Introduction

The sixth-/twelfth-century Andalusian philosopher Ibn Rushd, or Averroes as he is known in Latin, cites the following early Islamic-era verse in his commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics*. In it, the poet describes having a conversation with his fellow caravan travelers (or beloved) on camelback on their way home after they have fulfilled their pilgrimage duties in Mecca:[1]

أَخَذْنا بأطرافِ الأحاديث بيننا وسالتْ بأعناقِ المَطِيِّ الأباطحُ

We took to the choicest of speech between us
as the broad valleys flowed with the necks of camels
~ Kuthayyir ʿAzza (d. 105/723)

Ibn Rushd cites this verse as an example of rendering poetic the simple idea of "we spoke and we traveled." While it might seem intuitively obvious in this case that one way of expressing the idea is more poetic than the other, this book seeks to explore the theoretical reasoning classical Arabic literary theory provided for poeticity. The question is not what defines poetry as verse, the answer to which entails a description of the formal structure of a poem, its rhyme and meter. Rather, the inquiry of this study is what defines language as *poetic* or *eloquent*, whether in the form of verse, prose, or the

[1] Ibn Rushd, *Talkhīṣ kitāb al-shiʿr* (Cairo: Markaz Taḥqīq al-Turāth, 1986), 122. This verse is frequently discussed in medieval Arabic literary criticism. It is variously understood as being about pilgrimage or love. As is often the case with early Arabic poetry, the verse is attributed to several poets, among them the famous Kuthayyir ʿAzza, or quoted without any attribution. See my discussion of the verse in Chapter 2, under the section "Alteration (*Taghyīr*)," and in Chapter 4, under "What Makes One Metaphor Better than Another?"

Quran.[2] The answer to this question is an aesthetic one and requires an understanding of the criteria employed in classical Arabic theory when evaluating poetic speech.[3]

This leads us to a less obvious question: On what basis did medieval Arabic critics evaluate the *relative* merit of two poetic statements? ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, the great fifth-/eleventh-century literary theorist, for example, compares the following two verses by two preeminent Abbasid poets. Both verses describe a similar battle scene, observing the shining flashes of metal in the dust of combat.[4]

يزورُ الأعادي في سَماءٍ عَجاجَةٍ أسِنَّتُهُ في جانِبَيها الكَواكِبُ

He visits the enemies in the dust-clouded sky
his spears stars in its midst

~ al-Mutanabbī (d. 354/965)

كأنَّ مُثارَ النَّقْعِ فوْق رُؤوسِنا وأسْيافَنا لَيْلٌ تَهاوَى كَواكِبُهْ

The dust, stirred up over our heads,
and our swords [in its midst] were like a night with shooting stars

~ Bashshār ibn Burd (d. c. 167/784)

Al-Jurjānī found Bashshār ibn Burd's verse superior to al-Mutanabbī's. How and why does he come to this conclusion? To what does he attribute the aesthetic superiority of Bashshār's rendering of the image? Is there a universal aesthetic sensibility that governed his and other critics' judgments of poetic beauty at the time or is it simply a matter of personal taste? In sum, what criteria did medieval Arab thinkers consider when evaluating literary quality?

While Ibn Rushd, the philosopher, and al-Jurjānī, the literary theorist, wrote in different disciplines, in disparate corners of the Islamicate world, and lived a century apart, I believe they shared a common aesthetic outlook drawn from the same literary heritage that shaped their ideas about poetry. In this book, I argue that this aesthetic outlook is defined by

[2] Language can be metered and rhymed but not be poetic, like the famous instructive thousand-line poem (*Alfiyya*) by Ibn al-Mālik (d. 672/1274) on grammar, the purpose of which was to aid the memorization of grammatical rules. At the same time, speech can be poetic even when not written in verse. As a result, the question of poeticity was discussed in prose and in the Quran, as well as in poetry.

[3] As discussed in the Preface, eloquence (*balāgha*) and poeticity both refer to the beauty of speech. That is, discussions of eloquence (*balāgha*) do not assess the persuasive power of speech, rather its beauty.

