Readings in Oriental Literature

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Arabian, Indian, and Islamic

Jalal Uddin Khan

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By Jalal Uddin Khan

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To the living memory of my parents
(who were happy that I was doing English)

and

To my lovely SSWN

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FOREWORD

I have greatly enjoyed reading this wide-ranging, sensitive and informative sequence of essays from the fluent pen of my erudite colleague and friend, Professor Jalal Uddin Khan. He is currently teaching at the University of Nizwa, Oman, having previously headed the department here, prior to which he taught in Qatar and Malaysia. Following his undergraduate education with distinction at Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh, he attended The American University, Washington, D. C. on a Fulbright scholarship before he moved on to New York University to complete his doctoral studies in the early nineties. Khan is not only an expert connoisseur of literature but also a passionate and moral man who believes in the potential of literature to make a difference for the better to the way people live their lives and act in society. He would certainly agree with Aristotle's famous dictum that man is a creature of the "polis" (often mistranslated as "man is a political animal"). For Khan, as for many other subtle and effective thinkers down the ages, man cannot be considered in isolation, as being something separate from his society and beliefs. This is not to say that Khan is unable to fully appreciate the purely literary and aesthetic aspects of a work of literature: on the contrary, he is extremely sensitive to all this. However, his greatest gift is in making interesting and resonant connections between literature and all aspects of earthly life: a fact that the present collection makes absolutely clear.

It has been my privilege to read these essays at the editing stage and Professor Khan and I have spent long, profitable hours debating subtle points of literature, history, society, philosophy and religion as they naturally arose from a close perusal of them. In the process, I have learned many new things, especially about the politics and culture of Bangladesh, Khan's mother country. He is clearly a great Bangladeshi patriot who is deeply mortified at the current level of political trouble and strife in his homeland and addresses a wide range of issues connected with this. For example, as a sensitive man

of literature, Khan is fiercely proud of his great compatriot and Nobel prize winner, Rabindranath Tagore. On the other hand, he is also sensitive to the fact that the current Bangladeshi national anthem, based as it is on somewhat inferior and inappropriate verses of the great poet, should probably be changed to something more suitable. It is revealing that Tagore, coming as he did from a rich Bengali Hindu background, did not support the division of the British-ruled Bengal in 1905 (which he thought went against the idea of an undivided all-India entity), as he also did not support the establishment of a university in Dhaka in 1921, thus preemptively and proleptically opposing (having died in 1941) the creation of an independent Bangladeshi state with an Islamic identity in 1971. On the other hand, Professor Khan's great reverence for Tagore as poet and compatriot is clear for all to see. It is precisely this subtle position of empathetic understanding that makes his thought on a range of topics both interesting and persuasive.

The book is divided into three clear sections dealing with India, Arabia and the religion of Islam. Each section possesses its own clarity and beauty, but literature is the essential theme binding everything together. Dr. Khan's main area of academic interest is the Romantic poets of the early nineteenth century and there are incisive articles to be found in this collection on Wordsworth, Shelley and Coleridge, not to mention his concise yet comprehensive study of the treatment of British India by the "eminent Victorians" such as (James) Mill, Tennyson and Ruskin in a comparative manner. Another area of deep interest is Orientalism: a word that Khan often uses in its pre-Said meaning of a group of academics who wrote as well as they were able to about the eastern world that they discovered through their travels and professions in the orient. I believe Khan takes an eminently sensible position on Said and postcolonial studies in general: both (he suggests) contain much that is true about the exploitation of the east by the colonial powers of Europe; yet, equally, in their narrow insistence on *everything* being tainted and corrupt that came from the pens of western writers on the east, the "Orientalists" and post-colonialists have over-reached themselves and arrived at a position that is patently absurd. Khan is particularly appreciative of the subtle and sensitive writings of William Jones on pre-Islamic Arabian poetry and the

influence of the ever fresh Oriental fountain of fun and fantasy, *The Arabian Nights*, reaching far and wide, especially the Western world, since the early eighteenth century.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity of thanking Dr. Khan for allowing me to be one of the first to read this densely argued and thought-provoking collection of articles.

