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Lingering with *Adab* before Rushing to Literature

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ABSTRACT

This essay aims to stay awhile with the concept of *adab* (proper asthetic and ethical form) before rushing to the Euro-American concept and practice of literature, which has been the translation of *adab* common since the late nineteenth century. Against the broader histories of this translation, I focus on the older meaning of *adab* in early modern Persian traditions and ask what it can show us about how texts come into being and gain meaning within its world. Texts were gifts, created and exchanged within various forms of companionship. *Adab* was textual form at once aesthetic and ethical. But it also had an important constitutive sociality, beyond the institutional, one unfamiliar to our contemporary understanding of literature. This lingering brings a presumed reading subject into view—a *homo amicus*, let us say—embedded in and concerned with social relationships. It also proposes that these generative relations provide cues for broadening our array of interpretive practices.

As a concept, "literature" structures how we think about genre classifications of texts, in terms of their relevant aesthetic qualities, and as disciplinary objects suited to particular forms of reading and analysis.[1] The concept tends to domesticate and conceptually reduce a diverse array of practices, from a variety of language traditions, under its heading. As we stretch "literature" to encompass these traditions and their practices to achieve a truly world literature, do we add only what looks like that literature, leaving aside the parts which do not? If we work with literature as a concept and discipline developed in (modern) Euro-American contexts, how can we engage with other traditions in a way which is not ultimately Eurocentric?

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1. Allen (*In the Shadow*, 17–19 and 74–93) outlines central debates around literature as a concept and discipline.

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The predominance of what came to be called "literature" entailed two significant consequences for the rest of the world: conformity upon the modern forms of writing across the world and a set of expectations that changed our experience of earlier forms of writing. Whatever was not like modern Euro-American literature could not be literature; and in whatever ways those other aesthetic and ethical practices had existed could be of no significance to literature. In what follows, I gesture toward some of those practices, to show that defining the textual domain that might translate as "literature" in one such tradition, Persian, requires that we also reconstruct the social practices constitutive of that domain. This comparison, of literature and what falls out of it when other concepts are recruited for the purpose of translation, ultimately has the potential to enrich our understanding of what literature is and what it can do.

In language traditions associated with Islam (e.g., Arabic, Persian, Turkish), the term *adab* or *adabiyat* (plural of *adab*) has been used to translate "literature," as a concept and set of practices and institutions.[2] *Adab*, once meaning aesthetic and ethical form with its aporetic epistemic and ontological qualities, became forms of writing associated with genres of (Euro-American) "literature."[3] I propose to linger here with the concept of *adab*. Against the broader histories of this translation of *adab*/*adabiyat* into literature in Persian (and Arabic), I focus on the meaning of *adab* in early modern (pre-nineteenth-century) Persian traditions and ask what it can show us about how texts come into being and gain meaning within its world. *Adab* was textual form at once aesthetic and ethical. But it also had an important constitutive sociality, beyond the institutional, one unfamiliar to our contemporary understanding of literature.[4]

Persian was a principal language of culture in the Islamic lands of Central, South, and West Asia from the thirteenth to the early nineteenth century. It crossed regions, empires, religious traditions, and socially distinct audiences, embodied in texts, sensibilities, aesthetic modes, and social ethics. A "Persian" was a kind of person who had received a particular form of basic education, which imparted "Persianate" aesthetic and ethical forms through which Persians understood and engaged with the world. The Persian language comprised a vast textual corpus, but one whose meanings also

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2. Allen describes this practice for Arabic (*In the Shadow*) and Fani for Persian (*Reading across Borders*).

3. I use "aporia" as a distinction that has "no limit. There is not yet or there is no longer a border to cross, no opposition between two sides: the limit is too porous, permeable and indeterminate" (Derrida, *Aporias*, 20).

4. As a concept, *adab* was present in other Islamicate languages with the same broad meaning, though it is animated specifically within each language tradition. However, most Persians, regardless of social location, were multilingual, communicating in Arabic, Turkish, and/or other vernacular languages less commonly used for textual production.

lived and circulated orally, in stories and verse, for broader audiences. The late seventeenth through eighteenth centuries saw the greatest geographical expanse and social depth of Persian speakers, just before colonial intrusions.

