Pedagogy File
Abbasid Pastoral:
A Teacher's Guide to the Story of Qays and Lubnā

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"Does every lover's liver burn
the way mine does for May?"
–Dhū al-Rumma (d. 735)

Most Classical Arabic love stories and poems feature the perspective of a young male protagonist who pines and yearns for his beloved and whose frustration and disappointment lead him down the path of social alienation, physical and mental decline, and often tragic death. They are stories of a passion that never attains its potential, either because the feelings are unrequited or because other men get in the way. The story of Qays and Lubnā contains many of these familiar elements, but what makes it so interesting is that passion survives both marriage and divorce. In fact, the post-nuptial separation inflames Qays's passion, which is a departure from the usual pattern of romantic narratives down to the present. The story brings together poetry, love theory, early Islamic history, and Islamic law in a stimulating and poignant narrative that will open students' eyes to the richness and complexity of Classical Arabic literature.

In this essay, I present a series of lessons designed to accompany the narrative as it appears in Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī's *Kitāb al-Aghānī*; it is not very long but is quite dense and multi-layered. I have taught this text as part of a course on premodern Arabic narratives about passionate love, its destructive force, and the futile attempts to contain it, but it would also fit well in a survey course on pre-modern Arabic or World literatures or in seminars on courtly love, doomed romance, or premodern theories of madness. It's a versatile and engaging text with obvious connections to works from the secondary school canon like Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (ca. 1595), and could also be used to illustrate questions of literary form and the use of poetry in narrative. As I cannot predict how much class time is available to study this material, I have organized the lessons into three segments:

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- Before students have read the text (Lesson 1)
- As they're reading the text (Lessons 2 & 3)
- After they've read the text at least once (Lessons 4 & 5)

Lesson 1 is the most didactic and introduces questions that can guide students' reading and analysis of the text. Lessons 2–5 are more dynamic and are designed to inform and invigorate discussion. The lessons are organized as follows:

Lesson 1: Introduction

Lesson 2: Plot and Composition

Lesson 3: Love Songs

Lesson 4: Limerence and Heartbreak

Lesson 5: Social Regulation

I devote five class sessions to the text, but that could be cut down to three sessions by combining Lesson 2 with Lesson 5 and Lesson 3 with Lesson 4, or just two by combining Lessons 1, 2, and 5, and Lessons 3 and 4 respectively. For those who teach through the format of lectures and accompanying discussion sections, I would advise presenting the information in Lessons 1, 2, and 5 in a single lecture and reserving Lessons 3 and 4 for discussion activities.

Course Texts

Original Arabic: The biography of the poet Qays b. Dharīḥ appears under the heading "On Qays b. Dharīḥ, his genealogy, and the events of his life" (*dhikr Qays b. Dharīḥ wa-nasabihi wa-akhbārih*) in Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, 24 vols. (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb, 1927–74), 9:180–220.

English Translation: Geert Jan van Gelder, trans., "Bedouin Romance: The Unhappy Love Story of Qays and Lubnā," in *Classical Arabic Literature: A Library of Arabic Literature Anthology* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 127–65.[1]

When citing these texts below, I refer to English and Arabic versions of the text like so: p. 128 [En]; 181 [Ar].

Suggested Further Reading

Khan, Ruqayya Yasmine. *Bedouin and ʿAbbāsid Cultural Identities: The Arabic Majnūn Laylā Story*. London: Routledge, 2020.

1. Van Gelder provides a list of other premodern Arabic versions of the story of Qays and Lubnā "all dependent on *al-Aghānī*" in note 381. Max Weisweiler published a German translation of the story in 1954 along with stories of other notable poet-lovers, such as Qays b. al-Mulawwaḥ (Majnūn Laylā), ʿUrwa b. Ḥizām, Jamīl, etc. See Max Weisweiler, *Arabesken der Liebe. Früharabische Geschichten von Liebe und Frauen* (Leiden: Brill, 1954), 78–90.

Kilpatrick, Hilary. "*Aḫbār manẓūma*: The Romance of Qays and Lubnā in the *Aġānī*." In *Festschrift Ewald Wagner zum 65. Geburtstag*. Edited by Wolfhart Heinrichs and Gregor Schoeler, 2:350–61. Beirut: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1994.

Leder, Stefan. "The Literary Use of the *Khabar*: A Basic Form of Historical Writing." In *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East: Volume 1: Problems in the Literary Source Material*, edited by Averil Cameron and Lawrence I. Conrad, 277–315 Princeton, NJ: The Darwin Press, 1992.

———. "The ʿUdhrī Narrative in Arabic Literature." In *Martyrdom in Literature: Visions of Death and Meaningful Suffering in Europe and the Middle East from Antiquity to Modernity*, edited by Friederike Pannewick, 163–87 Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2004.

Other relevant works are listed in the bibliography. In Arabic, one can find countless studies of Qays's poetry, and *ʿUdhrī* poetry more broadly, but I expect that readers will not ordinarily be using Arabic-language secondary sources with their undergraduate students. Jokha Alharthi's *The Body in Arabic Love Poetry* is a good guide to Arabic-language scholarship on the topic.[2] Persian and Turkish language scholarship is especially rich with analyses of adaptations of *ʿUdhrī* romances into those languages, e.g., by Niẓāmī (d. 1209).[3] His *Layli and Majnun* and *Haft Peykar* have been translated into English by Dick Davis and Julie Scott Meisami respectively, so one or both could be read in combination with the story of Qays and Lubnā.[4] Nazanin Hedayat Munroe's new study of love-narratives in textiles should not be missed.[5] Those interested in modern interpretations should see references in the lessons below, as well as the recent Indonesian film *Layla Majnun* (2021), in which Layla gets to be the passionate one for a change, and Qasim Haddad's poetic re-imagining, "Chronicles of Majnun Layla."[6]

2. Jokha Alharthi, *The Body in Arabic Love Poetry: The* ʿUdhri *Tradition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021). Foundational Arabic-language studies include Ḥusayn Naṣṣār, *Qays wa-Lubnā: shiʿr wa-dirāsa* (Cairo: Maktabat Miṣr, 1979); Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, *Ḥadīth al-arbiʿāʾ*, vol. 2, *al-Majmūʿa al-kāmila li-muʾallafāt al-Duktūr Ṭāhā Ḥusayn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, 1980); and Ṣādiq Jalāl al-ʿAẓm, *Fī al-ḥubb wa-l-ḥubb al-ʿudhrī* (Beirut: Dār al-ʿAwda, 1974).

3. See also Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, "Leyli o Majnun," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, last updated Oct. 30, 2017; İsmail Durmuş, "Uzrî Aşk," in *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi* (Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2012); and Hüseyin Tural, "Kays b. Zerîh," in *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi* (Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2022).

4. Niẓāmī Ganjavī, *The Haft Paykar: A Medieval Persian Romance*, trans. Julie Scott Meisami (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Niẓāmī Ganjavī, *Layli and Majnun*, trans. Dick Davis (New York: Penguin, 2021). If you choose to read Niẓāmī alongside the story of Qays and Lubnā, see also Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnūn: Love, Madness and Mystic Longing in Niẓāmī's Epic Romance* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Asʿad E. Khairallah, *Love, Madness, and Poetry: An Interpretation of the Maǧnūn Legend* (Beirut: Franz Steiner, 1980); and André Miquel and Percy Kemp, *Majnûn et Laylâ: l'amour fou* (Paris: Sindbad, 1984).

5. Nazanin Hedayat Munroe, *Sufi Lovers, Safavid Silks and Early Modern Identity* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023).

6. Monty Tiwa, dir., *Layla Majnun* (StarVision Plus, 2021); Qasim Haddad, *Chronicles of Majnun Layla and Selected Poems*, trans. Ferial Ghazoul and John Verlenden (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014).

I find it productive to discuss the story, ways of making sense of its tone and structure, and the circumstances of its composition with students before they read it. I also like to begin whenever possible by introducing students to visual and musical materials that are connected to the texts that I am teaching. That is what I set out to do in the introductory lesson below. This is a preference that no one need adopt, but I want to suggest that students regularly go looking for contextual and associative clues to the texts they are assigned. By introducing the story of Qays and Lubnā as a particularly knotty example of a written biography that draws on several oral substrates, I hope to de-mystify the text somewhat and boost students' confidence and focus as they navigate it for the first time. I also want them to understand from the very beginning that the poems featured in the narrative are the reason it exists, and not simply extraneous adornment. More than twenty-five years ago the late Th. Emil Homerin wrote in the pages of this journal that "poetry remains a vast, but untapped resource for the study of the larger medieval Middle East," and I hope that these lessons honor his memory.[7]

Lesson 1: Introduction

Lesson Summary

- Forensic history
- Pastoral and melodrama as interpretive frames
- Images inspired by the story of Majnūn and Laylā
- Cast of characters

The story of Qays and Lubnā is one of a handful of well known *ʿUdhrī* narratives describing the tragic lives and love affairs of a group of men who became notorious, and later famous, for their love poetry. These poems and the stories that emerged around them made the women who were the putative addressees and subjects of these poems famous as well. The men are conventionally referred to by the names of their beloveds in a paratactic pair (e.g., Majnūn Laylā, Jamīl Buthayna, Kuthayyir ʿAzza).[8] The most famous of these pairs, Majnūn and Laylā, have been memorialized in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and other languages as a symbol of rapturous, doomed, and maddening love. Qays and Lubnā are less famous, but their story is no less compelling, and I have found the social embeddedness of their romance an effective way of introducing students to the connection between love stories and authorial, historical, and legal contexts.

7. Th. Emil Homerin, "Poetry & the Study of the Medieval Middle East," *Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* 11, no. 1 (April 1999): 4–5, 11, at 11.

8. See the list of famous "passionate lovers" and others in Ibn al-Nadīm, *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm: A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture*, trans. Bayard Dodge (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 2:719–23.

Key Terms: *ʿUdhrī*

ʿUdhrī: This adjective comes from the name of the Northern Hijazi tribe Banū ʿUdhra to which two important poets of this style, ʿUrwa b. Ḥizām and Jamīl b. Maʿmar, belonged. Paired with nouns like *ghazal* (love poetry) and *ḥubb* (love), it describes the expression of a man's passionate desire for an idealized woman. This mainly takes the form of poetry in which the man complains that he has little agency, reason, or hope with regards to his unhappy love affair. Here is an example by the most famous representative of this style of poetry, Qays b. al-Mulawwaḥ, also known as Majnūn Laylā ("the love-crazed for Layla"):

"Taymāʾ is where you'll find Layla

when summer fixes its anchor."

Summer came and went,

separation remains.

I fear death at any moment,

with so much left unsaid.

Every time we meet,

thoughts flee my mind.