Dr. John Wallen, Editor-in-Chief, *The Victorian*
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Oman

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Most of the essays in this book (as well as the other, *Perspectives: Romantic, Victorian and Modern Literature*, by the same publisher) were originally published in different venues over the last decade or so. All the essays have been extensively revised for the purpose of bringing them together in these two books. In most cases the difference between the original and the present versions is one-third to double or, as in the case of a few, even two-thirds, so that the revisions actually reflect a growth and evolution of my ideas (not really a change of my views). In this sense, the two books are significantly different from a mere collection of my previously published materials. In fact, my intention of putting together a selection of them (twenty-five articles out of over forty) in the form of these two books arose from my urge that I had thought I had something fundamentally new and fresh to add to and augment my earlier readings. I am thankful that all the academic outlets – duly acknowledged at the outset of each essay -- in which the essays originally appeared in their shorter form have gladly extended their permission to reproduce the essays stating that they (the journals) would be rather happy to see them mentioned in my other publications.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the following individuals for their kind help and cooperation rendered in various ways, from technical to academic, in preparing and formatting the two manuscripts. My very first mention goes to Professor Nancy K. Nanney, a past Chair of the Humanities Division, West Virginia University at Parkersburg. A graduate of the University of Hawaii with a background in modern dramatic literature and culture, Dr Nanney was always willing to carefully read with interest and acumen whatever academic and professional materials I shared with her every now and then. I always benefited from her critical comments and insightful corrections. Her kind words that my work

would attract a broad international readership were very encouraging, lifting my spirits high.

I owe a very special indebtedness to Dr John Wallen, Professor of English at the University of Nizwa, Oman, who is also editor of the mostly Western-contributed open access quarterly journal *The Victorian*. He deserves many hearty thanks with plenty of deep gratitude for being an immensely handy and highly valuable asset to patiently and carefully go through the individual essays that comprise the entire material of the present book. That he wrote a beautiful foreword to this book has greatly obliged me and has given a lasting form to our collegial and cordial relationship. A Royal Holloway (University of London)-trained Richard Burton scholar, Dr Wallen's (Victorian) specialism overlaps mine (Romanticism); his research interests border and intersect mine, making him the right person, well-read and well-published as he is, to seek a second opinion from, when necessary, in putting together the contents of the volume.

I wish to acknowledge with my highest regard and appreciation Professor Laurence Lockridge of English at New York University, New York. An established and well-known Harvard-educated Romanticist with his scholarly studies in the field, Dr Lockridge was always helpful whenever I approached him with my academic needs and queries, generously praising my work as fascinating and wide-ranging. I am truly honored that he kindly agreed to read and write a fine and penetrating preface to my above-mentioned *Perspectives* book, although he thought, probably as a compliment, this *Oriental* volume was an expression of what could be described as "strange seas of thought" to many readers and as such might attract more attention. It is to be mentioned that there are four essays—those on Shelley, Coleridge and the Victorian Reaction to British India—that are common between the two volumes.

I cannot but be happy and proud to thank Professor M.A.R. Habib for his revealing comments on some of my writings he kindly made time to read. An expert on T. S. Eliot and modern literary theory with numerous critical as well as creative volumes to his credit, Dr Habib, a British-American scholar of Oxford background, teaches at Rutgers University, New Jersey. I am indebted to him for his remarkably articulated statements endorsing

my books. I must thankfully mention Dr Syed Bashir Ahmed, who teaches English and Translation here at the University of Nizwa, Oman and who, hailing from Indian-occupied Kashmir, was always on hand to help me with many a technical trouble I faced on my desktop and provide me with a variety of electronic sources of academic interest.

I take this opportunity to remember with gratitude the following institutions, which generously allowed me to use their resources either directly or through inter-library loan or e-mail correspondence with the staff: The American University Library, Washington, D. C.; New York University Library, New York; Brooklyn College Library, Brooklyn, New York; New York Public Library, New York; Qatar University Library, Qatar; IIU Library, Malaysia; University of Malaya Library, Malaysia; University of Nizwa Library, Oman; York University Library, Toronto; and the British Library, London.

Once again, thanks go to all those journals in different countries (India, Egypt, Spain, Turkey, Taiwan, Malaysia, England, USA, Australia, and Bangladesh) in which most of the essays first appeared in their original versions and which, noted at the beginning of each essay, have kindly granted their permission to have the materials, now significantly revised and updated, reprinted in these two books. On the other hand, among my readings, I should particularly mention the highly useful Houston-based bimonthly *Saudi Aramco World*, which I have been receiving gratis (as all subscribers do) since 1999 and to which I am greatly indebted for the interdisciplinary (historical, cultural and literary) knowledge I have acquired, with great delight and satisfaction, from its beautifully printed (glossy and illustrated) pages since.