Any consideration of *adab* as proper aesthetic form in writing must consider its indissolubly constitutive relationship with proper ethical form, particularly forms of interaction with the world that defy the reductions and separations of the modern category of literature.[5] I thus foreground how Persian texts were so often produced as gifts, in exchanges proper to the social ethics of particular relationships central to Persianate societies.[6] Understanding texts as gifts, as an enactments of bonds between people, gives us a different view of their substance and meaning, as well as of their implied addressee.

Rethinking what texts are, how they come into being, and their roles in various relationships calls into question presumed divisions between the world and the text, literature and life, aesthetics and politics.[7] Putting pressure on the boundaries that usually define the Eurocentric modern concept of "literature," by lingering with a broader concept that compasses ethics and their aesthetics, offers more expansive possibilities of being in the world and the role of texts within it. Additionally, we are given resources from another time to reflect on our limits and exclusions. Perhaps thinking critically about modernity requires thinking with those of its aspects that modernity seeks to disavow as radically different, what we call "the premodern."

ADAB(IYAT) AS LITERATURE

Michael Allen outlines two common meanings of literature, as "both a canon of texts and the practice by which to read them," which "comes to delimit sensibilities and critical skills inseparable from what it means to be modern, cosmopolitan, and educated."[8] He

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5. Allen (*In the Shadow*, 9–12) shows, for instance, the stark distinctions that literature makes between its reading practices and those associated with religion. Thus, literature preserves itself as modern and secular, using the narratives of rupture with traditional and religious others, to claim a moral ground.

6. This is goes beyond what Allen calls for, which is a consideration of the "literary culture" as the "disciplined practice through which it [a text] is understood," or a "literary hermeneutics" (*In the Shadow*, 40–41). I propose to understand the socioethical context in which the text is generated, circulated, and also gains meaning.

7. Anidjar provocatively outlines the inability of translation to account for its limits when we make literature "name and form a universal field of fragile but guarded specifics, filled with promise and potential (diversity and inclusiveness, knowledge, truth, and—why not?—justice) while singularly distinct from other fields of human, all-too human, inventiveness (Economy, Science, Politics, Religion)" ("Just One Word," 89).

8. Allen, *In the Shadow*, 8. By contrast, Head argues that literary modernity in Morocco "consists not of a radically different type of text or mode of reading" but "an expanded reading public" ("Print Culture," 184–87, quote at 184).

calls attention to the way in which literature as a category is secured through particular understandings of what it means to be literate: reading and interpretive practices, as well as the institutions of education and dissemination of these practices. This focus on reading and interpretive practices, and the kind of world it demarcates, seeks to expand conceptions of literariness beyond the limits of world literature.[9] But Allen begins with the contention that "literature, known in Arabic as *adab*," was already there and *not* "born with the colonial encounter, but rather . . . [was] redefined through modernization."[10] In spite of the richness of Allen's definition of literature, then, his historically ungrounded concept of *adab* as already literariness unwittingly reifies the category of literature as something that has always existed everywhere.[11] This truncated idea of *adab*, as textual aesthetics and practices of reading, is already filtered through the question of literature, as separate from social aesthetics and ethics.[12]

Aria Fani asserts that "accepting 'literature' as a self-evident translation for the Persian term 'adabiyāt,'" comes at the cost of "eliding how the rise of literature reconfigured premodern forms of knowledge."[13] He notes that even in the early twentieth century, "*adabiyat* was always defined as a plural of *adab*, understood to mean proper form—in other words, as a derivation of *adab*."[14] Later, this older idea of *adab* was split, with *adabiyat* becoming literature, and *adab* reduced to manners.

Before it was translated into modern literature, *adab* was meant for training perception to read the world, not just texts. Texts (and their tellings) played an important role in cultivating this reading ability. But they did so as part of relationships central to the moral becoming of collectives and their individual selves. In this sense, *adab* is a discipline of being in the world aesthetically and ethically, and it is according to its standards that speech and practice, textual and social, imaginative and real, take shape, circulate, and gain meaning.[15]

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9. The scholarship on world literature is vast. For its advocates, see Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?*; and Casanova, *World Republic of Letters*. For its critics, see Apter, *Against World Literature*; and Mufti, *Forget English!* For a discussion on the state of the field, including how its object is assumed, see Mattar, *Specters of World Literature*, especially the preface and introduction.