"Poor thing, he's sick."

No, this heart knows who'll save it.

This and a couple of other text boxes that appear below could be adapted as lecture slides or handouts.

Forensic History

Qays b. Dharīḥ and Lubnā bt. al-Ḥubāb may or may not have been real people, but they have been treated as historical figures for more than a millennium. Arabic-speaking societies remembered and transmitted poems attributed to Qays, and they explained and elaborated the details of his life and attempts to find happiness with Lubnā. Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (897–ca. 971), who is best known for his monumental anthology of poems (that is, songs), legends, and historical anecdotes called *The Book of Songs* (*Kitāb al-Aghānī*), put together his version of the story in the first half of the tenth century.[9]

9. The author's name also appears as al-Iṣbahānī reflecting the Arabized spelling of the older pronunciation of the city's name: once "Spahān," now "Eṣfahān" (see "Isfahan," in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, last updated July 19, 2016). The sound shift from /p/ to /f/ (a case of spirantization) is common in Persian, and the example of al-Iṣ-

Qays and Lubnā live on as legends today thanks to a set of poems and stories that circulated orally and in writing, not only because they are beautiful, but because they carry names. There are countless love poems in Arabic that we fail to remember today in large part because the beloved lacks a name, and without a name, it is hard to get a story going. Al-Iṣfahānī begins with the poet's name and genealogy, so from the very start the audience realizes that they are in for a history. Al-Iṣfahānī was separated from the historical events of the story by ten generations and 1000 kilometers, but he makes a point of telling us that he has followed a historical method diligently and without bias (p. 128 [En]; 181 [Ar]):

> Several of our teachers informed me about Qays and Lubnā, his wife, in stories both connected and disconnected, in reports either scattered or properly arranged. I have put them all together to make a coherent text, except those isolated reports that could not be incorporated in the ordered narration, so I have mentioned them separately.

Al-Iṣfahānī's method is at its most visible when he lists the names of the experts and historians who are the sources for his history and when he reports contradicting details or accounts.[10] The coherent story that we get is the one that his informants broadly agree on, but he also includes outliers for the sake of completeness (p. 129 [En]; 181 [Ar]):

> I have quoted everything that is generally agreed upon in a continuous narrative, and every divergent motif wherever it fits in, duly attributed to its sources.

We also find al-Iṣfahānī citing written texts as his source a couple of times in the story, as in: "The following is found in a book by Ibn al-Naṭṭāḥ [who died in 866]" (p. 149 [En]; 201 [Ar], and p. 148 [En]; 200 [Ar] for another example). Al-Iṣfahānī's use of written sources is an indication of the fame that Qays and Lubnā's story had achieved by the tenth century. There is a personal example of this when al-Iṣfahānī shares something that he heard from his uncle (p. 136 [En]; 189 [Ar]). In another example of later generations' appreciation, we're told that the scholar Abū al-Sāʾib "swore he would not rest before he memorized" two lines of Qays's poetry after hearing them for the first time (p. 144 [En]; 196 [Ar]).

In addition to the historical sources that al-Iṣfahānī names, many scholars consider the poems themselves to be a source for the narrative. A nice way of getting students to read closely before a discussion section is to ask them to identify 2–3 prose anecdotes that are clearly inspired by events mentioned in one of Qays's poems. Students will intuit that poems can circulate in a way that stories cannot due to meter and rhyme, but I would argue that we do not need to impose categories like canonical and apocryphal onto the different layers of a text when encountering it for the first time. Some elements of the story are unique and bear no relation to what we find in the poems, and in the case of some poems, they may

bahānī with a /b/ (standing in for /p/ in Arabic transliteration) shows that it was not the immediate result of Arab colonization as is sometimes claimed.

10. Hilary Kilpatrick has done a thorough analysis of these informants in "*Aḫbār manẓūma*: The Romance of Qays and Lubnā in the Aġānī," in *Festschrift Ewald Wagner zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Wolfhart Heinrichs and Gregor Schoeler, 2:350–61 (Beirut: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1994). See also Sebastian Günther, "Assessing the Sources of Classical Arabic Compilations: The Issue of Categories and Methodologies," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 32, no. 1 (2005): 75–98; and the foundational study by Manfred Fleischhammer, *Quellenuntersuchungen zum Kitāb al-Aġānī* (Halle: Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, 1965).

have become attributed to Qays after the story became popular. The presence of poems in the story will seem peculiar at first, but that makes it very generative for discussions and debates about the history of the text's composition and its role as an anthology of Qays's poetry. I encourage students to interrogate their genre expectations and use the text as an opportunity to ask whether there are analogous moments of lyricism in other narratives that they know well (see the discussion of melodrama below).

A Pastoral?

There are two well-known genres that may help students understand what is happening in the story of Qays and Lubnā.[11] The first type is "pastoral," which describes visual and narrative artworks that represent the life of rural communities, especially shepherds. There are well-known musical examples, too, like Beethoven's Sixth Symphony (1808). Pastoral may strike some people as a European genre because of all the bucolic oil paintings clogging up museum galleries, but the long history of the genre is more interesting than that. Some of the people depicted alongside domesticated animals in Neolithic Rock art from several millennia ago may be shepherds, and the Crook and Flail, two objects symbolizing Ancient Egyptian kingship, were adapted from pastoral tools.[12] Closer to the period and region in which Qays and Lubnā would have lived, we find a shepherd with his flock in a gorgeous Byzantine mosaic dating to the sixth century CE in the Diakonikon Baptistry of Moses Memorial Church on Mount Nebo in Jordan.[13] In the Arabic-speaking context, shepherds are usually referred to as Bedouin, pastoral semi-nomads who live and roam in desert and semi-desert settings, but when they appear in Classical Arabic stories, they are usually not on the move as the stories are often set in an oasis, wadi, or other settlement where water (and other people) can be found. In another line by that most famous of *ʿUdhrī* poets, Majnūn Laylā, the pastoral worldview is unmistakable:

> We were young; together we grazed our herds. How I wish
> we'd always stayed small, us and our herd.[14]

Does that sound like something a shepherd might say? Or does it sound like someone's idea of what a shepherd would say?[15]

11. See also Ruqayya Yasmine Khan, *Bedouin and ʿAbbāsid Cultural Identities: The Arabic Majnūn Laylā Story* (London: Routledge, 2020), 120–25; and Jaroslav Stetkevych's famous study of early Arabic poetry *The Zephyrs of Najd* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

12. See Maria Guagnin et al., "Hunters and Herders: Exploring Neolithic Transition in the Rock Art of Shuwaymis, Saudi Arabia," *Archaeological Research in Asia* 4 (2015): 3–16. Linda Evans has drawn an interesting comparison between the arrangement of sheep in Middle Egyptian tomb paintings and the Good Shepherd motif, which was dominant in early Christian art in Rome. See Linda Evans, "The Good Shepherd's Flock: Insights from Ancient Egyptian Art," in *Dust, Demons and Pots: Studies in Honour of Colin A. Hope*, ed. Ashten R. Warfe, James C. R. Gill, Caleb R. Hamilton, Amy J. Pettman, and David A. Stewart, 177–89 (Leuven: Peeters, 2020).

13. Michele Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, ed. Patricia M. Bikai and Thomas A. Dailey (Amman: American Center of Oriental Research, 1993), 135, 146.

14. See original in al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī* (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb, 1927–74), 2:10; 2:11. See also Adam Talib, "Fathers and Husbands," in *Arabic Humanities, Islamic Thought: A Festschrift for Everett K. Rowson*, ed. Joseph E. Lowry and Shawkat M. Toorawa, 233–55 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 237.

15. See Khan, *Bedouin and ʿAbbāsid Cultural Identities*, esp. ch. 5.



Fig. 1. Frederick Goodall (1822–1904), *The Ploughman and the Shepherdess: Time of the Evening Prayer* (1897). Tate, Presented by subscribers 1898. Photo: Tate.

In literature, the setting and subject matter of pastoral were already well established when the Latin poet Virgil (d. 19 BCE) was writing his *Eclogues*, and I cite that famous example here for two reasons: (1) Virgil's shepherds compose and recite poems just like the *ʿUdhrī* poets do, and (2) Virgil's poetic narratives have been interpreted as a comment on historical events in his day.[16] It's important for us to consider why a historian like al-Iṣfahānī and his contemporaries, who were urban Muslims in a wealthy and expansive empire, were so interested in the lives of eloquent shepherds from the Arabian Peninsula. Eloquence played a big part, for sure, as Qays's poems were remembered, recited, and sung for centuries after his death, sparking curiosity about his biography. But in addition to being fans of Qays's poetry, we might consider that al-Iṣfahānī and his peers were also interested in the story of Qays, Lubnā, and their society because it reflected a setting and a way of life that seemed to them more innocent and intuitive than their own.[17]

16. L. P. Wilkinson, "Virgil and the Evictions," *Hermes* 94, no. 3 (1966): 320–24.

17. See further Rina Drory, "The Abbasid Construction of the Jahiliyya: Cultural Authority in the Making," *Studia Islamica* 83 (1996): 33–49; and Peter Webb, "Cry Me a *Jāhiliyya*: Muslim Reconstructions of Pre-Islamic

Melodrama

The other genre that I highlight for students is melodrama. Usually used as a pejorative, melodrama describes a narrative work that features moments of heightened emotion and sentimentality. This may be achieved by impassioned dialogue, non-diegetic or diegetic sound, singing or soliloquies, sudden alterations in narrative pace, etc. In addition to these structural elements, melodrama often externalizes a character's psychology in an exaggerated fashion—or what appears to us now as exaggerated since modernism prides itself on representing interiority. The characters in the story of Qays and Lubnā remain a mystery in many ways, and even when al-Iṣfahānī clues us into their motivations, their choices can appear rash or extreme. Characters like Lubnā, Qays's father Dharīḥ, and al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī are all pivotal to the plot, but their motivations remain unexplored or flat. I encourage students to pay close attention to moments of tension and conflict and to effusions of emotion and ask them to make a note of any feelings or sensations they have while reading. I conclude my introduction by asking students to look at some images—to eschew verbal descriptions momentarily—in order to understand how the attributes of the *ʿUdhrī* poet-lover and beloved have been figured in history.

Images of Passion

As there are no illustrations of Qays and Lubnā that I know of, I use the much more famous pair of Qays (Majnūn) and Laylā to help students understand the iconography of *ʿUdhrī* romance. These images testify to the enduring popularity of the Majnūn and Laylā story, and the figure of the doomed lover. I ask students to pay special attention to characterization in the representation of human forms and draw their attention to the presence of (non-human) animals in all of these images, as that is a topic we return to in a later lesson.