Before I conclude, I can by no means let my debt to my two great friends go unacknowledged and unrecognized. One of them is Zoglul Hussein, a UK-based former computer consultant, who gave up his (doctoral level) academic and professional ambitions to organize the struggle for the freedom of Bangladesh in Kolkata in 1971. In addition to being an activist and organizer, he is currently doing freelance writings on the historical and political scene of the country of his origin. The other is Col. (Retd.) R. Chowdhury, also a former freedom fighter of Bangladesh, now living a retired life in

the USA and frequently writing essays, under the pseudonym of "Obaid Chowdhury," on the social and political issues of the original native country he valiantly fought for forty-four years ago. Both are men of great integrity, patriotic fervor, and personal sacrifice. Both believe that the country of their contribution continues to slide backward, especially with respect to the ideals of freedom, democracy, patriotism, and nationalism, particularly under the present Awami League government. Both have an excellent and splendid, perhaps unbeatable command of English in their possession. While one of them kindly checked a large portion of my two books for slips through word file editor, the other was nice to make time to review the last and longest chapter, on the religious diversity in the West, and make useful comments that helped me to reorganize the entire chapter. It is my pleasure to give a lasting form to the memory of my politically well-informed and like-minded friends.

Finally, I am glad to express my warm thanks to my family — my wife and our three wonderful children, SSW — who were always supportive of my hard work and scholarly pursuits even if that meant me being away from home in Toronto to teach abroad in the Middle East and leaving them alone to do the routine drudgery of the household, to be punctuated, however, by whatever exciting North American attractions, opportunities, and challenges they could avail themselves of as the three amazing kids have been going through the different stages of their school and college education with occasional yet serious "teen" excursions of their own into the realms of literature as part of their course of study.

Jalal Uddin Khan
University of Nizwa
Oman
November 30, 2014

PART 1:

ARABIAN

CHAPTER ONE

THE BEAUTIFUL AND THE SUBLIME: WILLIAM JONES ON ANCIENT ARABIAN POETRY[1]

Argument: William Jones was one of the greatest orientalists of all time. His academically and intellectually informed orientalism began with his translation of ancient Arabian poetry, especially *The Muallaqat*, which he found to be both beautiful and sublime. To him, the natural, as opposed to imitative and artificial, description of ancient Arab tribes and their tribal conflicts and loyalties, and their normal ways of life, including love and duty and horses and camels against the backdrop of a dry and dreary landscape, was deeply rhapsodic and expressive. More specifically, it was the desert plains and stony Arabias that Jones found beautiful as well as sublime. Following Edmund Burke, who is credited to have popularized those aesthetic notions/categories after the middle of the eighteenth century, Jones, about a decade later, applied them in his study of ancient Arabian poetry containing fresh or renewed descriptions of man and nature and recommended the Eastern models, including the Persian and the Indian, to instill new life into what he thought was the stale and hackneyed condition of European literature.

Sir William Jones is one of the most well-known eighteenth-century English linguists and Orientalists.[2] He knew dozens of languages and pioneered the scholarly study of many Eastern languages and literatures such as Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit, paving the way for comparative linguistics and comparative literature. While still a boy he started reading from *The Arabian Nights* and Shakespeare as much as from natural history, which was recommended to him by his parents. Having noticed his great

abilities as a child prodigy, the master of Harrow, Dr. Thackeray, remarked that "he was a boy of so active a mind that if he were left naked and friendless on Salisbury Plain, he would nevertheless find the road to fame and riches."[3] Dr. Thackeray surely did not have any idea at that time that his remark about Jones's talent was going to prove strikingly true with the only difference being that the English Salisbury Plain would be replaced by the plains of the Arabian desert in the discovery of whose beauty and sublimity, through ancient Arabian poetry, he was literally alone and metaphorically "naked and friendless."

According to Alexander Chalmers, "Oriental literature presented itself to his mind with unusual charms as if the plan of his future life and the avenues to his future fame had been regularly laid down before him."[4] Early on, Jones realized that "greater advantages were to be reaped from [Eastern] languages than from the more popular treasures of Greece and Rome." In the early 1780s, he undertook to translate an Arabian poem on the Mohammedan law of property inheritance with the intention of obtaining a job as a Supreme Court judge in India. About the same time he translated the seven ancient Arabic poems of the highest reputation, popularly known as *The Moallakat*, so named after their being suspended on the wall of the House of God in Makkah. A discussion of these prize poems forms the main part of this article, but before that, let us take a brief look at Jones's theoretical and aesthetic ideas about poetry and other fine arts such as music and painting.