10. Allen, *In the Shadow*, 6.

11. Ibid., 75. Mufti makes similar arguments in *Forget English!*, 145. My thanks to Aria Fani for the reference.

12. Allen, *In the Shadow*, 78–79, 81–87. In fairness, Allen excavates a historical definition of literature (as *paideia*) closer to *adab* and ultimately argues for a return to something like it. Nevertheless, his focus remains on textual aesthetics and what it means in the world.

13. Fani, *Reading across Borders*, 41.

14. Ibid., 45.

15. A key text of *adab* is Sa'di of Shiraz's *Gulistan*. See Kia, "*Adab* as Literary Form;" Ingenito, *Beholding Beauty*, 99–150; and Keshavmurthy, "Two Interpretive Postures."

What remains incommensurable, then, when we rush to demarcate premodern *adab* as "literature" is a significant part of a capacious concept that connects texts to contexts, domains that we call literary with domains we consider separate (politics, religion, or the material, "real life"). We also lose access to a different way of being that can enable us to expand our own conceptual ground. I try in this essay to stay with the parts that cannot be translated as literature, to call attention to the limits of "literature" as a category. These limits—epistemological, disciplinary, and temporal—depend on divisions that distort what studying *adab* should be and show us what studying "literature" could be.

THE *ADAB* OF *ADABIYAT*

Contemporary *adab* is most often defined as manners or etiquette, an unsatisfying translation given etiquette's devaluation in English as something incidental to substance or meaning, haunted by the question of sincerity.[16] Premodern *adab* included textual aesthetics as part of its broader meaning as proper social and (or) aesthetic form, both of which determined moral substance, and, as such, ethics. "Good" behavior was also beautiful and the beautiful was also morally good. A substance did not fully exist when unconnected to its proper form.

This ontology must be considered alongside the aporetic nature of distinctions in the world of *adab*. To show possession of social *adab*, one had to know what to do and say in any given situation. This required knowing virtues, their relations to one another, and how to respond properly in situations that required negotiating between more than one demand. In other words, to be a possessor of *adab*, a Persian had to know when to strive and when to accept, when to be silent and when to speak (correctly). It was not always straightforward and sometimes the tension was precisely the point.

What does a text understood as part of and through *adab* look like? What might we learn from the embodied social practices that were generative and constitutive of texts and their aesthetics?

PERSIAN TEXTS AS GIFTS OF COMPANIONSHIP

A variety of texts were composed, compiled, and offered within forms of companionship that were ubiquitous across the premodern Persianate world. Persianate societies (out of which polities grew) cohered around hierarchically structured social bonds linking individuals and groups marked by dissimilar origins, religious affiliations, social locations, occupational groupings, and claims to power. These relations gained their substantive meaning through their appropriate forms of enactment. The production

16. Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility*, 197–212.

and exchange of images, compositions, books, and objects, as well as embodied practices were vital to realizing these relations and rendering them legible.

In addition to types of texts we now consider literary, such as collections of poetry, narrative poetic and prose works, companionship (*suhbat*) was also the primary generative site of other sorts of textual production, from chronicles and biographies, to various compendia, treatises, and commentaries. Reframing such texts as gifts (*tuhfah*, used in the titles of hundreds of texts in Islamicate languages) and returning them to the matrix of *adab*, as enactments of gratitude (in the form of praise, exhortation, or pedagogy), for instance, requires us to read, interpret, and interact with them according to the terms of these social relations.

Let me give an example of such a relationship as the generative space of texts. In the late seventeenth century, Muhammad Afzal "Sarkhvush," writing from Delhi, bemoaned the patronage neglected by his king (ʿAlamgir Awarangzib, r. 1658–1707) in relation to a similar connection, decades earlier and elsewhere. He did so in the context of commemorating "Zuhuri" Turshizi, a migrant from Iran who composed famed prose and poetic works at Deccani courts in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