Guiding Questions

- How do each of these images "localize" and "update" the legend for viewers?
- What do these images tell us about the more famous Qays (Majnūn), his health, and mental condition?
- What kind of relationship is established visually between Qays (Majnūn) and non-human animals?

Arabian Culture — A Case Study," in *Islam at 250: Studies in Memory of G. H. A. Juynboll*, ed. Petra M. Sijpesteijn and Camilla Adang, 235–80 (Leiden: Brill, 2020).



Fig. 2. "Majnun in the Wilderness," ca. 1600, Mughal India, from an album of Niẓāmī's Khamsa, The Katherine Kittredge McMillan Memorial Fund, 85.80; image credit: Minneapolis Institute of Art, CC PDM



Fig. 3. "Majnūn at Laylā's Grave," ca.1563, Mughal India, from an illustrated manuscript of Niẓāmī's Laylī o Majnūn, Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Pers. d. 102, f. 105b.
image credit: Bodleian Libraries, CC BY-NC 4.0



Fig. 4.
"Layla and Majnun in the Wilderness with Animals," ca. 1590–1600, attributed to Sanwalah (Indian, active ca. 1580–1600), from a Khamsa of Amir Khusrau Dihlavi, The Cleveland Museum of Art, gift in honor of Madeline Neves Clapp; gift of Mrs. Henry White Cannon by exchange; bequest of Louise T. Cooper; Leonard C. Hanna Jr. Fund; from the Catherine and Ralph Benkaim Collection, 2013.301



Fig. 5. Oil painting of Majnūn and Laylā, eighteenth century, attributed to Shiraz, from the Metropolitan Museum collections (1987.355.1)



Fig. 6. Majnūn and Laylā at the opening ceremony of the 2015 European Games held in Baku, Azerbaijan. image credit: Kremlin.ru, CC BY 4.0

Having discussed the text's author and his trusted informants, ways of understanding its style and polyvocality, and the transformation of powerful emotions into bodily signs, students can now read the story with the benefit of more contextual information and focus. As it includes many named individuals, I provide students with a list of characters (see below) to help them remember important details. Some of the points raised in this introductory section could be presented to students as questions to guide their reading. In the lessons that follow, the story is broken down into two sections for analysis: the plot (see Lesson 2) and the poetry-suffused romance section following the couple's divorce (see Lessons 3 and 4). In Lesson 5, we return to the plot section to delve more deeply into its legal and social contexts. For the sake of time, Lessons 2 and 5 could be presented to students after they have read through the text once on their own. The next lesson focuses on the structure of the text, which will bring us back to the question of its composition, authorial intervention, and the relationship of prose and poetry.

List of Characters

Qays's Family

Qays b. Dharīḥ: a young man from the tribe of Kināna, who likely died around 689. He is an only child.

Dharīḥ: Qays's father

Qays's unnamed mother: al-Iṣfahānī gives us her father's name and that of one of her brothers. She nursed al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī when he was an infant.

al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib: Qays's milk-brother, a grandson of the prophet Muḥammad, and son of the prophet's daughter Fāṭima and his cousin ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, the fourth caliph. His martyrdom is commemorated every year on ʿĀshūrāʾ.

The Fazāra (North Arabian tribe)

Lubnā: Qays's second wife, who shares a name with his first wife. He meets her during his travels after his divorce.

Lubnā's Brother: He sees Qays as a desirable relation and encourages him to marry his sister.

Lubnā's Family

Lubnā: a young woman from the tribe of Kaʿb b. Khuzāʿa, early allies of the Prophet Muḥammad.

al-Ḥubāb: Lubnā's father

Lubnā's second husband: a resident of Medina. Two identities are proposed in the text. The first is **Khālid b. Ḥilliza**, a member of the Ghaṭafān tribe, and the other is an unnamed male relative of **Kathīr b. al-Ṣalt al-Kindī.**

Other Characters

Ibn Abī ʿAtīq: patron of poets and singers in early Islamic Medina and a great-grandson of Abū Bakr, the first caliph.

Muʿāwiya: the first Umayyad caliph, ruling from Damascus.

Yazīd: the caliph's son, who would later become caliph himself.

Marwān b. al-Ḥakam: the governor of Medina, who would later become caliph for a brief time.

Burayka: a wealthy woman of Medina.

Ḥammāda: A Bedouin woman who was an erstwhile neighbor of Qays and his family.

Lesson 2: Plot and Composition

Lesson Summary

- Two versions of the story
- A postmodern version
- The place of poetry
- Where does the story unfold?

In this lesson, I highlight moments of authorial intervention and meta-fictional comment because I am primarily interested in the text from the perspective of literary studies. A historian, or another instructor pressed for time, might prefer to incorporate the discussion of social and legal contexts covered in Lesson 5 at this point as well. For me, analyzing the construction of the text is essential for understanding the interplay of prose and poetry, so that gets sustained attention here. I also include information about the locations mentioned in the text, though that would also fit in Lesson 1 or Lesson 5. Because I teach in an Arab university where most students have encountered famous examples of the literary tradition in school textbooks in a digested and simplified form, I put special emphasis on the original formats and presentation contexts of primary sources.

The Long and the Short of It

We begin this lesson by simplifying the plot of Qays and Lubnā's tragic love story before considering in detail how al-Iṣfahānī presents it to us. The following is based on pp. 129–32 of the English translation:

- Qays, a young Arabian tribesman, falls in love with Lubnā, a woman from another tribe, but his father Dharīḥ refuses to let him marry an outsider. Qays asks his illustrious friend (and quasi-brother) al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib to intervene on his behalf and he does, which leaves Dharīḥ with no other option but to concede to the marriage.
- After the couple are married, Qays falls ill. The illness appears serious enough to make Qays's parents worry about their son's mortality and the fact that he and Lubnā haven't had any children. Dharīḥ demands that his son marry one of his cousins, a long-standing wish, or that he have a child with an enslaved woman.
- When Qays refuses, Dharīḥ demands that Qays divorce Lubnā, and he takes a vow that he will stand in the hot sun until Qays obeys his command. After a period of time, Qays divorces Lubnā. Qays soon becomes ill—heartsick and "possessed" this time— and he will remain in that state for the rest of his life.

Compare the above to the biography of Qays that we find in an earlier source, *On Poetry and Poets* (*Kitāb al-Shiʿr wa-l-shuʿarāʾ*), by Ibn Qutayba, who died in 889:

> Qays and Lubnā were married, and then he divorced her. After the divorce, he couldn't get over her, and his love for her only grew. He used to pass by her home (keeping it a secret from his family), so her father married her to a man from the Ghaṭafān tribe. Qays continued to visit Lubnā and her new husband, so her father went to Muʿāwiya and told him what Qays had been doing. Muʿāwiya sent Qays a message telling him that he would be signing his own death warrant if he were to visit Lubnā again.[18]

This version of Qays and Lubnā's story is even more condensed, amounting to only four laconic lines in the printed edition. Students may feel that al-Iṣfahānī has rushed through the plot of the romance, so they should compare his version to Ibn Qutayba's to get an idea of how the story has expanded to include a "backstory" before its conventional beginning, i.e., the couple's divorce.

In al-Iṣfahānī's much longer version of the story, the marriage and its unhappy conclusion serve almost as exposition (an introduction to the main characters, settings, and major themes of a work). The remainder of the story (pp. 132–65 [En]) follows the events of Qays's and, to a certain extent, Lubnā's lives after they split up. In this longer section, al-Iṣfahānī includes conflicting versions of events, as well as some alternative accounts of what we've already been told, such as a woman named Ḥammāda's eye-witness account of Qays's conflict with his father (pp. 135–36 [En]; 188–89 [Ar]).[19] When it comes to the end of Qays and Lubnā's unhappy lives, al-Iṣfahānī tells us explicitly that there are multiple and conflicting accounts of their deaths (p. 164 [En]; 219 [Ar]):

> There are different versions of how the story of Qays and Lubnā ended. Most of the transmitters say that they both died while they were separated. Some say that he died before her and that when she heard this she died from grief. Others say, rather, that she died before him and that he died afterward of grief.

By including the names of his informants, recounting multiple and conflicting versions of events, and framing the entire story as the product of careful and inconclusive forensic history, al-Iṣfahānī's narrative reads to us today as almost postmodern. If the students know Arabic, they may find the re-imagined version presented in the box below thought-provoking.

18. Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb al-Shiʿr wa-l-shuʿarāʾ*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1958), 2:628. Fleischhammer and Kilpatrick point out that the version of the text that we have today is likely different from the one that al-Iṣfahānī knew.

19. See also Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā Thaʿlab, *Majālis Thaʿlab*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1948), 1:237–38.

When Qays and Lubnā Went Postmodern

I mention postmodern narrative to get you thinking about how al-Iṣfahānī put his version of the legend of Qays and Lubnā together, but there is an actual postmodern version of the story of Qays and Lubnā that makes for entertaining viewing, if you know Arabic. The 1988 Syrian television program *Iḥtimālāt* (Possibilities), directed by ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Kōkash (1942–2020), revisits well-known historical figures and tales through a combination of dramatizations of modernized-Classical Arabic anecdotes and the intervention and participation of two modern-day television hosts, a man and woman whose role is to guide their guests to different outcomes, the "possibilities" of the show's title. In the episode devoted to Qays and Lubnā ("Qays b. Dharīḥ," screenplay by Riyāḍ Naʿsān Āghā), several of the characters come to life: Qays, Lubnā (1) and her father, Qays's mother and father, and Lubnā (2). We see how things might have been: Lubnā (2) gets jealous when she overhears Qays's poetry about Lubnā (1); Qays's mother fights with his ex-wife and new wife simultaneously; and Lubnā (1) outlines her conditions for getting back with Qays, including the modern demand of a house separate from his parents. You can see what I've been calling melodrama quite clearly whenever the actor playing Qays (Jihād Saʿd) recites poetry. He turns away from the person he's been speaking to and is framed in a close-up as he looks into the distance.

The Place of Poetry

It is in the much longer post-divorce section of the story that we get most of Qays's poetry, which as we've discussed was the source of his fame and curiosity about his life and love affair.

