

Love And Longing In Pre-Islamic Arabic Poetry (Al-Mu‘allaqāt)

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Abstract: This article examines the themes of love *ḥubb*, *‘ishq* and longing *ḥanīn*, *shawq* in the *nasīb*—the amatory overture—of the *Mu‘allaqāt*, the celebrated pre-Islamic odes. The objective is to understand how longing in these poems’ functions not only as an emotional outpouring but as a structural, cultural, and ethical force. Methodologically, the study combines close textual readings of representative odes *Imru’ al-Qays*, *Tarafa*, *Zuhayr*, *Labīd*, and *‘Antarah* with philological analysis, reference to classical commentaries, and insights from modern scholarship in ritual poetics and oral-formulaic theory. More than twenty critical works are reviewed to situate the discussion historically and theoretically. The findings show that longing in the *nasīb* is not a decorative prelude but a threshold emotion: it transforms personal memory into communal values, giving credibility to later sections of the *Qaṣīda*. *Imru’ al-Qays* frames longing as knowledge, *Tarafa* ties it to mortality and generosity, *Zuhayr* tempers it with wisdom, *Labīd* elevates it into metaphysics, and *‘Antarah* uses it to claim social recognition. In conclusion, love and longing emerge as the emotional engines of the *Mu‘allaqāt*, anchoring the coherence of the *qaṣīda* and embodying the values of endurance, generosity, and honor.

Keywords: *Mu‘allaqāt*; *Nasīb*; *Love and Longing*; *Pre-Islamic Arabic Poetry*; *Qaṣīda Structure*

INTRODUCTION

Pre-Islamic poetry, or *shi‘r jāhili* as it is called in Arabic, has long been regarded as the clearest view of Arab life before Islam. It was not just a source of pleasure, but also the storehouse of tribal wisdom; in it were kept the memories, values and identity of the tribe (Beeston et al., 1983; Zwettler, 1978). Among this enormous heritage, the *Mu‘allaqāt* are very important. Visited by seven or, more usually, ten of its greatest poets *Imru’ al-Qays*, *Tarafa*, *Zuhayr*, *Labīd*, *‘Antarah*, *‘Amr ibn Kulthum* and *al-Harith ibn Hilliza*, these odes are famed as the most splendid productions of early Arabic eloquence. Legend had it that they were inscribed in gold and suspended on the walls of the holy *Ka‘ba*; according to later reports about the prestige and authority of these poems (Nicholson, 1907; Arberry, 2018).

The *Moallaqat* conform to the standard form of the *qaṣīda* (قصيدة) in that they are made up of three parts — the *nasīb* (نسيب), or nostalgic opening; the *raḥil* (رحيل), or descriptive and narrative body of the poem recounting travel, hardship, battle, etc.; and finally, *fakhr* (فخر), in which a poet praises either his tribe or himself. Original criticizers sometimes regarded the *nasīb* as an ornamental prolog, but modern studies increasingly make it out to be the emotional and structural center-piece of the ode (van Gelder 1982; Arazī & Stetkevych 1996). Love (*ḥubb*, حُب) and longing (*ḥanīn*, حنين; *shawq*, شوق) are dominant themes within the *nasīb*. These feelings are not only personal but social and symbolic. The poet’s lament at the deserted campsite (*aṭlāl*, الأطلال) accepts the form of a collective rite that translates individual loss into social memory and affirms tribal virtues such as bravery, generosity, and stoicism. Longing can also function as a cultural force, which establishes a direct link between the internal and the collective. Arazī and Stetkevych (1996) claim that the *nasīb* is a type of traditional performance that establishes the moral lessons of the poem. Michael Sells (1989) uses visual imagery of ruins and loss to ponder on time and

mortality. In the end, James Montgomery (2018) emphasizes the struggle between power and weakness, whereas Jaroslav Stetkevych (1971) places nostalgia at the center of Arab literary awareness. When taken as a whole, these perspectives present the *nasīb* not as a useful introduction but as the emotional and narrative center of the poem.

Pre-Islamic Arabic poetry interpretation, transmission, and preservation are among the most significant intellectual traditions in Arabic literature. The body of poems was recorded and formalized largely by early "anthologists" such as *Abū Tammām*, curator of the *Ḥamāsa* (scale twelve) and *al-Mufaḍḍal aḍ-Ḍabī*, compiler of the *al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* (tenth). Apart from their history as preserving Arabs' oral literature, these anthologies both began with standards for what again would be considered beauty centuries later. Analysts such as *al-Zūzanī* and *Tibrīzī* have helped to expand the analytic tradition by situating the poems in their proper linguistic, historical and cultural contexts. It is the very aspect of placing the poems in a sense between lines where they are fully able to be appreciated according to their tribal background that has been particularly receptive among later enthusiasts such as *al-Tabarānī*, who was both fruitful in his explanations and judgments. *Ibn Qutaybah's Kitāb al-Shi'r wa-l-Shu'arā'* remains a formative influence in the articulation of the *qaṣīda's* organizing principle. He found the poem's emotional and architectural coherence to rest entirely on its *nasīb*, or romantic preface in which loss of homeland and love alternates with tears. This focus on movement of the poem from nostalgia to pride and moralizing reflection had an impact on the classical poetics of verse in Arabic, which established a norm.