In his essay *On the Arts Commonly Called Imitative*, which reminds us, by both comparison and contrast, of Aristotle's theory of imitation in *Poetics* and Sir Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry*, Jones does not agree with the view that poetry, music, and painting are merely imitative and asserts that they affect us by virtue of being "entirely distinct from imitation" and are, in fact, expressive of the natural emotions of the mind.[5] Jones supports his observation not just by referring to the early poetry of the Hebrews, Greeks, Romans, Arabs and Persians, but also by citing evidence that in some Muslim countries where imitation was not much admired and where sculpture, painting and dramatic poetry were strongly discouraged, "there were poets and musicians, both by nature and by art…"[6] He claims that the greatest effect of poetry

and music is not produced by imitation but "by a very different principle, which must be sought for in the deepest recesses of the human mind."[7] A person who is joyful or afflicted cannot be said to imitate the joy or grief of others. A sincere lover does not need to imitate the passions of others. Poetry in his view is always a strong and animated expression of human passions, sometimes pure and unmixed, sometimes variously modified and combined. A highly embellished composition is indeed artificial and may strike the mind only for a short time but the beauties of simplicity are more delightful and permanent.

Modern critics agree with Jones in their view of the beauty of the natural rather than the imitative quality of the poetry of the early Arabs. According to W. A. Clouston, ancient Arabian poets "were all men of high poetical genius," although they did not have any literary culture.[8] They could hardly read or write. "They were natural poets, whose ignorance of letters was fully compensated by … the faculty of … expressing, in their rich and copious language, what they thought and felt." They were "impulsive children of desert, …whose strong feelings found vent in flowing verse." Speaking about the charm of the early poetry of the Arabs, Sir William Muir says, "With the traces of cities and gardens left far out of sight, you get away into the free atmosphere of the desert; with the trammels and conventionalities of settled society cast aside, you roam with the poet over the varied domain of Nature in all its freshness, artlessness and freedom."[9]

Jones applied his own observations about the nature of poetic creativity in his essay on the Poetry of the Eastern nations, which he thought excelled that of the Europeans in imaginative expression, liveliness of fancy and the richness of invention. He found that the ancient Arabian poetry was both beautiful and sublime. It was beautiful for its simplicity and naturalness; it was sublime for its evocation of the sense of awe and fear far beyond the ordinary and the utilitarian, the finite and the familiar. Jones says: "… we must not believe that the Arabian poetry can please only by its descriptions of beauty; since the gloomy and terrible objects, which produce the sublime, when they are aptly described, are nowhere more common than in the Desert and Stony Arabias; and indeed we see nothing so frequently painted by the poets of those countries as

the dens of wolves and lions, precipices and forests, rocks and wildernesses."[10] As he explains in the previously mentioned essay ("On the Arts Commonly Called Imitative"), the beautiful is associated with the expression of love, joy, pity, desire, and all other tender passions as well as the descriptions of nature that delight the senses. On the other hand, the expression of grief, hate, anger, fear and the terrible passions as well as the objects which are unpleasant to the senses are productive of the sublime.

It goes without saying that Jones borrowed the two opposing aesthetic categories from what has remained till today the most influential source defining them and that is Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757).[11] In his philosophical examination, which came in the heels of other similar seventeenth and eighteenth century writings and paintings the tradition of which goes back to the first century Longinus's *On the Sublime* (or, *Of the Sublime*), Burke associates the beautiful with the objects and feelings of love, health, society, pleasure, attraction, harmony, light, delight, sweetness, smallness, equanimity, clearness, usefulness, control, picture-perfectness, womanliness, closeness of physical proximity, and smoothness of curves that appeal to love, sexual desire, sexual intimacy, and, therefore, self-propagation. In other words, Burke revises the classical ideal of rhetoric and oratory, clarity and formality, proportion and perfection, discipline and knowledge, organization and regimentation to fit it in his notion of the beautiful. In the process, he finds an opportunity to be critical of the classical ideal and pave the way for the aesthetic of the pre-romantic sublime or picturesque. This he thinks lies in the "negative" or "mixed" pleasures and has to do with the heightening of passions and the evocation of the infinite. Higher in kind, quality, and status, Burke defines the sublime as those emotions and passions generated by the objects of greatness, grandeur, awe, loftiness, height, depth, astonishment, admiration, reverence, respect, excessive blurring light, obscurity, vagueness, mystery, fear, dread, danger, pain, sickness, death, terror, horror, wildness, roughness, ruggedness, gloom, darkness, uncertainty, apprehension, repulsion, confusion, eternity, and infinity. Such sensations are informed or characterized by "the quality of greatness--whether

physical, moral, intellectual, metaphysical, aesthetic, spiritual, or artistic" and a half or veiled knowledge of anything "beyond the possibility of calculation, measurement, or imitation." They, therefore, appeal to desires of self-preservation.