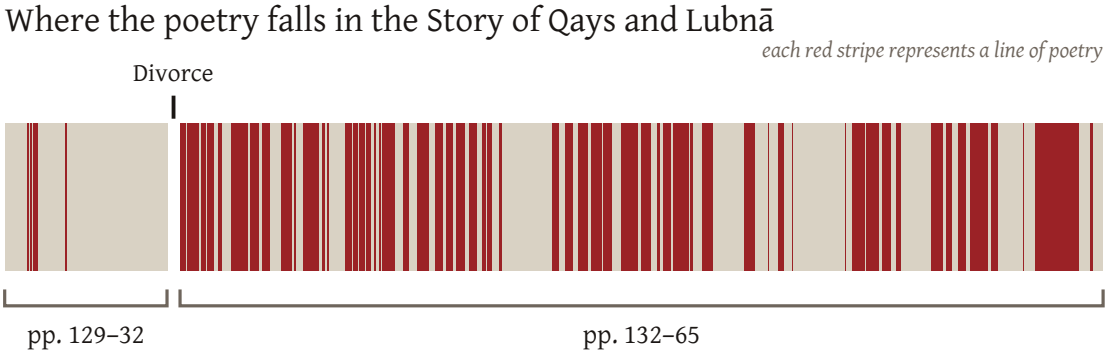


Fig. 7. Where the poetry falls in the story of Qays and Lubnā; visualization created in Python using PyMuPDF and Matplotlib

In a deliciously meta-fictional moment, al-Iṣfahānī tells us that Qays's poetry was popular and controversial during his lifetime, which caused conflict between Lubnā and her second husband (pp. 154–55 [En]; 208–9 [Ar]):

> Lubnā's husband rebuked and reproached her, saying, "You have caused a scandal for me, being mentioned in this way."
>
> But she replied, angrily, "Man, I swear by God I did not marry you because I wanted you or your possessions! And you were not deceived about me. You knew that I was married to him before, and that he was forced to divorce me. By God, I only agreed to remarry when they threatened to make him an outlaw if he visited our tribe. I was afraid that his passion would move him to risk his life and be killed; so I married you. Now it is up to you: divorce me; I don't need you."
>
> The husband did not reply. He began to come to her with girls of Medina, who would sing Qays's poems to her, hoping to be reconciled to her. But she only became more estranged from him. She would cry inconsolably whenever she heard any of these songs.

The reason I say that this scene is meta-fictional is because the narrative tells us that the characters in the story listened to songs based on Qays's poems just as al-Iṣfahānī's audience were used to doing. Likewise, Lubnā has a strong emotional reaction to Qays's verses as perhaps al-Iṣfahānī and his audience did. The words themselves are powerful, but they are rendered even more powerful when we imagine Lubnā herself hearing them. Her impatient and unashamed reaction to her new husband's criticism is also one of the clearest expressions of her emotional life in a narrative that often portrays her as passive and enigmatic.

A lot of attention is paid in the story to Qays's emotional reactions and psychological torment both before and after he divorces Lubnā, but he is not the only character whose emotions overwhelm him. Lubnā is often seen crying in reaction to events that seem beyond her control. After she confesses her love to Qays early in the story (p. 129 [En]; 182 [Ar]), we don't hear from her again until the couple are on the verge of divorcing and she utters the foreshadowing line, "Qays, do not obey your father or else you will perish and cause me to perish too" (p. 131 [En]; 184 [Ar]). Lubnā doesn't talk very much in the story at all, but when she does, she often plays the role of the reasonable and upright one in contrast to Qays, the irrational hysteric. After the couple divorces, many people, including Lubnā, warn Qays that he is acting inappropriately by pursuing her and lamenting his fate. "You are making an exhibition of yourself and making a scandal of me!" (p. 137 [En]; 190 [Ar]), Lubnā tells him at one point. When Lubnā's father complains about Qays's behavior, the caliph sends a message to the governor of Medina "decree[ing] that Qays's blood could be shed with impunity if he [continued to harass] her" (p. 145 [En]; 197–98 [Ar], see also p. 148 [En]; 200 [Ar]). Groups of unnamed men and women also try to get Qays to come to his senses, but to no avail. In some of his most famous lines, he claims that social stigma and threats of physical violence cannot stop him as his mind will forever remain free (p. 148 [En]; 200–201 [Ar]):

They may bar me from her, they may slander to keep
me from her, a commander may issue a threat:
But they won't stop my eyes from crying forever,
and they cannot remove what I keep in my mind.

In Lesson 3, we will discuss Qays's poems more fully, and in order for students to appreciate them and their important role in the plot, this lesson has focused on the strange composition of the story text itself. The plot is recounted quickly and what follows (after p. 132 in the English version) is a hybrid text that incorporates Qays's poems (like an anthology) while also interweaving the threads that we have drawn students' attention to already: the amplification of certain poetic lines into elements in the plot, the affective and destructive role of love poetry in Qays and Lubnā's relationship, and the popularity of these poems in al-Iṣfahānī's lifetime.

Where do the events of the story take place?

Al-Iṣfahānī informs us (p. 129 [En]; 181 [Ar]) that Qays's family lived in Medina, or around Medina, or—according to one informant—in Sarif north of Mecca. His interaction with al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī and Ibn Abī ʿAtīq likely took place in Medina. Later in the story, al-Iṣfahānī tells us that Qays went to visit a friend in Medina even though he'd told his Fazārī in-laws that he wanted to visit his family. Qays meets Lubnā and her father while traveling, but the area where they live is not specified. It is a "watering-place" (p. 148 [En]; 200 [Ar]), which makes sense when you consider how Qays and Lubnā met for the first time. In the same verse that implies that Qays lived in Sarif, he says that Lubnā lived in al-ʿAqīq, which al-Iṣfahānī informs us is a valley in al-Yamāma (in the Najd region). Lubnā is said to have moved to Medina to join her new husband when she remarried. Both Qays and Lubnā go on pilgrimage to Mecca in the story.

Another way of thinking about the location of these legendary events is to think about them in relation to the author and his audience. The story takes place in the near past (a couple of centuries before the author's lifetime) in a region that has been prestigious for Muslims and lovers of Arabic from at least as early as the sixth century. Al-Iṣfahānī and his peers, who lived in cities like Baghdad, Basra, Aleppo, and even further away in Rayy and Cordoba, were very interested in Hijazi culture and history, and they devoted colossal energies to collecting and preserving it. *Kitāb al-Aghānī* is actually a major source for the history of Medina, or the history of Muslim memories of Medina, to put it a different way.

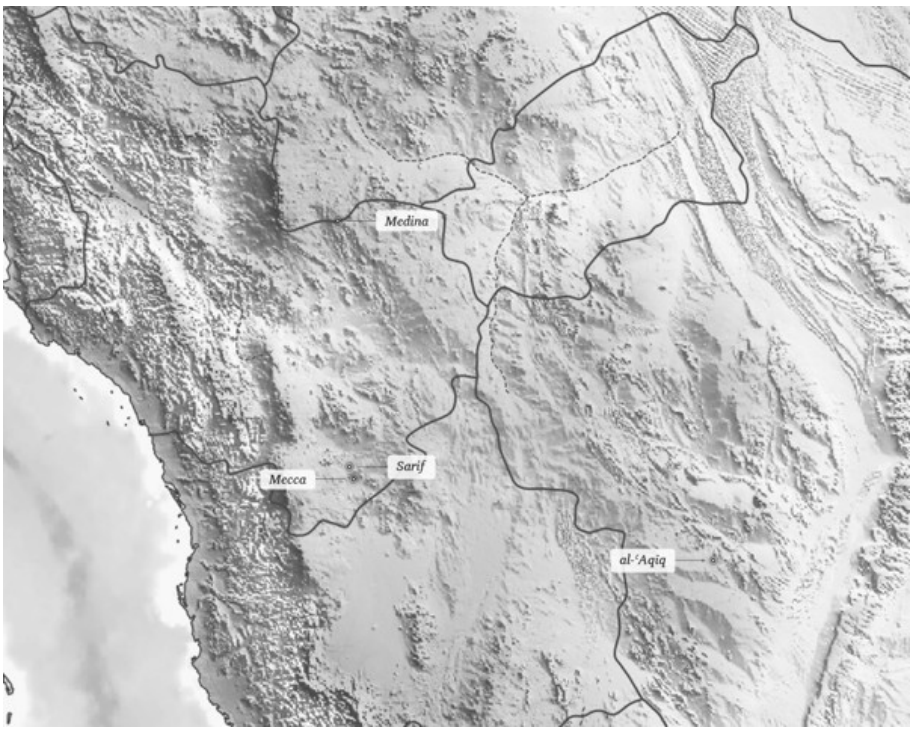


Fig. 8. Map adapted by author based on Saudi Arabia relief location map by Carport using map data from administrative map by NordNordWest,
both released under CC BY-SA 3.0, plotted locations added in Python

Lesson 3: Love Songs

Lesson Summary

- Qays's fame
- The poems: hypotexts or songs?
- An ʿUdhrī-inspired YouTube playlist
- Song lyrics by Qays b. Dharīḥ (with discussion questions)

This lesson builds on the preliminary work done in Lessons 1 and 2, and by now students should have a good grasp of the plot, main characters, setting, themes, and especially the unfamiliar structure of the text. I believe that these topics represent an important grounding that is necessary before turning to the more complex landscape of poetry, emotion, and social regulation, which are the subjects of the remaining lessons. In this lesson, we focus on the text of Qays's poetry in particular and its connection to the musical tradition, which is one of the key pathways of its circulation during the author's lifetime. I include some songs that you can introduce to students by way of atmosphere and to show them that sung poetry remains the most popular form of poetry performance in the Arab world. This lesson asks students to think about poetry as both a source for the story of Qays and Lubnā and a force in their lives.

Qays's Fame

Qays's biographical and literary fame rests on his poetry, and that was what motivated al-Iṣfahānī to gather details about his life. There are two types of evidence in the story that reflect Qays's fame as a poet in the author's day. The first is seen in the anecdotes about erudite men in Iraqi cities who were interested in his poetry and able to quote it from memory (see several mentions of Abū al-Sā'ib al-Makhzūmī in the story). This is, of course, connected to what al-Iṣfahānī tells us at the very beginning (p. 128 [En]; 181 [Ar]: "Several of our teachers informed me about Qays and Lubnā..."), but there is an important difference between the totality of a society's historical knowledge and those people and events that capture the public's imagination. Because al-Iṣfahānī and his interlocutors represented some of the most educated and literate men in their community, we should not assume that all their interests were shared widely. By the same token, there was a lot of popular culture that al-Iṣfahānī and his peers were ignorant of as men, as adults, as Muslims, as city-dwellers, and as cultural elites and snobs.

The second type of evidence for Qays's literary fame brings us closer to this poorly understood and mostly vanished popular culture that rarely made it into Classical Arabic texts. That is, the enduring popularity of some of Qays's poems set to music. Before we talk about Qays's fame as a lyricist, let's look at how the story of Qays and Lubnā represents singing (p. 154 [En]; 208 [Ar]):

> The affair of Qays became widely known in Medina. Al-Gharīḍ, Maʿbad, Mālik and others sang his poems and there was nobody, high or low, who was not greatly moved when they heard it, feeling sorry for Qays's suffering.