The global recognition came because of today's researchers' interest in this tradition. Sells' *Desert Tracings* (1989) "made the romanticism of loss and longing speak to all cultures," while in Arberry's *The Seven Odes* (2018), he offered the *Mu'allaqāt* to English readers with both literary sensitivity and philological faithfulness. Alan Jones's scholarly texts (1992, 1996) used cutting-edge editing in conjunction with the best traditional Arabic learning to set new standards of textual accuracy and annotation. (2019) has resurrected *'Antarah's* iconic ode, shifting the focus to how valor and love passion combine to produce the aesthetics of social identity and tribal pride.

The oral and sung features of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry have remained critical to understanding its evolution. The methods of oral transmission that maintained the poetic repertory both before and after Islam were studied by Zwettler (1978) and Schoeler (2006), who framed these poems as live performances rather than static texts. Van Gelder (1982) went on to show how the *nasīb* serves as a complex tool of structural unity, leading the listener from individual feeling to group confirmation. Arazi and Suzanne Stetkevych (1996) offered a ceremonial reading of the *qaṣīda* in a different interpretive vein, arguing that the poetry journey reenacts rituals of passage. This is place of Jaroslav Stetkevych's (1971) original examination of nostalgia (*ḥanīn*) as the emotional center of Arabic poetics—an emotional mirror that combines nature, tribe, and self.

The comparative turn in the late 20th century extended the *qaṣīda's* literary significance beyond the Arab world. Volumes such as *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa* (Sperl & Shackle, 1996) and *Medieval Arabic Praise Poetry* (Meisami & Starkey, 1998) situate the genre within broader transregional frameworks, revealing how conventions of praise, lament, and authority circulated through Persian, Urdu, and African Islamic literatures. These studies underscore questions of gender, voice, and cultural agency embedded in the performative identity of the poet.

Modern studies increasingly develop the interpretive techniques used for pre-Islamic poetry. Alhajaya (2022) examined metaphor and *kenāya* as linguistic expressions of rupture, outlining how moral forces are processed in figurative constructs by means of trauma as well as endurance. Ghazali et al. (2024) tellingly mapped *Ṭarafa's* ode as a symbolic charting of *jāhili* society, and brought to light the mediation between individual attitude and collective demand. Translation and stylistic analysis have also exposed the ways in which measure, rhythm creates sense across languages. Ghazel (2019) and Al-Ghadeer (2020) push at the aesthetic extremes of

translation to reveal how the spatial imaginary and metrical regularity impede complete transfer. Collectively, these contributions represent a lively area of research.

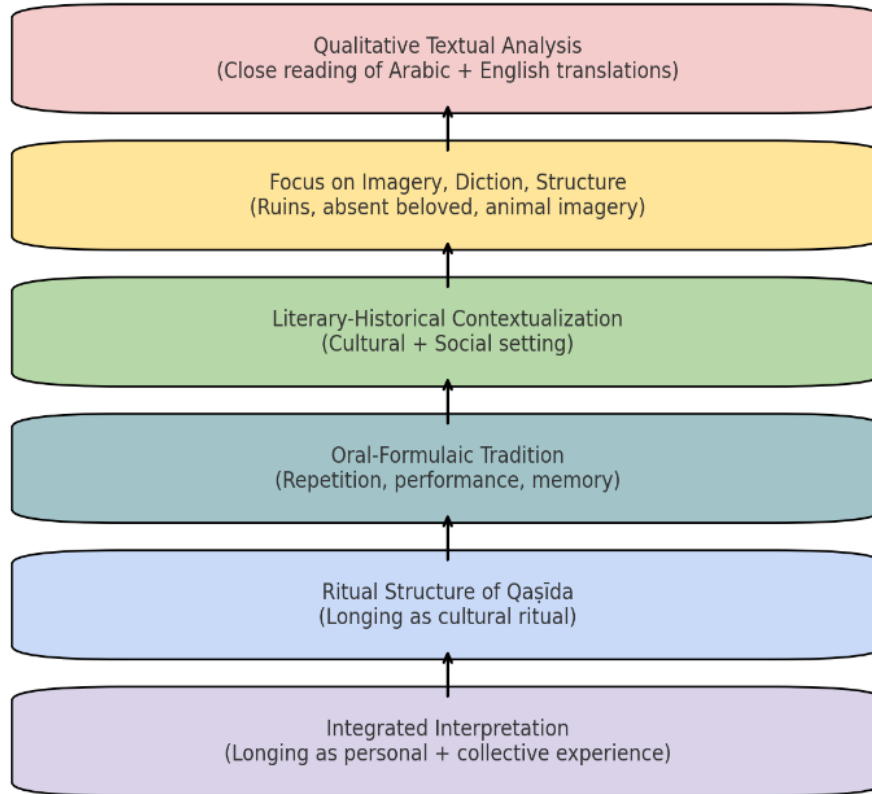
The study of pre-Islamic poetry continues to be an important area where tradition, memory, and modernity come together, from early philological preservation to contemporary semiotic and comparative analysis. In particular, the *nasīb* keeps irritating thought about how longing outlines poetic discourse, the Arab past's cultural imagination, and its enduring implications in literature around the world. There is still an important gap in the critical analysis of the *qaṣīda*, especially when it comes to the thematic and cultural aspects of longing, although the significant contributions of past scholarship. While the fact that previous studies have mostly concentrated on the poem's oral performance and structural coherence (van Gelder, 1982; Zwettler, 1978; Schoeler, 2006), the longing motif has usually been dismissed as a formal or aesthetics convention rather than being investigated as an active cultural indicator. Although notable translators and interpreters like Montgomery (2018), Sells (1989), and Arberry (2018) have highlighted its lyrical beauty, they have rarely looked into its deeper social implications.