Though their *sāqīnāmah*s—a popular early modern verse genre meaning "song of the cupbearer" in which the speaker repeatedly calls for a wine cupbearer and a song—were deemed close in merit, the responses the two poets could expect from their respective rulers were different.[17] Sarkhvush commemorates Zuhuri's rich reward for his poem: "It is said when he sent it [the *sāqīnāmah*] to the Nizam Shah at Ahmadnagar, in spite of the fact that he [Burhan Nizam Shah II] did not know [Persian] discourse [*nā-āshnā'ī-yi sukhan*], he sent him [Zuhuri] several trains of elephants laden with coin and valuables." Sarkhvush next describes that he himself has composed a *sāqīnāmah* in ʿAlamgir's name, the proper act toward a person from whose patronage he benefits (*namakash mīkhurad*, literally, "whose salt he eats"), "though he [ʿAlamgir] has not heard it, and if he were to hear, the reward would be obvious[ly small]. Nevertheless, he [Sarkhvush] has enacted what is due [as] loyalty [*adā-yi haqq-i namak kardah*, literally, "fulfilled the obligations of [taking] salt"]."[18]

Sarkhvush evokes a sense of deterioration in imperial patronage relationships legible precisely because of a common understanding of meaningful activities among poets across regions and polities. To lament this deterioration, Sarkhvush links himself to his generic forbearer, Zuhuri, who lived in a different kingdom. In this moment of ultimate cultural transregional linkage, there is a simultaneous imperial unraveling: ʿAlamgir's

17. For more on this genre, see Losensky, "Sāqi-nāma."

18. Sarkhvush, *Kalimat*, 130.

interminable wars are reflected by his absence and lack of attention to the court and its poetry. Sarkhvush produces and offers the *sāqīnāmah* as the gift appropriate to his bond. But unlike even the unlettered (in Persian) Nizam Shah, ʻAlamgir neither receives the poem and praises of his accomplished courtiers nor gives them their proper due. Salt, symbolizing the bond linking different people in relationships of obligation and privilege, modeled on the exchange of hospitality given and received, is not being reciprocally circulated.[19] The repeated exchange of gifts, appropriate to the respective parties' positions as patron-client and their individual social and occupational locations, maintained the salt bond. Sarkhvush's lament is about this relationship's disruption, not a pampered poet's whining about lack of proper artistic appreciation or the calculated ploy of a rational self-interested individual. He offers his part of the exchange upholding the salt bond, even if the poem is not received by the king, who nevertheless still offers his care. His absence has hollowed out this care to the material, without the intimacy of companionship.

But Sarkhvush does not remain alone. He commemorates the ruptures in one kind of relationship by reinforcing the vitality of another, between himself and his poetic forbearer. 3Separated temporally as much as spatially, Sarkhvush can nevertheless think himself together with Zuhuri, and be thought of with other *sāqīnāmah* writers. *This* was Persianate *adab*; it could collapse time and fold space as we know it. It was not itself material, but by conditioning experience, giving it substantive moral and aesthetic meaning through form, *adab* provided reality, outside of which the material was meaningless. We may speak of *adab* as the sensibilities, practices, and symbols through which people understood their social whole and themselves in relation to it.

Some may object that language as rhetoric is not an accurate indicator of "what was really going on." But the presumed disjunction between imaginative and material realms is a product of our own modern idea of empiricism. Historically, an aporetic exchange between them, mutually constitutive and sustaining of experience, constituted what was "real." Appropriate aesthetic forms of language could manifest particular ethical forms of social exchange. Emma Flatt has shown how metaphors appropriate to friendship letters referred to practices and activities within which conviviality took place. The correct and deft expressions of friendship could create and thereby stand in for the physically proximate sociality expected of such relationships.[20] Indeed, commemorations of

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19. "Salt" is shorthand for "bread and salt" (*nān va namak*), part of larger rituals of hosting vital to creating bonds of loyalty and protection. Vermani outlines salt's role literally ("From the Court to the Kitchens."). Green notes the invitations to share food created "strong moral obligations" and were "bound up with a political discourse of gift giving" in the wider Islamic world ("Blessed Men," 349).

20. Flatt, "Practicing Friendship."

all sorts were part of the obligations of friends, depending on the nature of the bond.[21] Thus, forms of composition were implicated in the creation and sustenance of individual ethical substance, social bonds, and political cohesion.