There's another example of singing in the story that I also find very interesting, but it is easy to miss because al-Iṣfahānī underplays the musicality of the moment (pp. 145–46 [En]; 198 [Ar]):

> On the evening that [Lubnā] was taken to her [new] husband the women of the tribe recited (*yaqulna*):
>
> Darling Lubnā's husband
>
> has no one who excels him.
>
> He's privileged above all others
>
> by what she nightly tells him.
>
> But Qays is dead while yet alive,
>
> he's slain, midst women wailing, crying.
>
> May God not keep him far from us;
>
> Away with those who say he's dying!

The women are clearly chanting these lines (in the *hazaj* meter) as part of Lubnā's wedding procession, and even if we assume that there was no musical accompaniment—or nothing beyond the percussive structure of tambourines or clapping—this is a song. It may be the product of al-Iṣfahānī's or an informant's imagination, or it could be a very well remembered artifact of an otherwise lost, communally produced and ephemeral popular culture.[20] It is, at any rate, another example of Qays and Lubnā's conflictual love affair negotiated in sung verse.

Hypotexts

In principle, it was the fact that musicians were performing songs based on Qays's poetry in tenth-century Baghdad that inspired al-Iṣfahānī to collect details of his biography and marriage. If that is indeed how the story came together, then the songs are a kind of hypotext to the prose narrative's hypertext. A cynical reader like me might say that a line of Qays's poetry ("I do not love your earth; I kiss / the trace of her who trod the dust") was the inspiration for the scene in which he "kissed the place where she used to sit, and her footprints" (p. 134 [En]; 186 [Ar]). While the impulse behind that way of engaging with the text is historically minded, it is anachronistic in its own way because more people in history read the prose and poetry as an organic whole than read them as palimpsestic counterpoints the way a scholar might today.

I have suggested melodrama as a way out of this impasse, which focuses more on how the author composed a text than how audiences received it. If the story is a kind of melodrama, then the poems are not mere hypotexts, or inspiration for the prose narrative that encircles them. It seems obvious that there are images, metaphors, events, and locations mentioned in Qays's poems that may have needed explanation, interpretation, and glossing to make sense to an audience who belonged to a very different place and time. But if these stories were living stories, so to speak: if they captured the audience's imagination, inspired people to see themselves as Qays-es and Lubnā-s when they got into love trouble, helped them understand the nature of their children's or siblings' obstinance and intensity, then the poems and the prose probably fit together quite nicely. In a melodrama, the plot slows at key moments to allow characters to communicate their intense feelings, to rhapsodize, lament, swoon, and sing. I encourage students to think of the poems not as a digression, or as the revealed substrate of a historical core, but as a pause and a demand for attention and receptivity.

20. On women's *ṣaff* songs in contemporary Saudi Arabia, see Lisa Urkevich, *Music and Traditions of the Arabian Peninsula: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 33–36. On music in the Abbasid period, see George Dimitri Sawa, *Music Performance Practice in the Early ʿAbbāsid Era, 132–320 AH / 750–932 AD* (Ottawa: Institute of Mediaeval Music, 2004); George Dimitri Sawa, *Musical and Socio-Cultural Anecdotes from Kitāb al-Aghānī al-Kabīr: Annotated Translations and Commentaries* (Leiden: Brill, 2019); Eckhard Neubauer, "Musiker am Hof der frühen Abbāsiden" (PhD diss., University of Frankfurt am Main, 1965); and Dwight F. Reynolds, *Medieval Arab Music and Musicians: Three Translated Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

There are, by my count, 299 verses attributed to Qays b. Dharīḥ in the story of Qays and Lubnā as it appears in *Kitāb al-Aghānī*. Of these, only a very small number were ever sung, so it would be going too far to say that al-Iṣfahānī's interest in Qays was primarily musical.[21] Of the poems that al-Iṣfahānī marks as "Song" (*ṣawt*), meaning that they were performed in his day, it appears that only a few of the verses were sung, e.g., on pp. 134–35 [En]; 187 [Ar], al-Iṣfahānī gives us a ten-line poem by Qays and explains that only the first five lines of the poem were performed as a song by Ibn Muḥriz.[22] This suggests that the performer may have repeated a single line a few times, stretching it out, playing with prosody and emphasis, reprising the lines in couplets or triplets over the course of a song performance. Examples from this *ʿUdhrī*-inspired playlist of modern songs illustrate that technique well:

- The Lebanese singer Fairuz singing verses by Majnūn Laylā (Qays b. al-Mulawwaḥ) in "Uḥibbu min al-Asmāʾ" (1999).
- The Iraqi singer Kadim Al Sahir's classic hit "Anā wa-Laylā" (1997, lyrics by Ḥasan al-Marwānī).
- The Syrian master Ṣabāḥ Fakhrī's classic prelude "Yā Lāʾimī bi-l-Hawā al-ʿUdhrī" (ca. 1977).

If students have enough Arabic to identify words in the first example here sung by Fairuz, I would ask them to respond to the following discussion prompts in pairs:

- Represent the repetition of lines in a diagram. Do certain lines or phrases get repeated more than others?
- How does the singer divide the line of poetry (*bayt*) into sung phrases?
- Do these divisions change the meaning of any of the lines or introduce suspense?
- What happens in the song when Fairuz is silent?
- Does the song contain an example of something that "resembles her name?"

21. I count twenty-four songs in total plus the women's wedding song discussed above.

22. A "famous musician and singer of Mecca, who lived in the 1st–2nd/7th–8th centuries"; "Ibn Muḥriz," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam New Edition Online (EI-2 English)*, ed. P. J. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

Here is a list of the songs attributed to Qays. I ask students to look at some of these in detail and discuss them in small groups (see sample discussion questions below).

Song Lyrics by Qays b. Dharīḥ							
Song number	No. of Lines	English pp.	Arabic pp.	Song number	No. of Lines	English pp.	Arabic pp.
1	3	133	186	**13**	8	148	200–01
2	2	133–34	186	**14**	4	149–50 (unmarked)	202
3	10	134–35	187	**15**	5	152–53	205
4	4	135	187–88	**16**	20	154 (unmarked & untranslated)	207–08
5	3	138	191	**17**	2	156	210
6	3	140	193	**18**	4	157	211
7	4	141–42	194	**19**	2	157–58	211
8	3	142	194–95	**20**	4	159–60	214
9	2	142	195	**21**	2	160	215
10	2	143	196	**22**	2	160–61	215
11	4	146	198	**23**	4	161 (unmarked)	215
12	5	147	199	**24**	23	163–64	217–18

Discussion Questions

Song no. 8, three-line *dāliyya* (rhyming in D), meter: *al-Ṭawīl*

- What is the question that makes Qays recite this poem? How does the poem answer the question?
- How does the Qurʾan describe the formation of human beings? (See Qurʾan Surat al-Muʾminūn 23:12–14)

Song no. 23, four-line *fāʾiyya* (rhyming in F), meter: *al-Ṭawīl*

- How many different ways does Qays say he loves Lubnā?
- What gives rise to them? How do they manifest?

Song no. 3, ten-line *lāmiyya* (rhyming in L), meter: *al-Wāfir*

- To whom is the poet speaking at the beginning of the poem?
- What alternative reality does Qays imagine in this poem?

Song no. 4, four-line *ʿayniyya* (rhyming in ʿ), meter: *al-Khafīf*

- To whom is the poet speaking in this poem?
- What is the meaning of line 3?
- What are the events associated with Songs nos. 3 and 4? How is Qays behaving in this episode?

This lesson has focused on the importance of music and poetry in both Qays's life and his legacy. In the next lesson, we focus in particular on the topic of much of this poetry, love and heartbreak, and its connection to a history of theories about love and madness.

Lesson 4: Limerence and Heartbreak

Lesson Summary

- Limerence
- Classical Arabic love terminology
- Love-madness
- Qays as mother
- Lubnā as liver
- "Dead while yet alive"

Limerence

A crush, an infatuation, lovesickness, "puppy love," obsession, *zaolian* ("early love"), limerence.[23] There are lots of ways to describe intense romantic feelings usually associated with young people. I used to have to introduce students to the term "limerence" when I first started teaching this course, but now many of them know it from social media and "online material relating to limerence, such as threads and blogs wrestling with the question of when, and why, love might tip into obsession."[24] The term first appeared in

23. The song "Puppy Love" was written and sung by Paul Anka in 1960 and later revived by Donny Osmond in 1972. *Obsession* (dir. Curry Barker, 2025) is the name of a commercially successful recent horror film, which Matthew Schmitz has cited as an example of the emerging genre he calls "Heteropessimist Horror," *Compact* (May 31, 2026). On *zaolian*, see Yubin Shen, "Too Young to Date! The Origins of *Zaolian* (Early Love) as a Social Problem in 20th-century China," *History of Science* 53, no. 1 (2015): 86–101.

24. Molly Gorman, "Limerence: When a Crush Becomes Obsessive," *BBC* (February 12, 2026). See also Melinda Wenner Moyer, "This Kind of Obsessive Attraction Isn't Love. But it Has a Name," *The New York Times* (July 9, 2026).

Dorothy Tennov's 1979 book *Love and Limerence*, which set out to describe clinically the psychological experience of passionate love for the first time:

> ... I wanted to know what causes people to fall in love, whether some people are more likely than others to fall in love, what is the incidence of unhappy love, and how can we help people who are unhappy because of love.[25]

Pairing Tennov's analysis with Erich Fromm's normative prescriptions in *The Art of Loving* (1956) may generate a lively discussion.[26] For something closer to the history of emotions, students could read part of Lennard J. Davis's 2008 book *Obsession: A History* or dive straight into the intellectual history of psychology with Jay R. Greenberg and Stephen A. Mitchell's 1983 *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory*.[27] Students might have something to say about BYU's recent report on "young adults[']... romantic interactions with AI chatbot companions."[28]

Classical Arabic Words for Love

In addition to being foundational, I like talking about Tennov's work with students because it introduces the idea of terminology and différance—though I don't get Derridean in this class—and it conveniently leads us to another relevant piece of information that most of my students have learned from social media: Classical Arabic's many degrees of love.[29] Online, students are likely to have encountered a fixed system of graduated Arabic love terms, probably adapted from well known sources like Ibn Ḥazm's (d. 1064) *Ṭawq al-ḥamāma* or Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's (d. 1350) *Rawḍat al-muḥibbīn*.[30] If we set aside concerns about intellectual history, reification, and linguistic relativity for just a moment, these lists offer a fun opportunity to work with students on the idea of love as a topic in philosophy, and the

25. Dorothy Tennov, *Love and Limerence: The Experience of Being in Love* (1979; repr., Lanham, MD: Scarborough House, 1999), 6.

26. Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (1956; repr. New York: Harper Colophon, 1962).

27. Lennard J. Davis, *Obsession: A History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Jay R. Greenberg and Stephen A. Mitchell, *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

28. Brian J. Willoughby, Jason S. Carroll, Michael Toscano, Rebekah M. Hakala, and Katrina Morris, "Secret Soulmates: How AI Romantic Companions Are Starting to Impact Real-Life Romantic Relationships in Young Adulthood" (Wheatley Institute and Institute for Family Studies, 2026).

29. See inter alia the Infographic published on December 31, 2019, through the social media accounts (@arabicwords_0) of *Ḍād*.

30. See "the discussion of terms and their use" in Lois Anita Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love among the Arabs: The Development of the Genre* (New York: New York University Press, 1971), 87, where she identifies al-Kisāʾī's *Rawḍat al-ʿāshiq* as a "minor [terminological] landmark": "...it is the first (extant) work in the Arabic literature on the theory of profane love to give a systematic discussion of the nature of love, the names for it, and their derivation and meaning." And more recently, A. Z. Obiedat, "The Semantic Field of Love in Classical Arabic: Understanding the Subconscious Meaning Preserved in the *Ḥubb* Synonyms and Antonyms through Their Etymologies," in *The Beloved in Middle Eastern Literatures: The Culture of Love and Languishing*, ed. by Alireza Korangy, Hanadi al-Samman, and Michael C. Beard, 300–23 (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018).

absorption of philosophical discourse and literary expression into the "scientistic" veneer of psychology today. They are also an opportunity to get students to build their vocabularies, practice plurilingualism, and reflect on the relationship between a phenomenon and the imperfect words that describe it. While the controversial cliché about how many words for snow there are in Inuit languages has its own Wikipedia entry, Arabic words for love are presented only as an uncritical list.[31] A historically informed revision would make for a good class project, I think.

One doesn't really need to explain infatuation to young people, or to old people, because most of them recognize it, but song lyrics offer perhaps the quickest and most charged introduction to the subject matter: "Wouldn't It Be Nice" by The Beach Boys (1966) is a gorgeous example; "Tamallī maʿāk" by Amr Diab (lyrics by Aḥmad Mūsā, 2000) is pretty good, too.[32] I've had good luck in the past bringing in Taylor Swift songs, which are rich in narrative and dialogue, but one need not be so parochial.[33] For my purposes, I want students to reflect critically on the use of address in love songs (and poems) that represent infatuation:[34]

- Who is the "you" in the song?
- Does the referent of a pronoun change depending on who's singing or listening?
- Is the song about love or about being in love?
- Can the "you" hear the "I"?

This is your chance to play Eric Clapton's "Layla" (1970).[35] The song is a good entry point for a discussion of the two meanings of the word *shawq* ("longing"): fulfillment vs. anticipation, as explained by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya and helpfully summarized by Giffen.[36]

Love-Madness

The Wellcome Collection has a nice selection of images surveying the history of lovesickness that can be compared to the images of Majnūn that students looked at in Lesson 1.[37] Students should understand that in psychology (represented by Tennov) as in Arab-Islamic culture, the state of limerence or infatuation is involuntary and that thoughts of the beloved ("the

31. Compare Wikipedia [English], "Eskimo Words for Snow," and Wikipedia [Arabic], "Qāʾimat murādafāt al-ḥubb."

32. "Wouldn't It Be Nice," by Brian Wilson, Tony Asher, and Mike Love on The Beach Boys, *Pet Sounds*, Capitol, 1966; "Tamallī maʿāk," by Aḥmad Mūsā on Amr Diab, *Tamally Maʿāk*, ʿĀlam al-Fann, 2000.

33. e.g., "Love Story," by Taylor Swift on *Fearless*, Big Machine, 2008, and on *Fearless (Taylor's Version)*, Republic, 2021; and "But Daddy I Love Him," by Taylor Swift and Aaron Dessner on *The Tortured Poets Department*, Republic, 2024.

34. Apostrophe and *iltifāt* are terms of rhetoric connected to direct address, but they have distinct meanings and may distract from the point of this lesson.

35. "Layla," by Eric Clapton and Jim Gordon on Derek and the Dominos, *Layla and Other Assorted Love Songs*, Polydor/Atco, 1970. See also María Rosa Menocal, *Shards of Love: Exile and the Origins of Lyric* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), ch. 3.

36. Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love*, 93; see also Obiedat, "The Semantic Field."

37. Aisha Mazhar, "A Short History of Lovesickness," *Wellcome Collection*, Stories (February 11, 2020).

limerent object") dominate one's imagination. It's that cognitive hegemony that lends love its close association with madness. When we first meet Romeo at the beginning of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, he's moping because Rosaline, the girl he has a crush on, isn't interested in being wooed. At one point, he calls love "a madness most discreet."[38] In today's English, discreet may mean "hidden" or "private," but in Shakespeare's day, it meant "prudent," which paired with "madness" is clearly an oxymoron. Both meanings of the word "discreet" are worth thinking about in connection with Qays's experience of love-madness as there's nothing the least bit "private" or "prudent" about it! I wrote "love-madness" instead of "love and madness" because Qays's attachment to Lubnā is presented as involuntary, compulsive, and destructive, and I think the term could also apply to Romeo, who forgets all about Rosaline later that same day when he meets Juliet for the first time. "Holy Saint Francis, what a change is here!" the friar exclaims when Romeo tells him about his new beloved.[39]

Both Romeo and Qays are love-mad, but their passions manifest along very different lines. Where Romeo moves seamlessly from one infatuation to another in the space of a single day, Qays gets stuck on Lubnā forever. Neither of the young men is open to hearing advice from older men in their lives who care for them, though these characters are quite useful for readers trying to get their bearings.[40] We learn something important about Romeo when Friar Laurence tells him to moderate his ardor for Juliet: "Lo, here upon thy cheek the stain doth sit / Of an old tear that is not washed off yet."[41] And we learn something about Qays when he ignores the advice of the doctor who comes to treat him (pp. 141–43 [En]; 194–96 [Ar]). The doctor's advice is ignored in this case, but it does seem to be rooted in the practical wisdom of experience (p. 142 [En]; 195 [Ar]):

> "Thinking of any of her bad qualities and blemishes, and all the kinds of filth that are loathed by humans, will help you to forget her. That is how one gets over one's feelings."

Qays's response, "If I find fault with her I liken her unto the moon / when full and rising—that is blame enough" (p. 142 [En]; 195 [Ar]), reminds me of a great poem on love by W. H. Auden ("Heavy Date," 1939) that could be read in contrast with Qays's love poems:

> Crying for the moon is
> Naughtiness and envy,
> We can only love what—
> —ever we possess[42]

38. William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, edited by Barbara Mowat, Paul Werstine, Michael Poston, and Rebecca Niles (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, 2012–13), 1.1.200.

39. Ibid., 2.3.69.

40. On the problem of passion, see Jalal Abd Alghani, "Mediaeval Arabic Love Theory between Dissonance and Consonance: Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Zakariyyāʾ al-Rāzī and His Argument against ʿIshq," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 67, no. 3 (2014): 273–87.

41. Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, 2.3.79–80.

42. W. H. Auden, "Heavy Date," in *Collected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (New York: Vintage, 1991),

Possession, or the drive to possess, is a subtext underlying the story of Qays and Lubnā as symbolized by marriage, divorce, and persistent attachment. It is also there in the relationship between parents and their children as we'll discuss in the next lesson.

Qays as Mother

In the eye-witness account of Qays's erstwhile neighbor Ḥammāda (pp. 135–36 [En]; 188–89 [Ar]), she cites a poem of Qays's that expresses his feelings of possession and loss in particularly strong terms: Lubnā is (or was) a part of his body, and he misses her like a mother misses her child. This six-line poem brings together themes of possession, parenthood, and animal-human relations (pastoralism) in a striking way that students may find eye-opening. It's also a clear example of the thematic interlacing of prose and poetry (narrative and lyric) that I've mentioned above. Ḥammāda paints a picture of Qays as a young, and ostensibly naive and sensitive, shepherd who has a close relationship with his family's camel herd (pp. 135–36 [En]; 188 [Ar]):

> I was living next to the family of Dharīḥ, with a herd of camels—some of them looking after calves that were not their own, others with a dummy calf, others without any calves, and some followed by their own young. Dharīḥ's son, Qays, climbed on top of a hill, to see how the camels were doing and admire them.[43]

The four types of she-camel described here are:

- mothers nursing calves born to other mothers;
- mothers manipulated into producing milk by the presence of a dead calf's taxidermied body;[44]
- she-camels with no calves or juveniles present;
- mothers accompanied by their offspring.

By extension, the three types of young camels described in relation to nursing mothers are:

- calves nursed by a she-camel who is not their mother;
- calves that have been slaughtered and stuffed;
- calves and juveniles in their mother's tow.

In the poem that concludes Ḥammāda's story, after Qays has been compelled to divorce his wife, he describes himself as a she-camel who is fiercely attached to her young, living and dead, in a moving pastoral poem. "Such camels do not love more strongly than I," he says, pleading against an inverted-Cartesian-hierarchy of non-human and human animals. Students may recall Majnūn's close association with his non-human companions in the images they saw in the very first lesson.

259–62, at 261.

43. I think it's plausible to translate *fa-kāna Qays b. Dharīḥ ilā sharaf fī dhālika al-qaṭīʿ yanẓuru* as "Qays used to climb up to watch the herd" or "was in the habit of climbing up to watch the herd."

44. On the term *baww*, see Robyn Creswell, "Is Arabic Untranslatable?," *Public Culture* 28, no. 3 (2016): 447–56.

Lubnā as Liver

In the first line of that same poem, he compares Lubnā to one of his organs (p. 136 [En]; 188 [Ar]):

> O my heart that, broken, flies up from my body

Van Gelder has with good reason chosen to translate Qays's original "liver" (*kabid*) as "heart" here, but if time allows, I would discuss that choice with students. There is a long and informative article on the word *kabid* in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* by Maxime Rodinson where he makes two important points regarding the term: (1) it is often used synecdochically to refer to internal organs as a whole, and (2) "the liver, alongside the heart, was very widely regarded as the centre or one of the centres of psychic life."[45] Students may find it interesting to learn that passionate love was described in relation to diseases of these two organs as well: *shaghaf* (pericarditis) and *khilāba* (perihepatitis).[46] It's important that they learn that the metaphor of love as disease lives on, as in a well known poem by Forough Farrokhzad (1934–67) that ends on the line:

چون تب عشقم چنین افروختی لا جرم شعرم به آتش سوختی

> because you ignited in me the fever of love
>
> of course you have set my verse on fire
>
> (trans. Elizabeth T. Gray, Jr.)[47]

There are countless ways of expanding the discussion and analysis of Qays's love poems, emotions, and love-madness. The important points to get across are that Qays's love-madness:

- begins after the couple divorce
- is self-destructive
- and manifests as physical illness.