This research fills that gap by suggesting that longing in the *nasīb* should be viewed as a basic cultural mechanism that expresses the connection between individual experience, collective memory, and the moral values of honor, generosity, and endurance that characterize pre-Islamic tribal identity, rather than just as an expression of personal emotion. Through close examination of how poets including *Imru' al-Qays* (امرؤ القيس), *Ṭarafa* (طرفة بن العبد), *Zuhayr* (زهير بن أبي سلمى), *Labīd* (ليبيد بن ربيعة), and *'Antarah* (عنتر بن شداد) articulate longing, this research reveals how close memories become vehicles for expressing and reinforcing communal values. Building on foundational perceptions from van Gelder (1982) and Arazi & Stetkevych (1996), it contends that the *nasīb* creates the emotional and structural core of the pre-Islamic ode. By reframing the *Mu'allaqāt* in this way, the study develops our understanding of how pre-Islamic poets transformed personal loss into moral continuity, reflecting a broader cultural flexibility expressed through their poetry.

METHOD

The study uses a close reading and qualitative textual analysis approach to examine how the literary form of *nasīb* expresses love and longing in several chosen odes from every one of the *Mu'allaqāt* poets, with a focus on imagery, diction, and structure. The poems are by *Imru' al-Qays*, *Ṭarafa*, *Zuhayr*, *Labīd*, and *'Antarah*. Each poem is presented in Arabic and with established English translations which permits the exploration of recurring motifs such as the *aṭlāl* (ruins), the absent beloved, and animal imagery. In addition to close reading of texts, the book does literary-historical contextualization of the odes within their cultural and social world. This twofold focus facilitates the development of an understanding of longing not only as a personal emotion, but also as a collective and ritualized experience that is integrated within tribal life. Following Zwettler's framework of oral-formulaic composition, attention is also given to the performative aspects of repetition and formulae that sustained these poems in memory and performance (Zwettler, 1978). Also, Stetkevych's model of the *qaṣīda* as a ritual structure provides a theoretical lens for interpreting the *nasīb* as the threshold through which private passion is transformed into communal identity (Arazi & Stetkevych, 1996).

Methodological Framework of the Study



Diagram,1 (Self): Methodological Framework of the Study

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Imru' al-Qays: The archetype of desire

Imru' al-Qays' Mu'allaqa begins with the famous *nasīb* at the ruins (*waqf 'ala al-aṭlāl*), which later became the model for how desire is expressed in Arabic poetry. His opening words, *qifā nabki* ("Stop, let us weep"), do more than announce grief. They pause the moment and draw both the poet and his companions into a shared act of remembering. The ruins he describes are not simply empty remains; they carry meaning, memory, and presence that the poet revives through poetry (Arazi & Stetkevych, 1993; Sells, 1989).

Stop, let us weep at the memory of a beloved and her dwelling,

At the edge of al-Liwa, between Dakhūl and Ḥawmal.

At Tuḍīḥ and al-Miqrāh, whose traces have not been effaced,

For the south wind and the north have woven their veils across them.

You see the site desolate, smoothed flat,

As if Sulaymā and Mayyil had never camped there.

I halted my camel there, as though she too were weeping,

Her eyes drenched, answering mine with flowing tears.

My companions said: "Do not exhaust yourself with grief,

قِفَا نَبْكُ مِنْ ذِكْرِ حَبِيبٍ وَمَنْزِلِ

بِسِقْطِ اللَّوَى بَيْنَ الدَّخُولِ فَحَوْمَلِ

فَتُوضِحْ فَالْمِقْرَاهُ لَمْ يَعْفُ رَسْمُهَا

لِمَا نَسَجَتْهَا مِنْ جَنُوبٍ وَشَمَالِ

تَرَى بَعْلَهَا بِالْوَجْهِ قَفْرًا مُسَطَّحًا

كَأَنَّ لَمْ تَحُلْ بِهِ سُلَيْمَى وَمَيْلِ

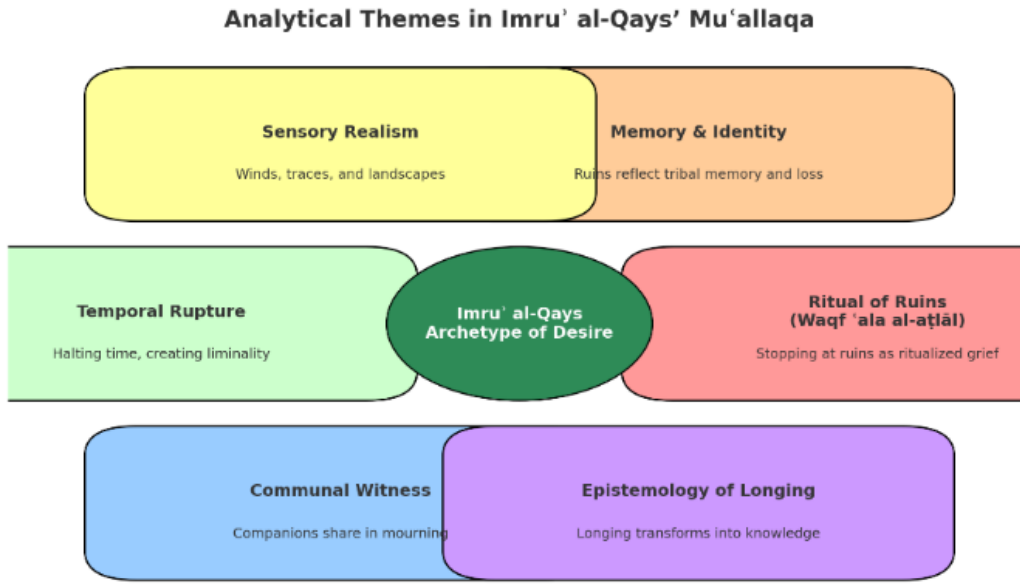
فَوَقَّفْتُ فِيهَا نَاقَتِي وَكَأَنَّهَا