[4] ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, *Asrār al-balāgha*, ed. Hellmut Ritter (Istanbul: Government Press, 1954), 159.

a statement's ability to evoke wonder in the listener. By analyzing the explanations they offer for the capacity of speech to arouse wonder, a sophisticated theory of aesthetic experience comes to light. This theory begins to be articulated at the turn of the fifth/eleventh century, marking a major paradigm shift from earlier Arabic criticism and representing an adaptation to the stylistics of *muḥdath* poetry, the "modern" style of the early Abbasid period (late second/eighth and third/ninth centuries).

The application of the concept of aesthetics to medieval Arabic thought is anachronistic. Aesthetics as a branch of philosophy that looks into the nature of art and beauty is a modern concept that developed in Europe in the eighteenth century.[5] However, as José Miguel Puerta Vílchez has shown in his *Aesthetics in Arabic Thought*, there is no paucity of discussions of beauty in the medieval Arabic context.[6] Nevertheless, the goal of this study is not merely to determine what they perceived as beautiful, but to investigate their justifications for this perception as well.[7] As such, our inquiry touches on three central aspects of aesthetics as a philosophical inquiry: aesthetic judgment, aesthetic experience, and the aesthetic object.

[5] The term was coined by the German philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten in the eighteenth century and then developed by Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant.

[6] José Miguel Puerta Vílchez, *Aesthetics in Arabic Thought: From Pre-Islamic Arabia through al-Andalus* (Leiden: Brill, 2017). Puerta Vílchez discusses aesthetics in various fields, including art, the Quran, and mysticism, as well as literary theory. Another important work on medieval Arabic aesthetics is a work by ʿIzzuddīn Ismāʿīl first published in 1955 entitled *al-Usus al-jamāliyya fī al-naqd al-ʿArabī* (*The Aesthetic Foundations in Arabic Criticism*). His analysis of the purely aesthetic aspects of poetry is limited to sound, on the one hand, and sentence construction, on the other. In both cases, he comes to the conclusion that beauty for the medieval critics lies in meter and proportionate relationships between parts of a sentence (p. 208). While I do not address questions of sound and meter in this book, my conclusions about the beauty of sentence construction are very different, as we will see in Chapter 5.

[7] Discussions of beauty (*jamāl* and *ḥusn*) per se in medieval Arabic generally revolved around physical human beauty or spiritual forms of goodness (see S. Kahwaji, *ʿIlm al-Djamāl*, in *EI*^{2}; Puerta Vílchez, *Aesthetics*, 66). The concepts of beauty and ugliness are also used in an ethical sense. These nevertheless could serve aesthetic purposes as well. Sarah R. bin Tyeer, for example, analyzes concepts of beauty (*ḥusn*) and ugliness (*qubḥ*) in Arabic prose based on the Quranic idea of justice and injustice (*The Quran and the Aesthetics of Premodern Arabic Prose* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). For a brief sketch of aesthetics in the medieval Islamicate world, see Doris Behrens-Abouseif, "Aesthetics," in *Encyclopedia of Islam, THREE*, ed. Gudrun Krämer, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2010). Conceptions of beauty in medieval Arabic culture have been discussed in the realm of art and architecture. See Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Beauty in Arabic Culture* [Schönheit in der arabischen Kultur] (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1999); and Valerie Gonzalez, *Beauty and Islam: Aesthetics in Islamic Art and Architecture* (London: I.B. Tauris in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2001).

The three are intertwined in classical Arabic discussions of poetic excellence: The effect of poetic speech on the listener's emotions (aesthetic experience) is regularly cited as the reason for their evaluation of something as beautiful (aesthetic judgment). The causes they cite for this emotional reaction, in turn, identify what aspects of poetic speech (the aesthetic object) render it beautiful (i.e., enable it to move the listener).