"Dead while yet alive"

More than once, Qays's separation from Lubnā is explained with reference to death. The women conveying Lubnā to her new husband call Qays "dead while yet alive" (p. 146 [En]; 198 [Ar]), and in his own poems he compares himself to both a grieving mother (p. 135 [En];

45. Maxime Rodinson, "Kabid," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam New Edition Online (EI-2 English)*, ed. P. J. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

46. Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love*, 92.

47. Furūgh Farrukhzād, "*ʿAshiqānih*," in *Tavallodī Dīgar: 1338–1342* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Murvārīd, 1353 [1974]), 60; Forough Farrokhzad, *Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season: Selected Poems*, trans. Elizabeth T. Gray, Jr. (New York: New Directions, 2022). See also Forugh Farrokhzad, *Io parlo dai confini della notte: tutte le poesie*, trans. Domenico Ingenito (Milan: Bompiani, 2023), 533. Moein sang an abridged version of the poem on his 1997 album *Panjereh* (Taraneh).

187 [Ar]) and an orphaned child (p. 146 [En]; 198 [Ar]). In many ways, Qays's love-madness presents conventionally: he can't sleep, has lost his appetite, is depressed and obsessed with his thoughts and memories of Lubnā; he sighs a lot, wanders off looking for her in the places where they used to meet, and is alienated from his family and community. The last symptom does not get enough attention in discussions of Arabic love theory, though the tradition is full of examples of heartbroken men acting out in anti-social ways, e.g.:

- Qays b. al-Mulawwaḥ (Majnūn Laylā) refuses to mate, disobeys his family, and abandons his community to live in the wilderness;
- Shahriyār, the tyrant at the center of *The 1001 Nights*, takes revenge on his unfaithful former wife—and womankind—by executing his latest bride at the dawn of each new day.

The anti-social rebellion of passionate lovers and the potential for them to cause harm to themselves, the women in their lives, and their families is a central theme of Qays's story and many other love narratives in the tradition. The final lesson considers society's reaction to passion and the poetry that expresses it.

Lesson 5: Social Regulation

Lesson Summary

- Social piety
- Inheritance law
- Filial piety and shade
- A modern adaptation

In this final lesson, I want to turn from the composition, tone, and theme of the work—which we have been exploring through frames like pastoral, forensic history, melodrama, and love-madness—to explore the conflict at the heart of the story in more detail. For the sake of analysis, it's helpful to pin down the conflict's external and internal manifestations:[48]

External: the threat to social order posed by passionate love[49]
Internal: the stakes of Qays and Lubnā's unhappiness

48. Compare with Leder, "The ʿUdhrī Narrative," 169: "There is a movement of gradual internalisation in the course of the story, induced by a change from exterior to interior obstacles, and this results in a transformation, or ascending refinement of love which often culminates in the lover's death."

49. Krystyna Skarżyńska-Bocheńska, "Qays et Lubnā: victoire de l'amour sur l'autorité du père et de la tribu," in *Authority, Privacy and Public Order in Islam: Proceedings of the 22nd Congress of L'Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants,* ed. Barbara Michalak-Pikulska and Andrzej Pikulski, 133–44 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), is a study of the story's social dimensions based on methodological assumptions that are different from those I've proposed in this module. It also offers a revisionist reading, which could make for a stimulating discussion with students interested in source-criticism.

The starkest and most enduring conflict in the story is the one between Qays and his parents. The other conflicts (between Qays and Lubnā; Qays and Lubnā's father, al-Ḥubāb; Qays and his Fazārī in-laws; Qays and the caliph; Lubnā and her new husband) all stem from that original conflict and can be understood as its unfortunate but predictable aftermath. Everything starts to go wrong in Qays's life after the young man insists on marrying Lubnā despite his parents' strong opposition. What makes the plot of the story so interesting is that the central conflict between Qays and his parents is introduced, then appears to get resolved, and finally resurfaces in a profoundly destructive way.

Social Piety

The reason that Qays's conflict with his father is resolved temporarily is the intervention of one of the prophet Muḥammad's grandsons. By virtue of his lineage and martyrdom, al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī has been venerated by Muslims for centuries, and we need not even get into the history of schisms in Islam because the Muslims in the story of Qays and Lubnā are united in their reverence for him. Both Qays and Lubnā's fathers obey him reflexively. At least outwardly. Qays's father eventually undermines the marriage that he had agreed to, and Lubnā's father has no trouble getting a death warrant for Qays from al-Ḥusayn's rival, the caliph Muʿāwiya.[50] Although the political history under the surface of the story is highly contentious, some students will recognize these names, and I think it is important to discuss the association of this story with early Islamic Medina and its outsized role in the formation of Islam as a caliphal empire and world religion.

Islam is a relatively new religion for the Muslims depicted in the story, with the events taking place around fifty to sixty years after the prophet Muḥammad and his supporters took refuge in Medina, where much of the story is set. This community of early Muslims was very influential for the development of Islamic law, especially for what is known as the Mālikī School. Mālik b. Anas (d. 795), the eponymous founder, is associated with the famous early *ḥadīth* collection known as *al-Muwaṭṭaʾ*, and there are some reports in "The Book on Divorce" (Book 29) that reflect or echo events in the story. These include topics, such as divorce when a husband is "terminally ill" (*marīḍ*) and re-marriage, e.g., it is not acceptable for a man to divorce a woman and then prevent her from moving on with her life, as Qays appears to want to do at some points in the story. Pregnancy and fertility are also connected to divorce in this chapter.[51]

50. On the representation of caliphs in Abbasid-era literature, see the recent article Zina Maleh, "Caliphs and Generic Representations of Ruling Power in al-Tanūkhī's *al-Faraj baʿda l-shidda*," *Journal of Abbasid Studies* (2026): 1–44.

51. See also Sara Verskin, *Barren Women: Religion and Medicine in the Medieval Middle East* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2021), esp. 105–7 ("Death of the Husband of the Childless Woman").

Inheritance Law

The question of Islamic inheritance law comes up more than once, so students should know that the rules regarding inheritance are expressed in fractions (shares of the estate). The word that is used in the story, *māl* translated as "wealth" (p. 129 [En]; 182 [Ar]), means property, money, etc., and in the Bedouin context this wealth usually takes the form of livestock.[52] I read select verses of *Sūrat al-Nisāʾ* (Qurʾan 4:7, 11, 12) with my students, and then present the legal opinion given in Mālik's *al-Muwaṭṭaʾ* (Book 27) on what a wife stands to inherit from her husband's estate if he dies childless, or without issue (i.e., a fourth). Some students will want to know how a widow's inheritance in Islam compares to other coeval legal systems. In Judaism and Roman Law, the dower served this function, but one could also point them to Justinian's 53rd novel (sixth century CE), which specifies the same proportion (a fourth) for impoverished widows and widowers.[53] There is a legal subtext to the exchange between Qays and his father, which immediately precedes Dharīḥ's ultimatum (see p. 131 [En]; 183 [Ar]), i.e., his suggestion that Qays try to conceive a child with an enslaved woman, which will require some sensitive contextualization.[54] In response to his father's three proposals, Qays counters with three of his own, and I think it should be clarified that the translation "...let me leave you with my wife" (p. 131 [En]) means "let me and my wife leave" lest students think that this is an allusion to some form of levirate or *čakarīh* marriage.[55]

52. Martin Plessner, "Māl," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam New Edition Online (EI-2 English)*, ed. P. J. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2012). A similar semantic development has been proposed for the Proto-Indo-European root "peḱ," though not without controversy. See chapter on "Livestock and Money" in Émile Benveniste, *Dictionary of Indo-European Concepts and Society*, trans. Elizabeth Palmer (Chicago: HAU Books, 2016).

53. *The Novels of Justinian: A Complete Annotated English Translation*, trans. David J. D. Miller and Peter Sarris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 435–36.

54. You may want also to point to the very different, but equally effective, ultimatum on divorce that Abū Lahab gave his son ʿUtba—and perhaps also his son ʿUtayba; see al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 39, trans. Ella Landau-Tasseron (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 161–63.

55. Mansour Shaki, "Čakar," in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, last updated May 7, 2013.

Key Terms: *Kalāla*

Kalāla

An obscure term that appears prominently in Qurʾan *Sūrat al-Nisāʾ* (4:12 and 176) in connection with inheritance. It also appears in the story of Qays and Lubnā. After her son recovers from a life-threatening illness, Qays's mother tells his father, Dharīḥ (p. 130 [En]):

> "I was afraid that Qays would die without leaving offspring, since this woman has not had any children. You are wealthy and your possessions would go to distant relations (*ilā al-kalāla*)."

The translation, "distant relations," attempts to summarize a complicated legal context and conveys how most readers would have understood the term. Max Weisweiler does something similar in his German translation ("Seitenverwandtschaft," i.e., "collateral relatives"). Pavel Pavlovitch, the author of a recent book-length study of the term *kalāla*, describes its use in the story of Qays and Lubnā as having an "exegetical character," i.e., that the term's usage and the narrative premise tell audiences how to understand the word. Pavlovitch's study along with earlier foundational work by David S. Powers and Agostino Cilardo (see bibiliography) are interesting examples of how scholars today attempt to understand the development of Islamic law and the relevance of Classical Arabic stories not only as evidence for how language was used in the past, but also how stories were used to popularize particular concepts and interpretations.

Qays's Mother's Tongue

We might not know Qays's mother's name, but we do know the name of her father, Sunna b. al-Dhāhil b. ʿĀmir al-Khuzāʿī, and one of her brothers, the poet ʿAmr b. Sunna. The patronym al-Khuzāʿī means that she was a member of the important Khuzāʿa clan like her daughter-in-law.

In addition to using the word *kalāla* in the story of Qays and Lubnā, she is also cited as an authority in Arabic dictionaries for the use of the preposition *fī* in connection with the verb *nāshada* ("to implore"). See Ibn Sīdah (d. 1066), *al-Muḥkam wa-l-muḥīṭ al-aʿẓam*, ed. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Hindāwī, 11 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2000), 8:29, s.r. *n-sh-d*.