فَدَيْنٌ لِعَيْنَيْهَا مِنَ الدَّمْعِ مُنْهَلِ

فَقَالَ صَحَابِي: لَا تُجْهِدِ الْمَرْءَ جَهْدَهُ

No true friend can blame you for the pain you bear."

وَمَا بِصَدِيقٍ مُّشْفِقٍ عَنْكَ مُعَذِّلٍ



Diagram,2 (Self): Analytical Theme in *Imru'al Qays' Mu'llaha*

According to academics, this moment reflects not only his personal grief but also the broader shocks of tribal life, such as the loss of a home, the realization of mortality, and the weakening of social ties (Abbas, 2022). Winds blowing over the traces of the area; this is imagery that establishes how memory and imagination can call back what has disappeared (Barnwell, 1980). Analyses of translation also demonstrate that the "rhythm" of the lines and the "gravity" of countries are not mere adornments but words/signs, which attach personal desire to tribal identity (Boase-Beier, 2011). And Jack's discussion with his mates also highlights that you don't need to grieve in private. It is known and public knowledge. Thus, Imru' al-Qays makes yearning a form of knowledge. His mourning becomes valor, memory becomes a gesture of defiance against loss, and poetry itself becomes a way to assert courage, truthfulness and continuity. For, as Arberry (2018) has noted, the imperative *qifā* ("Stop"), in fact, blocks time and offers the ruins as a stage where longing unlocks the gates of poetic truth.

Tarafa: Hedonism and mortality

Tarafa's nasīb shows his love of pleasure but also his awareness of death. He links longing with joy, reminding us that life is short.

For Khawla there are traces at Burqat Thahmad,
 Gleaming like the fading tattoo on the back of a hand.
 My companions stopped with me upon their mounts,
 Saying: "Do not perish in grief—show endurance!"
 On the day they departed, I was like a man struck,
 Sudden pain renewed, cutting deeper.
 I became like a ruined temple, covered in dust,

لَحَوْلَةٌ أَطْلَالٌ بِرِقَّةٍ تَهْمَدُ
 تَلُوخٌ كَبَاقِي الْوَشْمِ فِي ظَاهِرِ الْيَدِ
 وَقَوْفًا بِمَا صَحْبِي عَلَيَّ مَطِيئُهُمْ
 يَقُولُونَ لَا تَهْلِكْ أَسَىٍّ وَتَجَلَّدُ
 كَأَنِّي غَدَاةَ الْبَيْنِ يَوْمَ تَحْمَلُوا
 لَدَا عَجَلًا مِنْ بَعْدِ بَيْنٍ مُجَدَّدِ
 فَأَصْبَحْتُ كَالْهَيْكَلِ الْمَعْفَرِ فَوْقَهُ

Where the echo of lament and dew lingers.

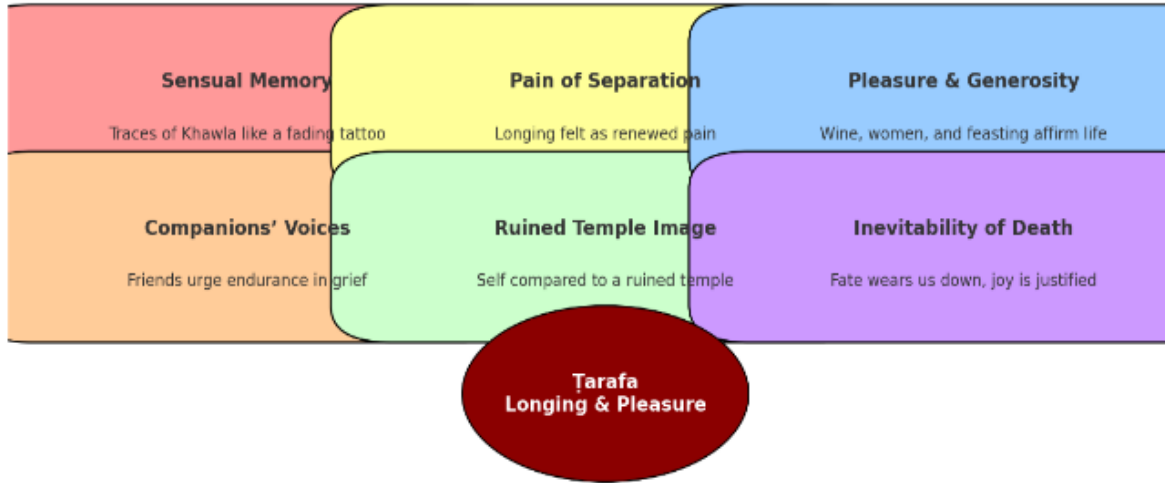
صَدَى يَصِيحُ وَالنَّدَى مُتَرَدِّدٌ

O critic! Do you begrudge me my joy?