As Peter Otto succinctly puts it, the sublime forces while the beautiful flatters into compliance. "The pleasure of beauty has a relaxing effect on the fibers of the body, whereas sublimity, in contrast, tightens these fibers." The beautiful is "what is well-formed and aesthetically pleasing, whereas the sublime is what has the power to compel and destroy us. The preference for the sublime over the beautiful was to mark the transition from the neoclassical to the Romantic era." As it has just been mentioned above, of the two, the sublime has the higher and greater effect on the imagination than the beautiful and as such holds the superior status. In Burke's argument, the sublime is exemplified and illustrated by God's majesty, solemnity of the divine presence, great poetry, "terrible beauty" of Helen, visual arts, seas, oceans, mountains, deserts, space, towers, perpendiculars, ruins, the darkness of the night, ghosts and goblins, chiefs of despotic governments out of touch with the public and founded upon the passion of fear, Druid religious ceremonies in "the darkest woods," heathen or barbarous temples of the American Indians who "keep their idol in a dark part of the hut," and, most notably, John Milton's portrait of the fallen Satan, whose now obscured glory and brightness are compared to the sun rising through mists and the revolution of kingdoms, his description of Satan's battle with God as if he were a parliamentary opposition leader, and of the hideous, shapeless Death ("black as night /Fierce as ten furies, terrible as hell") in *Paradise Lost*.

Clearly, the nature of the two aesthetic notions, as investigated by Anthony Ashley-Cooper (third earl of Shaftesbury), John Dennis, especially Burke and, afterwards, by Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schiller, contains the elements of the natural, secular, spiritual, and political, creating, in Duncan Wu's view, a revolution in aesthetic theory and shaping the thinking behind much of English Romantic poetry.[12] In his *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764) and the last of his three essays, "Analytic of the Sublime," in *The Critique of Judgment* (1790), Kant critiqued Burke's investigation of the sublime as sensuous,

immanent, and empirical.[13] According to him, the sublime lay in formlessness, boundlessness, and the ecstatic, cognitive, super-sensible, super-sensuous, numinous, and transcendental powers of the mind. He associated it with "reason" rather than "understanding," distinguishing between what he called "mathematical" sublime and "dynamical" sublime, and moral and aesthetic sublime, represented, for example, by night, man, earthquake, desert, raging storms, stormy seas, snow-capped peaks, volcanic fires, tall oaks, lonely shadows, deep loneliness, and far reaching solitudes (as opposed to day, woman, small streams symbolizing the beautiful). Literary critics later added many other instances of Romantic sublime such as Blake's naked, "revelatory" sublime through the "unpresentable" visions, Wordsworth's night-time climbing of the moonlit Snowdon in *The Prelude*, De Quincey's account of opium addiction, Byron's search for ideal forms (in *Childe Harold*, Canto III) and his Manfred's attempt to commit suicide from the edge of a cliff, and Shelley's *Mont Blanc* and *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*.

As mentioned above, early Arabian poetry such as *The Muallaqat* supplied William Jones with his examples of the beautiful and the sublime. It was marked by the common imagery of the freshness and freedom of the wild desert untainted by anything of the busy city life. Tenderness of expression and natural touches of elegiac pathos and humane feeling, as opposed to the artificial dazzle of diction, fill the ancient classical Arabian poetry. So do the bright sketches of Arab life such as feasting, drinking, dancing, riding, fighting, and showing personal prowess. Interesting glimpses of desert life such as the weary march on the back of the camels, sheep and goats grazing around the valleys, young ostriches flocking around, and the desert tribes camping in the cool shade of the scattered green meadows with the rare nearby mountain streams formed a delightful contrast with the surrounding bleak scenery. In the words of a journalist-writer for *Saudi Aramco World*,