Filial Piety and Shade

In addition to providing for widows, the Qurʾan also commands Muslims to respect their parents, so students should understand that Qays was facing a serious dilemma (e.g., *Sūrat Luqmān* 31:14 and *al-ʿAnkabūt* 29:8). The story is explicit that Qays's love for Lubnā gets in the way of his devotion to his parents (p. 130 [En]; 183 [Ar]) and that is what precipitates the confrontation with his father. This confrontation culminates in a peculiar ultimatum that connects to broader notions of filial piety (p. 131 [En]; 183–84 [Ar]):

> [H]e swore an oath that no roof would ever shelter him until Qays had divorced Lubnā. He went outside and stood in the blazing sun. Qays would come and stand beside him, giving him shade with his cloak, himself being scorched by the hot sun; only when the shadows became longer would he leave.

Shade in its literal and metaphorical senses is a rich symbol in Near Eastern history and while students may understand the meaning of Dharīḥ's act intuitively, they may not recognize its connotations.[56] In his famous "Poem rhyming in L," the pre-Islamic brigand-poet (*ṣuʿlūk*) al-Shanfarā portrays exposure to the sun as a sign of his departure from human society and tribal comforts:

> To how many a day of the dog star,
>
> when the sun drools heat
>
> and snakes writhe
>
> on the burning ground,
>
> Have I lifted my face,
>
> with no cloth for a cover,
>
> and no veil,
>
> only a tattered Aṭḥamī cloak. (trans. Michael Sells)[57]

In contrast, cool shade is one of the attributes of paradise mentioned in the Qurʾan (see e.g., *Surat al-Nisāʾ* 4:57, *al-Wāqiʿa* 56:30, and *passim*), and the Prophet Muḥammad is honored by Muslims with the epithet "the one shaded by clouds" (*al-muẓallal bi-l-ghamāma*).[58] Shade is also used metaphorically to describe protection, care, and generosity, as in the Persian expression "May your shade always cover our heads" (*sāyeh-tān az sar-e mā kam nashavad*).[59]

Shade is not the same as darkness, however, which often has a negative connotation, as in Qays's description of the tomb where he and Lubnā will be reunited. Echoing Aristophanes's speech in *The Symposium* and Ibn Ḥazm,[60] Qays claims that his love for Lubnā stretches into the time before creation and beyond it (p. 142 [En]; 194–95 [Ar]):

> My soul was tied to hers before we were created,

56. In the Bible, Isaiah calls God "a shade from the heat" (Isaiah 25:4, NRSV; NRSV-UE). Some Muslim rulers have been described with the *ḥadīth*-derived honorific "God's Shadow on Earth"; see further in J. H. Kramers and C. E. Bosworth, "Sulṭān," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam New Edition Online (EI-2 English)*, ed. P. J. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

57. Michael Sells, "Shanfara's Lamiyya: A New Version," *al-ʿArabiyya* 16 (1983), 5–25, at 18.

58. As can be seen in the embroidered roundel, Ottoman Egypt, nineteenth century, sold at Christie's, London, April 25, 2024: sale 22675, lot 162.

59. The Egyptian expression *ḍill ragel wa-lā ḍill il-ḥēṭ* ("a man's shadow is better than the wall's") is a particularly bald expression of the utility of marriage from a woman's perspective and inspires the title of the feminist documentary "In the Shadow of a Man" (dir., Hanan Abdalla, 2012).

60. Ibn Ḥazm, *Ṭawq al-ḥamāma fī al-ulfa wa-l-ullāf*, ed. al-Ṭāhir Aḥmad Makkī (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1976), 21.

and after we were drops of seed, and in the cradle too.
The attachment grew like we ourselves did, ever stronger,
and will not be cut off, not even when we die;
It will remain whatever happens; it will come
and visit us in the dark gloom (*ẓulma*) of grave and tomb.

Union in the tomb is a familiar trope of lover's tales from *Romeo and Juliet* to the Chinese folktale of *The Butterfly Lovers*, which I also read with students, and Beatrice Gruendler has an article on other examples in the Arabic tradition, which could be brought in here to tie these strands together.[61]

A Modern Adaptation

ʿAzīz Abāẓa's 1943 verse play *Qays wa-Lubnā* has not been translated into English, so some instructors may not be able to incorporate it into their teaching. For those who can, I recommend it. Not only is it beautifully written, it is a creative expansion of the story, which brings its social dimensions to the forefront. In Abāẓa's version, Qays expresses the timelessness of his love for Lubnā to her directly: "I've loved you all my life / deep in my bones since long ago."[62] We also find Qays's parents issuing their ultimatum as one: they threaten to cut contact with their son so long as he remains married to Lubnā and vow to abandon their home, relying on the charity of tribes they meet along the way.[63] This, of course, is a refiguration of the counter-offer that Qays makes in the original. "Love's embraces may have lulled you [pl.] into a stupor / but worry keeps us up all night," Qays's mother tells her son.[64] Sleep and insomnia—dreaminess and vigilance—are powerful and adaptable metaphors in Classical Arabic narratives of love, and they recur at the happy ending of Abāẓa's play, too, when a disbelieving Qays asks:

Little-Lubnā (*Lubaynā*), is this real? Or is my wish / conjuring a dream before my eyes?"[65]

...

"On my soul and your life, has mercy / banished the darkness [around me] like the light of a breaking dawn?"[66]

61. *The Butterfly Lovers: The Legend of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai. Four Versions with Related Texts*, ed. and trans. Wilt L. Idema (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2010); Beatrice Gruendler, "'That You Be Brought Near': Union Beyond the Grave in the Arabic Literary Tradition," in *Love After Death: Concepts of Posthumous Love in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Bernhard Jussen and Ramie Targoff, 71–95 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015).

62. ʿAzīz Abāẓa, *Qays wa-Lubnā* (Cairo: al-Firqa al-Miṣriyya li-l-Tamthīl wa-l-Mūsīqā [Fann li-l-Ṭibāʿa], 1944), 79: *mā ʿishtu illā fī hawāki wa-innahū / la-hawan taghalghala fī l-ḍulūʿi qadīmū.* You can hear a radio performance of the play. Aḥmad Shawqī had famously adapted the most well-known *ʿUdhrī* romance into the verse play *Majnūn Laylā* in 1925.

63. Abāẓa, *Qays wa-Lubnā*, 84.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid., 171.

66. Ibid., 173.

As Stefan Leder has argued, the story of Qays and Lubnā shows "...love [to be] an autonomous force, which cannot be subjected to rules and prescriptions, but, if oppressed, unfolds, freeing destructive forces."[67] That much will be obvious to students from their first glance at the text, but I hope to have shared some profitable suggestions for deepening their appreciation of the work beyond the "problem of love" to its versatility and enduring salience. The order in which topics such as composition history, plot structure, poetry's connection to music, law, and family relations are presented is subjective, and I encourage instructors to re-arrange this material as best suits their preferences and time constraints. I have chosen to build up to this final lesson on social regulation in part because I want students to remember that these and other love stories reflected a social world and were interpreted in relation to people's lives and relative degrees of freedom and agency.

The story of Qays and Lubnā narrates one wealthy and well-connected young man's struggle with his family, health, and implacable desire. His experience is contrasted implicitly to that of Lubnā's, which is more opaque and more constrained. Modern re-imaginings by Abāẓa and the team of Āghā and Kōkash have taken more of an interest in Lubnā's perspective. By paying close attention to the text's composition and reception in al-Iṣfahānī's lifetime and to the metafictional moments in which Qays's poems move the plot of the story, I hope to suggest that both the scope and method of interpretation of this and other Classical Arabic love stories have always been communal, that women have always been part of the audience, and that neither Qays nor al-Iṣfahānī has a monopoly on the truth.

I like asking students to use their imagination, so I would conclude the module by asking them to re-tell the story from Lubnā's perspective whether in written form or as a dramatic performance.[68] Another fun and thought-provoking activity would be to simulate a modern courtroom setting with students representing the interested parties in front of a judge: Qays has died, and lawyers representing his parents, first wife, and second wife are laying claims to his inheritance. By changing key premises in the brief (e.g., the first divorce wasn't finalized, Qays's second wife is pregnant at the time of his passing, etc.), students can compare Islamic inheritance laws to those governing their own societies. Students could also be tasked with re-imagining and then performing an Umayyad version of *Romeo and Juliet* with Qays and Lubnā as the leads. I think al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī would make a good prince and Ibn Abī ʿAtīq a good substitute for Friar Laurence.

Beyond the plot, students should also be asked to engage directly with Qays's poetry. Those with a musical aptitude should be encouraged to write and perform songs, updating the language as they see fit. Graphically minded students could re-create a scene from the story in the style of one of the Majnūn illustrations surveyed in Lesson 1. As above, Lubnā's elusive voice is an excellent point of entry for curious readers in the present who could be asked to "write back" to Qays as Lubnā, adapting his meters and rhymes in *Muʿāraḍa* or South Asian *Mushāʿara* style. Creative and performance-based assignments will, in theory,

67. Leder, "The ʿUdhrī Narrative," 174.

68. On performance as a mode of teaching, see Joe Winston, *Transforming the Teaching of Shakespeare with the Royal Shakespeare Company* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2015).

discourage students' use of LLM-tools and are a way of engaging closely with primary sources even if they cannot read Classical Arabic. A more conventional assignment would be to ask students to identify the presence of key metaphors, images, and settings from Qays's poetry in translations of premodern Arabic, Persian, or Turkish poems or in Petrarchan English poetry. Avenues for analysis in essay form have been alluded to in the lessons above: human-animal relations, law and society, Abbasid attachments to the alterity of early Islamic Medina, and the intersection of gender and age.

Conclusion

In this article, I have focused a fair bit on the process of learning rather than exclusively on what is to be learnt because academic knowledge needs urgently to be democratized and that cannot be achieved by open-access publishing alone. For the sake of future research, and future readers, we need some proportion of our students to fall in love (yes, only that metaphor will do) with these stories, poems, and characters from Arabic literary history. My strategy is to complicate and expand their engagement with such texts ever more widely until *adab* is once more a way of being, to reveal the many questions that remain and the tacit answers that fail to satisfy, to trace the afterlives of these legends and the silent layers of gender and class that underpin them. This works best when the instructor is enthusiastic and supportive, so my final piece of advice comes from Badr al-Dīn Ibn Jamāʿa's (d. 1333) rules for teachers (*fī adab al-ʿālim maʿa ṭalabatihi muṭlaqan wa-fī ḥalqatihi*):

> Don't refrain from teaching a learner whose intentions are [mixed (i.e., not pure)] because it is hoped that the blessing of knowledge (*barakat al-ʿilm*) will purify those intentions.[69]

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69. Ibn Jamāʿa, *Tadhkirat al-sāmiʿ wa-l-mutakallim fī adab al-ʿālim wa-l-mutaʿallim*, ed. Muḥammad b. Mahdī al-ʿAjamī (Beirut: Dār al-Bashāʾir al-Islāmiyya, 1433 [2012]), 72.

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