أَلَا أَتَيْهَا اللَّائِمُ أَحْسَدَتْ مَعْبُطِي

Do you not see how fate wears us down relentlessly?

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ الدَّهْرَ يُعْنِي وَيَجْهَدُ



Diagram, 3 (Self): *Tarafa* Longing and Pleasure

In his poetries, the remnants of Khawla surface “like a tattoo on the back of a hand blurring with time,” an arresting metaphor linking memory and body. His friends challenge him to cope, but whose response makes wanting an aching and a reason for pleasure. “Ruined temple,” with its echoes of lament, is how Ṭarafa wants to describe himself; he’s establishing that the power of love and memory can wound profoundly while also necessitating pleasure. For him, wine, women, and feasting are not signing of carelessness but a way to affirm life’s fleeting nature. Desire becomes moral: generosity and open-handed giving gain their meaning because death is inevitable (Beeston et al., 1983; Monroe, 1972). In this way, Ṭarafa reshapes longing into a philosophy of living fully before time runs out.

Zuhayr: Longing and prudence

Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā shows longing with wisdom. His *nasīb* is short but full of meaning

Is there for Umm Awfā’s dwelling a trace, mute and silent,

أَمِنْ أُمِّ أَوْفَى دِمْنَةٌ لَمْ تَكَلِّمْ

At Ḥawmanat al-Durāj and al-Mutathallam?

بِحَوْمَانَةِ الدُّرَاجِ فَالْمُتَثَلَّمِ

Ruins worn by years, among them

دِمْنٌ تَجَلَّدَهَا السِّنِينَ وَبَيْنَهَا

Are signs effaced, though memory remains.

رَسُومٌ عَفَتْ وَالْعَهْدُ مِنْهَا مُقَدَّمٌ

I stopped my camel there, as though she too bore another’s burden,

فَوَقَفْتُ فِيهَا نَاقَتِي وَكَأَنَّهَا

And groaned beneath it.

فَدَنْ لَأُخْرَى حَامِلٌ فَتَحَجَّجِمُ

I paused after twenty years had passed,

وَقَفْتُ بِهَا مِنْ بَعْدِ عِشْرِينَ حِجَّةً

Through many nights, with many tribes camped there.

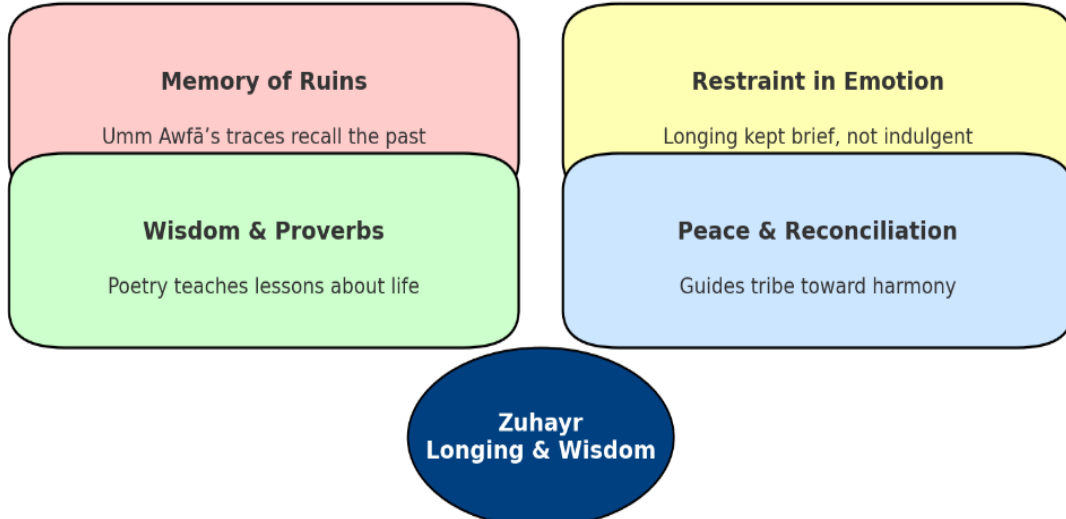
فَلَيْلًا بِهَا مِنْ كُلِّ حَيٍّ وَمُعْظَمٍ

The eyes said to the heart: "Listen and obey,"

فَقَالَتْ لَهُ الْعَيْنَانِ سَمْعًا وَطَاعَةً

And the world came back to him with a cost.

وَأَقْبَلَتِ الدُّنْيَا عَلَيْهِ بِمَغْرَمٍ



Diagram, 4 (Self): *Zuhayr Longing and Wisdom*

Thinking of the ruins of Umm Awfā, Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā does not elaborate on his feelings. Instead of emphasizing passion, he inspires knowledge via longing. His poems swiftly turn to teachings on time, harmony, and responsibility, explaining how love and memory can lead people to unification.