> The most celebrated poems of the pre-Islamic period were known as the mu'allaqat ("suspended"). They earned this name because they were considered sufficiently outstanding to be hung on the walls of the Ka'bah in Makkah for public display. The typical poem of this period is the qasidah, or ode, which normally consists

> of 70 to 80 pairs of half-lines. Traditionally, qasidahs describe the nomadic life, and they open with a lament at an abandoned camp for a lost love. The second part praises the poet's camel (or, in some cases, his horse) and describes a journey and the hardships it entails. The third section contains the main theme of the poem, and finishes by extolling the poet's tribe and vilifying its enemies.[14]

As suggested above, in many cases an ancient Arabic poem begins with the poet's lament for his departing mistress, his description of the warring tribes, and his own horses and camels, so essential an animal to desert life. In one of the finest pastoral utterances, Antara compares the mouth of his beloved to a fragrant bower kept in perennial verdure by gentle rains. Lebid also mentions the pastoral touch of profuse rains from thunder clouds just as Tarafa touches on astonishingly dark cloudy days. Other common scenes in *The Muallaqat* may include the poet drinking long-stored wine; his secret meeting with a beautiful damsel of a hostile tribe followed by protracted and fierce single combats with the most renowned warriors; rising early in the morning to mount his horse to defend his tribe against the invaders; his supervising the gaming with arrows for camels which he himself has generously provided as the prizes; watching the beautiful girls of nimble fingers serving drinks or playing their musical instruments; the poor and needy taking part in the feast given by others; wild cows being chased by the hunters; pity for such a cow who is roaming restlessly in a rainy night in search of its lost young one; and pity for the wounded horse who seems to be upbraiding the owner with its eyes and who would have spoken about its pain if it could.

Like the ancient poetry of all nations, that of Arabia too had a divine or spiritual content and was full of praise for the deity as the creator of the wonders of nature such as the serenity of the sky, the splendor of the sun, the verdure of the fields and woods and the glowing colors of the flowers. The natural objects with which the ancient Arabs were perpetually familiar gained in their beauty and sublimity in the context of the intense heat in a desert climate. Many of the Eastern figures of speech may be common to other nations but they derived especial propriety from the manners of the Nomadic Arabs, who dwelt in tents in the open plains seasonally

moving from place to place, retaining the simplicity of their ancestors, and spontaneously singing their native folk songs as they were watching their flocks. Almost all their notions of felicity were taken from the freshness and verdure of the isolated groves of trees, plants and shrubs that they could experience from their tents under the open sky. As they were great admirers of beauty and enjoyed a life of ease and leisure, they were naturally reflective of the passion of love, which was the true source of agreeable poetry.

Having a genius for poetry in itself is not enough. The language of a people should also be rich to adequately express their feelings and passions. Ancient Arabians were fortunate in that respect as well. Their language, Jones argued, was highly expressive, sonorous and perhaps the most copious in the world. Given their familiarity with beautiful objects, their enjoyment of a calm and quiet life in the midst of open nature and having the advantage of a language highly favorable to the cultivation of poetry, Arabians were naturally excellent poets. The fact that the rise of a poet in their tribe was one of their principal occasions for rejoicing, showed their fondness for poetry and the respect they had for poets.

At the beginning of the seventh century, the Arabic language was brought to a high degree of perfection by a sort of poetical academy that used to assemble at stated times in a place called Ocadh where every poet produced his best composition. The most excellent of these poems were transcribed in characters of gold upon Egyptian paper and hung up on the wall of Kaabah. As such they were known as *Modhahebat* (meaning "golden") and *Moallaqat* (translating "suspended"). The poems of this sort were called *Casseidas* or eclogues, seven of which were considered as the finest that had been written about the time of Prophet Mohammad.

The most prominent of the pre-Islamic poets was Imraul Qayes, whose poem (*Muallakah*) is the most picturesque and dramatic of all the seven prize poems. It is full of turns of events suggesting the poet's own reckless, wandering life in the desert following his secret affair with a girl of another tribe at war with his own, which caused him to be expelled from his own tribe by his father. The poem's exciting dramatic scenes of desert life are described with a primitive frankness and naturalness. These include accounts of the

poet's youthful fun such as the merry game of hiding the clothes of some young bathing women, who upon getting their clothes back entertain the poet and his comrades with their songs and generous offer of drinks as they all sit together in the sand-hills to eat supper over a freshly killed camel.

