What you are due to him. Pare down the proofs, their protraction is what will follow, along
With rain washing away greed and something of extemporization, in you or in them,
The aim of the situation, and take those left behind, the scattered between obstructions.
And wipe away, hopes of victory, that fine dust from pangs of the end, then perhaps this:
In you, or in them (no difference), haste will universalize a feverish joy, you will be various,
Due to the power of the truth that made you two. And you view one another with sympathy,
Opening the gates to encompass pain, which given voice leads back to glimpses of spoliation:
And likewise you,⁶⁸
Exuberance restored to you;⁶⁹
Hasty flight, like a squirrel, restored to you; you are restored, you, to you,⁷⁰
Tremulous from the grind of greetings that are the millstone of weddings,
And you are in the state you are due to them.⁷¹
The epilogue's encounters are with womanly palm-fans, children begotten, as before the
Whispering of delight to the joyous with a sort of spontaneity, within you or within her,
Death is not recorded in respect of the bones of some great sin, it is ever so salubrious; and
Their spontaneity, mass spontaneity, the more so as they pledge their tomorrow going by the
Composed facial expressions to murder with composure. Over yonder, then, is nothing of
What was there?
Is there a greater difference than what you spin from latent fears?
O you, O you jokers, as in lore, let us leave this nothingness, the humorous like a circus;
May you ponder on your own the unwieldy bead in an unwieldy necklace, and reach back
Into the claws of the unawares and trim them drastically up to boredom with the spectacle
That closed your eyes to them, over there, among the golden fears of the dark.*

⁶⁶ Qur'an S.106.

⁶⁷ The Blind Barber actually exists as a chain of barbershops in the United States of America.

⁶⁸ You (feminine).

⁶⁹ You (feminine).

⁷⁰ You (feminine) in each instance in this line.

⁷¹ You (feminine) in each instance in this line.

*And we bear witness that we nibbled the last fruit, before reaching back – like you – into
The sempiternity of light that obscures.*

Have you erred and found another situation bespeaking our jugs?

Golden,

G

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N. . .

This pawn

And the safe will deal with the adversity of the soul.

- Translated by Aviva Butt – 2018

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