Labīd: Longing as ontology

Labīd's *nasīb* begins with peaceful, abandoned ruins. He instantly transforms the occasion into something greater, even though those phrases initially appear like a typical expression of grief. Beyond love and memories, Negro South's deserted homes and abandoned locations serve as a warning that all you lose in life is swept away. The most well-known quote from Labīd is "Everything dies except Allah (SWT)." Indeed, everything dies, save for Allah. This is how yearning for what remains turns into longing for the cherished. The ruins serve as a reminder to him that life is short, beauty will fade, and happiness will eventually disappear. The only everlasting fact that remains is Allah (SWT). These modifications long into something even more profound: it serves as a tool for exploring existence itself. He also warns the general public that no one will ever surpass their deeds because everyone will be judged one day. Along with to being a spirit guide for his tribe, Labīd is regarded as the best kind of poet whose ideas will continue to be relevant in religious thought because his verses combine a personal experience of loss with spiritual truth.

The dwellings are effaced—no place remains,
no standing,

عَفَّتِ الدِّيَارُ مَحْلُهَا فَمُقَامُهَا

At Minā their hollows and ridges stand
eternal.

بِمَنْى تَأَبَّدَ غَوُّهَا فَرَجَامُهَا

The haunts of the gazelles and deer are
empty,

فَمَدَافِعُ الرِّمِيِّتَيْنِ فَأَهْلُهَا

Their dams deserted, their mounts
abandoned.

حَلَّتِ السُّدُودُ فَعَوَّلَهَا فَأَكَاثُهَا

When their ties were severed, it was as if

فَإِذَا تَقَطَّعَ وَصْلُهَا فَكَأَنَّهَا

On the day of parting their doors were locked
forever.

يَوْمَ الْفَرَاقِ لَمُغْلَقٌ أَبْوَابُهَا

Indeed, everything apart from Allah (SWT) is
perishing,

أَلَا كُلُّ شَيْءٍ مَا خَلَا اللَّهَ بَاطِلٌ

And every delight is destined to vanish.

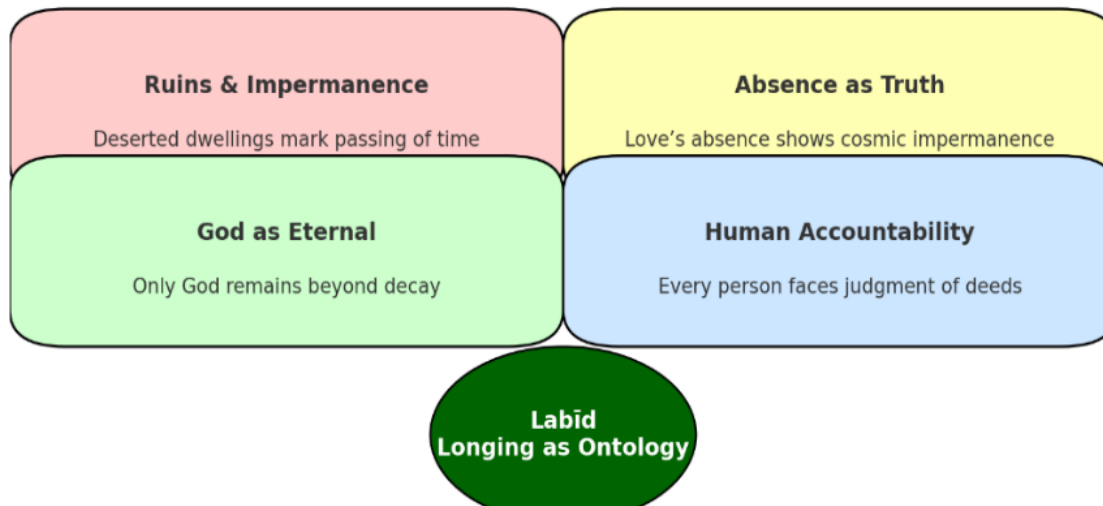
وَكُلُّ نَعِيمٍ لَا مَحَالَةَ زَائِلٌ

Every man will one day know his deeds,

وَكُلُّ إِمْرٍ يَوْمًا سَيَعْلَمُ سَعْيَهُ

When his record is gathered and judged by
the Judge

إِذَا حُشِرَتْ أَعْمَالُهُ وَقَضَى بِهِ الْقَاضِي



Diagram, 5 (Self): *Labid* Longing as ontology

The lack of love in *Labid*'s poems extends beyond personal loss to a higher reality. Desire is a search for permanence in a world that all things fade on. That's why his famous verse "everything that is not of Allah is perishing" functions as both an expression of longing and a reminder of what actually tolerates.

Antarah: Love as social aspiration

'*Antarah ibn Shaddād's Mu'allaqa* weaves love and struggle into one voice. His devotion to 'Abla is never just personal; it is tied to his fight for recognition within his tribe. Born to an enslaved mother, 'Antarah uses poetry and battle to prove his dignity and worth. When he calls out to Abla's dwelling, he is also speaking to her people, demanding that they see his courage and nobility. His longing is both tender and martial: he loves Abla deeply, but he also longs for the honor that will make him her equal.

Have the poets left any fragment unspoken,

هَلْ غَادَرَ الشُّعْرَاءُ مِنْ مُتَرَدِّمٍ

Or have you recognized the dwelling after
doubt?