The sublime passages of the poem are those in which the poet describes his dangerous love adventure during which he could actually be killed by the people of the hostile tribe. He undertakes an arduous journey through the desert at dark midnight and proceeds through the enemy tents to the dwelling of the maiden he loves. Both of them secretly elope away while she is drawing over their footsteps the train of her flowing robe so that no trace of the direction they are taking is left behind. The poet describes the tense and fearful moment of their first sight of each other as "the hour when the Pleiads appeared in the firmament, like the folds of a silken sash variously decked with gems."

It is usual in all countries to make allusions to the brightness of the heavenly bodies which give their light to all; but the allusions have an additional beauty if they are made by a people who pass most of their nights in tents in the open air and consequently see the moon and the stars in their greatest splendor. The darkness of the night seems to enfold the poet, a solitary wayfarer, with a garment, "like the billows of the ocean, to make trial of [his] fortitude in a variety of cares." His address to the night heightens the emotion to the point of being sublime:

> Dispel thy gloom, O tedious night! that the morn may rise; although my sorrows are such that the morning light will not give more comfort than thy shades. O hideous night!—a night in which the stars are prevented from rising as if they were bound to a solid cliff with strong cables!

The poem ends with an equally sublime description of a thunderstorm accompanied with lightning in the desert mountains.

The fourth of the prize poems was composed by Lebid. It is purely pastoral and similar to Virgil's *Eclogues*. Lebid begins by praising the charms of a fawn and then criticizing her unkindness. This was followed by a description of his camel, which he

compares for its swiftness to a stag pursued by hounds. He then proceeds to mention his own riches and accomplishments, and his noble birth and the glory of his tribe. The beauty of the poem lies in its easy and simple yet elegant diction and its lyrically expressed natural sentiments. Here is a passage, for example:

> But ah! Thou know'st not in what youthful play
> Our nights, beguil'd with pleasure, swam away;
> Gay songs and cheerful tales deceiv'd the time
> And circling goblets made a tuneful chime;
> Sweet was the draught and sweet the blooming maid,
> Who touch'd her lyre beneath the fragrant shade;
> We sipp'd till morning purpled every plain;
> The damsels slumber'd but we sipp'd again:
> The waking birds that sung on every tree
> Their early notes were not so blithe as we.

Lebid at first was a violent opposer of Prophet Mohammad. As an eminent versifier he hung up a poem on the gate of the holy mosque in Makkah reflecting about the new religion and challenging the other poets to answer in equally dignified verse if they could. The poem began like this:

> Are not all things vain, which come not from God?
> And will not all honors decay but those which he confers?

Or, in C. J. Lyall's translation,

> Yea, everything is vain, except only God alone,
> And every pleasant thing must one day vanish away! …
> And every mother's son, though his life be lengthened out
> To the utmost bound, comes home at last to the grave:
> And every man shall know one day his labor's worth,
> When his loss or gain is cast up on the Judgment Day.[15]

These universally admired lines appeared so sublime that no one ventured to answer them till Prophet Mohammad placed some verses from the Koran beside them, which struck Lebid so deeply that he instantly thought they must have been of divine origin and

not of any human creation. This confession of his own inferiority made him tear down his verses and embrace the new religion of Mohammad. While Mohammad later acknowledged that no heathen poet had ever written nobler verses than those of Lebid, Lebid also proved to be immensely useful to the Prophet in replying to the satirical attacks of Imraul Qays, who was highly critical of Mohammad's new religion. Lebid's highly suggestive metaphorical description of time when he was over a hundred and twenty years old and his sad reflections about the shortness of life as opposed to the permanence of what comes from God are perhaps among the most sublime passages in ancient Arabian poetry:

> Time in his lengthened chain of years has bound
> Our mortal race, nor ever his conqueror found:
> I've seen him pass by day, I've seen by night,
> And still, unchanged, return with morning's light.
> Time, like Lebid, grows older every day,
> But waxes stronger while I waste away.[16]

More instances of the sublime in Lebid are provided by desolate ruins, deserted mansions, characters engraved on dreary rocks, wintry winds on a cold morning, valleys wild and rough with large stones, and men climbing a hill to determine the enemy location with dust flying around. Lebid's reflections on the hero of his tribe who never fails to overcome the greatest difficulty with courage and who always acts with greatness of mind and nobleness of heart reach the height of sublimity. His hero leaves a perfect model of excellence for others to be inspired and be proud of. All heroic members of his illustrious tribe knew how to conduct a war successfully and then make peace. They were an enlivening spring to the living generations, but not without the jealous hostilities from their enemies.