Suhbat (companionship or conversation) has been discussed largely within medieval Islamo-Jewish economic history, where it has been reduced to "reciprocal agency" that regulated commercial partnerships.[22] This is a narrow understanding perhaps indicative of how economic thought dominates our understanding of why people act as they do in all exchanges, a sort of "rational" profit-driven calculus of the capitalist sort.[23] As neoliberal subjects, we inhabit a world in which increasingly "there is only homo oeconomicus," a subject who "approaches everything as a market and knows only market conduct."[24] Wendy Brown notes that "in the neoliberal political imaginary that has taken a responsibilized turn, we are no longer creatures of moral autonomy, freedom, or equality. . . . In this respect, the construal of homo oeconomicus as human capital leave behind not only homo politicus, but humanism itself."[25] Inquiry into *suhbat* and its forms may help us recoup a way to navigate the neoliberal threats to our sense of ourselves (and thus possibilities) as humans.

SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIPS: MEN OF POWER AND MEN OF LEARNING

Suhbat was both a subset of *adab* and a central arena of its transmission. Persian moral philosophy emphasized fellowship between men as the means of attaining perfection. The learned had a special role, since the pursuit of learning was understood as part of man's drive to perfect himself. In such a calculus, the learned were more perfect than others, and seeking companionship with them was one way to further the process for others, since "one cannot become perfect in isolation."[26] Poetry, a privileged form of discourse understood to bestow eloquence, was an important refinement that a learned person should possess.[27] If one could not compose poetry, the next best thing was to keep companionship with those who could. Furthermore, men of learning such as

21. For example see, Bray, *The Friend*; and Paul, "Khidma."

22. Jessica Goldberg, *Trade and Institutions*, 133.

23. Mattar notes that "as with literature, the aesthetic itself as well as aesthetic experience is posited . . . as at a remove from the external world," and "as a paradigm of the aesthetic, it might thus be said that the concept of literature . . . is a paradigmatic ideological form of capitalist modernity" (*Specters of World Literature*, 9).

24. Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 39.

25. Ibid., 41–42.

26. Tusi, *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, 321.

27. For more on the work of poetry in creating a relation between people and of the world itself, see Manoukian, "Towards a Poetic Sociology."

"scholars, jurists and literati were also required for [a] court's own understanding of itself as a valid entity."[28] Men of power (*umarā'*) needed men of learning (*fużalā*) and these relations were as vital to medieval and early modern polities as those between rulers and military subordinates.

Such relationships were symbiotic. Men of learning could bestow multivalent prestige, while men of power could offer succor and protection. Many learned persons commemorated in *tazkirah*s (biographical compendiums) as poets are biographically depicted in terms of their students/patrons. Mirroring their learned companions, the biographical narratives of men of power take the shape of a list of companions/teachers that, along with origins, defines them. Patronage of the learned also furthered the creation and spread of knowledge at a more general level, enabling and signifying a society's virtuousness. These relationships were the ground of textual production, seen as necessary for the constitution of Persianate societies and their polities.

This type of companionship contained within it the exchanges of patronage and mentorship. For instance, as a noble of high position in Delhi, ʻAli Quli Khan "Valih" Daghistani (1712–56) benefited from the prestige of patronizing and learning from Shams al-Din "Faqir" Dihlavi (1703–69), the learned scholar and poet par excellence. In such a way, Faqir's reputation was bound up with Valih's own and elicited the loyalty of devotion to his stature. Valih described Faqir as "the exemplar [among] the learned and virtuous of the age and the chief poet of the world."[29]

Faqir returned his beloved student, friend, and patron's gift of commemoration and countenance with gifts of gratitude. He composed poetry to mark significant occasions (for Valih's wedding) and also authorized Valih's poetry by collecting it into a *divan* in 1744.[30] More significantly, in 1747 Faqir composed the narrative poem *Masnavi-yi Valih Sultan* (The tale of Valih and Sultan) at Valih's request, setting to verse his tragically unrequited love for his cousin Khadijah Sultan, loosely following the narrative structure of the famed tale *Layla and Majnun*.[31] In the section describing the reason for composing the poem, Faqir explains being in a state of restless disquiet, unable to bring to fruition his desire to compose. He receives a summons from Valih, whom he describes as distinguished by the eloquence of his pen, his bravery in battle, and his refined manner. With professions of love and admiration, he hastens to his friend's presence, where Valih confides his own agitated and disturbed state over his lost love, Khadijah. With many declarations of love ("Oh direction of my prayer, it is from you that all my