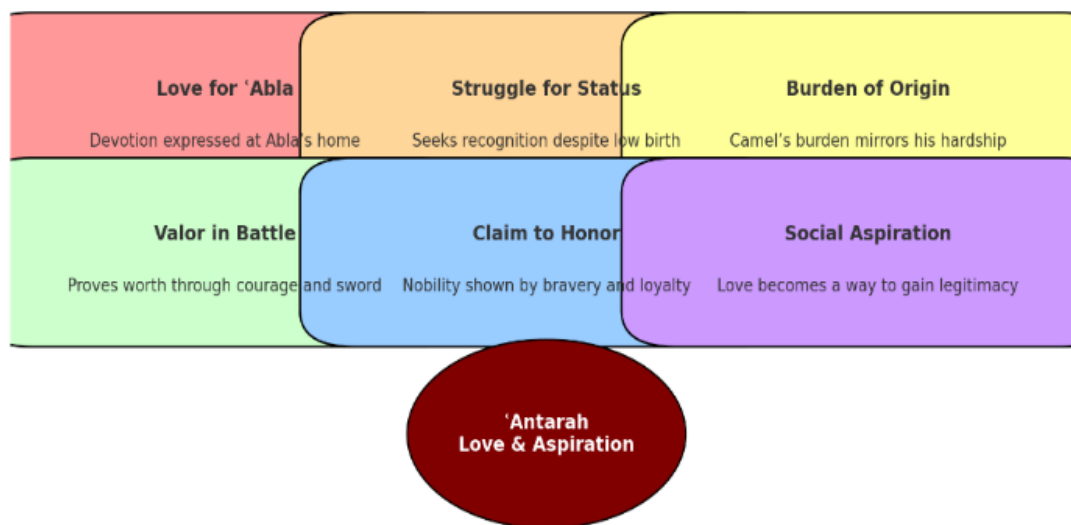
أَمْ هَلْ عَرَفْتَ الدَّارَ بَعْدَ تَوَهُّمٍ

O Abla's house at al-Jiwā, speak to me!

يَا دَارَ عِبَلَةَ بِالْجَوَاءِ تَكَلَّمِي

A morning greeting to you, Abla's home, and peace!
 I halted my camel there, groaning beneath the weight,
 As though it carried another's heavy burden.
 I longed to turn the swords in my hands,
 So that her people might know the worth of my nobility,
 And He who is above the heavens might know our station,
 And Abla herself might know the love I conceal for her.

وَعَمِي صَبَاحًا دَارَ عَبْلَةَ وَأَسْلَمِي
 فَوَقَفْتُ فِيهَا نَاقَتِي وَكَأَنَّهَا
 فَدَنُّ لَأُخْرَى حَامِلٍ فَتَحَجَّجِمُ
 وَوَدَدْتُ تَقْلِيْبَ السُّيُوفِ بِأَيْدِي
 لِيَعْلَمَ أَهْلُهَا مَكَانَ الْكَرَمِ
 وَيَعْلَمَ مَنْ فَوْقَ السَّمَاءِ مَكَانَنَا
 وَيَعْلَمَ عَبْلَةُ أَيُّ حُبٍّ أَكُنُّ هَا



Diagram, 6 (Self): *Antarah* Love as social aspiration

In 'Antarah's poetries, love is never just a private emotion. His devotion to 'Abla is bound up with his struggle for recognition within the tribe. To love her openly, he must also prove himself worthy in the eyes of her people. This is why his poetry moves so easily between images of affection and images of battle. By showing his courage with the sword and his loyalty in combat, he turns passion into proof of honor. Love, for 'Antarah, is inseparable from valor, because only through bravery can his longing be respected. In this way, desire becomes more than personal feeling, it becomes a public claim to dignity and validity. By joining love with courage on the battlefield, 'Antarah reshapes longing into social aspiration, turning personal affection into a claim for public honor (Montgomery, 2018; Sells, 1989).

Comparative Perspective: Poets and Their Longing

Pre-Islamic Arabic poetry is not only about love or individual feeling; it is rooted in the shared values and memory of the tribe. Each poet approaches longing in a different way, but together their voices preserve the ideals of their society. Imru' al-Qays represents the passionate and sensual side of longing. His use of the *atīlāl* motif the ruins of a beloved's dwelling makes desire a measure of authenticity. Private sorrow, through his poetry, becomes a mark of valor and depth of feeling, attributes long associated with the warrior-poet (Arazi Stetkevych, 1996). Ṭarafa travels a different road, extolling youth, wine and pleasure as he also cautions his audience about the transitory nature of life. It is, if you like, an intoxicating blend of self-indulgence and death and in that sense, it captures something of the tribal ethic of being generous to others whilst at the same time making the most of life before it's over (Jones, 2012). His poems express a philosophy

of reckless giving, in which joy is noble for its very lack of reason, given shortness of time. Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā is moderate in his longing. His *nasīb* begins with remembrance of the past, but he is soon engaged in lessons, wisdom and reconciliation and peace. For him, desire is a passageway into ethical thought. His poetry „subordinates the category of personal emotion to that of tribal unity and obligation (Die Mu‘allaqa des Zuhair: Zuhair Ibn Abi Sulma, 6th Cent: Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming: Internet Archive, 2010). Longing, for Labīd ibn Rabī‘ah, becomes metaphysics. The ruins are not simply the sketching of loss but reminders of only temporariness. That “everything is perishing but Allah (SWT),” his tongue’s work as a Thracian whey-leathermaker artfully and absolutely rises longing into one of those cosmic truths about survival, humility and fate. Desire thus becomes a teaching about existence, fusing tribal stoicism with spiritual insight (Sells 1989). ‘Antarah ibn Shaddād combines love with chivalry. Abīla is devoted to him and he prides himself on it amidst his tribe of men. By linking desire with fighting ability, he turns yearning into social climbing. Love is the evidence of courage, and love is the tissue we create to claim honor, respect through poetry and by battle (Lawson 1995). Together, these poets suggest that yearning was never solely private. It embodied and enhanced the tribe’s virtues: bravery, generosity, wisdom, perseverance and honor. In their poetry, the individual longing mirrors a shared identity. The results of this comparative perspective are still mainly descriptive, as is the description of how each poet articulates his longing. But there are few explanations of why these differences exist, what they reflect under the surface, how cultural, social and personal structures condition the poet’s approach. Such phenomena as the motivations behind these differentiations (especially in terms of historical context, individual biography and tribal allegiance) would complement an analysis which would show what motivated each poet to sing of longing and for what use they were put within pre-Islamic Arabian society.