There is a sense of the sublime associated with animals in Lebid, Imraul Qayes, and Tarafa. We find comparisons of fighting men with strong-necked lions and of fast-running camels with sailing ships on the Tigris. There are amazing descriptions of camels ascending the summits of rocks in hot and humid weather, the hunters of the desert—wolves—devouring their hunted prey of

young camels, and the sure-and-swift-footed horses descending into the enemy valley in the darkness of the night and raising their necks like the smooth branches of a lofty palm. Imraul Qayes's sublime description of the horse is as follows:

> […] it is so fleet as to make captive the beasts of the forest, ready in turning, quick in pursuing, bold in advancing, firm in backing, and performing with the strength of a vast rock which a torrent has pushed from its lofty base. The sound it makes in its rage is like that of a bubbling cauldron, rushing on like a flood and striking the hard earth with a firm hoof. It trots like a wolf and gallops like a young fox, running from wild bulls to wild heifers, overpowering them in a single attempt.[17]

Here Burke may be brought up again, who considers the horse from two perspectives, first as a socially useful beast for the plough and the road, in which it has nothing of the sublime, but when considered as an animal "whose neck is clothed with thunder, the glory of whose nostrils is terrible, who swallows the ground with fierceness and rage," it possesses the sublime. Also, the way it is described in ancient sacred Hebrew poetry, associating it with thunder, fierceness, and rage, the idea of the horse becomes great and grand. Similarly, the idea of a lion, tiger, panther, rhinoceros, wild bull, serpents, poisonous animals, bulls (to be contradistinguished from ox), wolves (but not dogs)--all in their awful beauty in the gloomy forest and howling wilderness, biblical wild ass, mythical unicorn, and the mythical or biblical leviathan, also becomes elevating and magnificent. Burke argues that when strength is only useful and employed for our benefit or pleasure agreeable to us and when it acts in conformity to our will, then it can never be sublime or the cause or source of a commanding perception.

The description of his own camel by Tarafa is heightened to the extent of being sublime: long is her neck resembling the stern of a ship; her skull is as firm as an anvil; her joints are well-knit and her bones are solid like a strong bridge of Grecian architecture; her two haunches are as compact as the two smooth valves of a lofty castle-gate; her ears like those of a solitary wild bull in the groves, as sharp as to be able to distinguish every sound in her nightly journeys; her heart, easily susceptible of terror, palpitates with a

quick motion, yet remains firm in her chest as a round solid stone striking a broad floor of marble, galloping, quickening her pace for fear of the strong lash; she is awakened to vigorous action by the sound of human steps. The long panegyric on his camel—nearly one third of the poem—ends with the pleasing, if not sublime, image of the camel "float[ing] proudly along with her flowing tail as the dancing girl floats at the banquet of her lord and spreads the long white skirts of her trailing robe." Camels were so indispensable to desert life that a detailed description of the animal could never have been unpleasing to the poet's readers. Zohair's sublime description of war is memorable. He describes war as a foul monster, a dire fiend, of which once the flame is kindled, it blazes and rages. War grinds people as the mill grinds the corn. It is the mother of twins--famine and desolation, distress and ruin, two full-grown but deformed monsters. Death is described as the mother of vultures; the warrior as fierce as a bold attacking lion with a flowing mane, with claws never blunted.[18]

Jones wrote two poems based on his knowledge of some Arabic originals. "Solima: An Arabian Eclogue" is not a regular translation from the Arabic language; but most of its elements are taken from the Arabian poems he had read, with the virtues of benevolence and hospitality as their theme. His selection from his sources was such that he wrote one continued piece "in praise of an Arabian princess" called Solima.[19] The princess Solima had built caravan sites in the desert with gardens for the pleasure of travelers and pilgrims. Compared with other eclogues of similar pastoral elements, "Solima" tells a "nobler" tale in which the "heavenly mind" of Solima is described to be far above the "empty pride" and "delusive joy" of others. Her Edenic surroundings of glades and bowers are, therefore, not meant "to beguile the sight" with "idle shows of vain delight." The glittering scene of sweet-scented breeze and blue streams flowing over the sandy vales glowing with "liveliest hues" is intended instead for the most humanitarian of purposes: to help the poor and the sick, the weak and the weary, the old and the orphan. As she hears their tales of sorrow, the kind and caring Solima,

> […] radiant as the star of day
> Through the thick forest gains her easy way