28. Flatt, *Courts of the Deccan Sultanates*, 79.
29. Valih, *Riyaz*, 3:1534.
30. Ibid., 1:31.
31. Rahman, "Faqir Dehlavlī."

works pour forth. . . . Oh my heart, oh [you who are] soul of the two worlds"), Faqir pledges to ease his friend's pain by setting Valih's love to verse.[32] The text comes into being at this point, as the mutual fulfillment of two friends' needs, a significant form through which their virtuous substance is actualized in the world. Mirroring the famous prologue of Saʿdi's *Gulistan* (Rose garden), the text's very conditions of possibility are the *adab* of companionship.[33] In Saʿdi's case, this narration of the text's genesis can be read as a literary trope. But in Faqir's *masnavi* (narrative poem), we know this relationship was "real," and its protagonists significant socially and politically.[34] We also know that the poem circulated widely, leaving us numerous manuscript copies.[35] Faqir's gift of the *divan* and his *masnavi* were necessary realization of gratitude, tying together the material and the imaginative as real.

GIFT OF WORD AND DEED

If exchanges that made and maintained social bonds generated and circulated texts, as objects, compositions, and expressions of care and gratitude, then what does this context mean for how *we* are to receive and engage with them? Let us turn to what is perhaps the most widely cited and referenced text on eighteenth-century Hindustani history and politics, Ghulam Husayn Tabataba'i's *Siyar al-Muta'akhkhirin* (Qualities/deeds of the contemporaries). This text is identified and read as a chronicle, a record of events. Among its renowned features is what has been called the first critique of colonialism penned in the 1780s.[36] This reading is complicated by its dedication to the infamous governor-general of East India Company (EIC), Warren Hastings. Given that Tabataba'i wrote his text as a man of letters who enjoyed companionship and patronage from several high-ranking EIC members, including Hastings himself, what are we to do with it?[37]

The critique's substance is instructive. Echoing Sarkhvush's lament, Tabataba'i identifies the central problem of EIC misrule, significantly, as a lack of social intimacy.[38] After bemoaning the fact that the English are not learning the bases of proper governance, he states: "In short, because the gates of companionship/conversation [*musāhabat*] are

32. The two published manuscript copies are from Karachi and Tehran. For the section detailing reasons for composing the poem, see pages 19–29 in the Tehran edition and 18–28 in the Karachi edition. Quote from Faqir, *Masnavi* (Tehran), 27.

33. See Saʿdi, *Gulistan*, 5–7; Kia, "Indian Friends," 398–99.

34. Kia, *Persianate Selves*, 178–79.

35. Beyond the two published manuscripts cited above, there are numerous manuscript copies in collections in South Asia and Europe. See, for instance, I.O. Islamic 392 in the British Library.

36. Chatterjee, *Black Hole*, 78.

37. Travers, *Empires of Complaints*, 218.

38. I am hardly the first to note this idea and its surrounding discussion. For instance, see Chatterjee, *Cultures of History*, 176–77.

closed and there is no association/intercourse [*ikhtilāt*] with the people of this country [by the English], the two sides are not aware of the conditions of one another."[39] This lack of intercourse results in a fundamental lack of knowledge, deleterious because it prevents them from knowing what will lead to the contentment of the people and the order and prosperity of the kingdom and the world.[40]

Social intercourse, particularly the speaking and listening it engenders, is crucial, appropriate, and beneficial knowledge. Desire for this type of intercourse must therefore be instilled in the new rulers, marked by their alterity to Persianate Asia. Ennobled by this knowledge, men of letters (such as Tabataba'i) defined by their lineage of service to rulers were vital to providing continuity in times of transition to new rulers, even those who were ignorant of the proper forms of governance.[41] The text then is a gift of instruction—Tabataba'i's statements are the preface for his description of how just rule has been dispensed by previous Persianate rulers.