Table 1. Comparative Table: Love, Longing, and Tribal Values.

| Poet | Style of Longing | Arabic Example | Tribal Values Linked |
|----------------------|---|--|---|
| <i>Imru’ al-Qays</i> | Sensual and vivid reconstructs beloved from ruins (aṭlāl) | قفَا نَبِكْ مِنْ ذِكْرِي حَبِيبٍ وَمَنْزِلٍ (Stop, let us weep for the memory of a beloved and her dwelling) | Desire authenticates experience → bravery & passion |
| <i>Ṭarafa</i> | Pleasure mixed with mortality youth and wine | لِخَوْلَةٍ أَطْلَالَ بِبُرْقَةٍ تُهَمِّدُ (For Khawla there are traces at Burqat Thahmad) | Generosity, open-handedness, seizing life’s joy |
| <i>Zuhayr</i> | Brief, prudent longing tempered by wisdom | أَمِنْ أُمِّ أَوْفَى دِمْنَةٍ لَمْ تَكَلِّمْ (For Umm Awfā’s dwelling, a silent trace remains) | Ethical reflection, reconciliation, peace |
| <i>Labīd</i> | Metaphysical longing becomes cosmic truth | أَلَا كُلُّ شَيْءٍ مَا خَلَا اللَّهَ بَاطِلٌ (Indeed, everything apart from Allah is perishing) | Awareness of impermanence, moral endurance |
| ‘Antarah | Heroic and aspirational love tied to recognition | يَا دَارَ عِبْلَةَ بِالْجَوَاءِ تَكَلِّمِي (O Abīla’s house at al-Jiwā, speak to me!) | Honor, social legitimacy, courage in battle |

The contrast between them proves that although for all poets of the Mu‘allaqāt the same ritualized scene of longing at the ruins (aṭlāl, الأطلال) is involved, each poet appropriates it to his own identity and tribal function. The pre-Islamic poets, however, employed sensual memory as the proof of love and therefore inadequacy, with Imru’ al-Qays converting it into proof of passion and consequently bravery; Tarafa making desire and the knowledge of mortality into grounds for generosity; Zuhayr conceiving longing as an exercise in prudence and conciliation; Labīd converting it into a metaphysical insight on impermanence; ‘Antarah synthesizing love with the quest for social honor. The chart exposes how a single poetic convention—the *nasīb*—led to different moral results and

suggests that pre-Islamic love and longing were more than mere passions; they were cultural forces that upheld the tribe's values.

Comparative Themes of Longing in Pre-Islamic Poetry

| | | |
|---------------|--|----------------------|
| Imru' al-Qays | Sensual longing, ruins as memory | Bravery & Passion |
| Ṭarafa | Pleasure & youth, shadowed by death | Generosity & Joy |
| Zuhayr | Prudent longing, ethical reflection | Wisdom & Peace |
| Labid | Metaphysical longing, cosmic truth | Endurance & Humility |
| ʿAntarah | Heroic longing, love as honor | Honor & Valor |

Diagram, 7 (Self): Comparative Theme of Longing in pre-Islamic Poetry

CONCLUSION

Love and longing in the Muʿallaqāt are not feelings we have, but things we do. Using themes of ruins, lack, and longing, poets make turn individual loss into collective ideals like courage, generosity and endurance. For this reason, the nasīb is both an individual reminiscence as well as a tribal ritual, preserving longing at the heart of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry. Reading these poems, you realize desire is not simply personal but also works as a cultural discourse that binds tribe and self. Imru' al-Qays, Ṭarafa, and Zuhayr give examples of the way in which eroticism was tied to tribal character and morality through their verses while Labīd's and ʿAntarah's poetry illustrates how love also formed an integral part of private life. Imru' al-Qays employs the aṭlāl to convey love, transforming desire into an act of bravery and honesty. The poet's longing for "youth and the grape's juice" acts as a metaphor for life passing too soon, in stressing that desire and good works are what we, essentially need. Regret is the most easy and practical tribe's solidarity string to tune in their peace of mind and why doing so since Zohair is a harmony between wisdom and famine. Longing, Labīd in its application Labīd's notion of longing moves from the particular to the universal and is felt in association with lived realities of fragmentation and death. Finally, Antarah equates honor with love, as is evident in his love for Abila and desire to be brave and accepted into society. Collectively, these poets demonstrate that longing is a many-splendored thing — romantic and strong, ethical and cosmic. However, it is the understanding that desire cannot be disaggregated from a general will (a collective) that links their diverse strategies. Inasmuch as poetry was style as a mode of artistic performance, it was also moral code – or at least had been before it became something written down... and, love and remembrance went along with mythic versions of tribal aspirations—braveness / generosity / wisdom (skill)/ strength (courage)/ honor.

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