As for how *we* should receive Tabataba'i's gift, its warning and instruction, we might take a cue from Sheldon Pollock, who reminds us that there is more than one way to engage with a text. We must take the text's terms of materialization seriously—and what that meant in the world—and read it for both its historical and analytic value. This is my answer to "the great intellectual challenge" of what Pollock has called "a critical philology," a practice of reading that necessarily includes "the hermeneutical necessity of asking 'What possibility does the text give me to understand my own being?'"[42] In this case, we must receive its lessons as a gift, examine its spirit, and perhaps approach the early modern state with a new consideration of the political ethics of social intimacy.

Such consideration might also give us a new view readers and audiences, a homo amicus as the desiring subject of *adab*, rather than assume and read for a transhistorical homo oeconomicus, animated by a modern (neoliberal capitalist) self-interest, market-dictated morality, and its particular social relations.[43] Homo amicus came into being through habituated social practices, the proper form (*adab*) of being in the world and with the world, according to one's position within it. Many of these habits were practices of exchange within formal relationships. The actualization of these relations produced

39. Tabataba'i, *Siyar*, Ms.or.fol. 257, 481b.

40. Ibid.

41. Chatterjee notices this advisory role, but whether this is bureaucratic is another question (*Cultures of History*, 170). The advisory/pedagogic role of the man of letters has a long tradition going back to educating newly converted Turkic dynasties who had conquered Persianate lands (like the Seljuks) or non-Muslim rulers (like the Ilkhanids).

42. Pollock, "Philology and Disciplinarity." Also see "Philology in Three Dimensions."

43. That capitalism structures social relations is hardly new, though the conceptual boundaries it creates is best articulated in Fraser and Jaeggi, *Capitalism*.

compositions, texts, practices, meanings. They were words and deeds that made virtue in the world, whether as admonishment, warning, example, or incitement. We may think of them as gifts, as objects and acts, transacted between people to create moral meaning, vital agents of social and political scaffolding, as Marcel Mauss put it.[44]

Let me conclude with a word on method. I examine my sources for their hermeneutical ground and their ways of seeing, understanding, experiencing, and representing the world and being in it. The next crucial step for me is to connect with that hermeneutical ground differently than is done via modern historicist practices. These practices were birthed in an era of European colonial domination and its attendant racisms, which gave us Orientalism, for instance, as a relation of power and knowledge. My inspiration is a body of decolonial and feminist scholarship that problematized the normative masculinist position of the scholar, who showed mastery by dominating his subject into an object of knowing, as so eloquently outlined by Samia Khatun.[45] This position had taught us to objectify our sources such that the subjectivity of the modern historian is dominant in the terms of engagement but absent as a term of interrogation. Perhaps, as Khatun puts it, we need to learn to "hear" our texts rather than rely solely on modern forms of reading.[46] After all, in early modern Islamic contexts, texts were not dead letters; they were occult agents that actualized meaning in the world.[47]

What if we bring ourselves back in, not to provide self-exposé, but to acknowledge ourselves as particularly formed and positioned modern speakers, seeking to understand? What if we approached our sources as they asked their audience to, as gifts of connection enabling aporetically indivisible ethical and aesthetic forms? What if, in short, we were to take *adab* and its logic as an analytic framework rather than just an object by which we could articulate our mastery of the Persianate past? What if we attempted to learn from it, be transformed by it?

To return to Allen's arguments, efforts to examine our own presumptions allow us to "consider the poetics of hearing, listening, and possibly empathizing differently."[48] I have attempted to take it in a slightly different direction, to show how rushing to "literature" may inhibit endeavors to learn about older practices of creating and receiving

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44. Mauss showed us new ways of looking at inanimate objects as having spirits, possessing power and demands (*Gift*).

45. Khatun refers to this subject-objection relation as a "an orientalist knowledge relation," one that renders texts into "dead artefacts incapable of living on in the modern world" (*Australianama*, 169–70).

46. Such a directive begins a process meant to "culminate in seeing, attaining consciousness and awakening" (Khatun, *Australianama*, 170–72, quote from 171).

47. Melvin-Koushki, "Islamic Grammatology."

48. Allen, *In the Shadow*, 137.

texts. *Adab* is but one means with which to consider other ways of being in the world, instead of merely other literatures. Ultimately, resisting the rush to make older practices already literature can "question the place from which we read, respond, and critique—the values that supposedly inform and inflect a manner of being in the world" and "imagine the world anew."[49]

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49. Ibid., 140.

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