Arabic sources do not identify and classify these various aesthetic aspects as such. However, by gauging the kinds of characteristics they typically find commendable in poetry and the reasons they give for this, in addition to their general descriptions of poetic beauty and eloquence, the various pieces of the puzzle begin to expose a picture of classical Arabic literary aesthetics. I contend that this aesthetic is centered on an experience of wonder. In exposing the ways in which they explain the production of wonder through language, an aesthetic theory becomes visible, which identifies the principles that render the aesthetic object (which is poetic/eloquent speech in this case) worthy of being deemed beautiful.

Discussions of the aesthetic in the European context typically revolved around conceptions of the beautiful and the sublime. Before the eighteenth century, sublimity was assumed to be "either complementary to or identical with beauty."[8] In the eighteenth century, however, Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant distinguished between the two aesthetic qualities, which Alan Singer and Allen Dunn describe as follows: "Beauty is the product of harmony, symmetry and wholeness, while sublimity is generated by the experience of power and magnitude. Beauty is usually credited with producing feelings of pleasure, well-being, and integration with nature and society, while sublimity is said to inspire feelings of empowerment, autonomy, and even isolation."[9] Some studies have identified classical Arabic conceptions of beauty in the sense of "harmony, symmetry, and wholeness."[10] While these characteristics may contribute to the pleasure of poetic speech, I argue that wonder was the aesthetic on which classical Arabic criticism was anchored, at least after the fourth/tenth century. Wonder does not depend on characteristics of harmony, symmetry, and wholeness; neither is it an experience generated by power and magnitude. It is an aesthetic that is altogether different from the European conceptions of beauty and the sublime.

[8] Alan Singer and Allen Dunn, eds., *Literary Aesthetics: A Reader* (Oxford, UK; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 6.
[9] Ibid., 5. [10] See, for example, Puerta Vílchez, *Aesthetics*; Ismāʿīl, *al-Usus al-jamāliyya*.

Classical Arabic texts abound with statements that credit a verse or a phrase's excellence to its ability to "move the soul." Medieval authors use a wide range of terms to describe this "movement to the soul." Among these, one finds explicit descriptions of the effect of poetic speech as one of wonder (*taʿajjub*), strangeness (*istighrāb*), and finding it novel (*istiṭrāf*).[11] However, medieval authors also describe the poetic effect as one of splendor (*rawnaq*), pleasure (*ladhdha*/*iltidhadh*), *ṭarab*, which roughly translates as delight resulting particularly from music, or simply as the effect of being moved (*hazza*/*ihtizāz*), and cheerfulness/liveliness (*aryaḥiyya*), among many others. Despite the wide range of adjectives used to describe the effect of poetic speech, the explanations they give for the arousal of all these various kinds of pleasurable emotions are consistent with those that lead to an effect of wonder. (This is true at least in post-fourth-/tenth-century criticism.) The various descriptions of the effect of poetic and eloquent speech on the listener, therefore, can be collectively characterized by wonder.[12] It is important to note that this inquiry does not simply look

[11] The concept of wonder is usually expressed using the terms *ʿajab* (wonder), *ʿajīb* (wonderful), *taʿjīb* (the evocation of wonder), and *taʿajjub* (wonderment). These terms are often used in conjunction with expressions coming from the root *gh-r-b*, including: *gharāba* (strangeness), *gharīb* (strange/foreign), *ighrāb* (the evocation of strangeness and unfamiliarity), and *istighrāb* (finding something strange). *Istiṭrāf* (finding something strange and novel) and *badīʿ* (innovative, original, and marvelous) also convey a sense of wonder and are also employed. While *taʿajjub*, *istiṭrāf*, and *badīʿ* usually (though not always) have positive connotations, *gharīb* can have both positive and negative connotations depending on the context. It is typically used in a negative sense, for example, when critics discourage the use of strange, unusual, unfamiliar vocabulary. In this case it is often paired with *waḥshī* (uncultivated) (see Khalil Athamina, "*Lafẓ* in Classical Poetry," in *Israel Oriental Studies XI: Studies in Medieval Arabic and Hebrew Poetics*, ed. Sasson Somekh (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 49–50). However, it can also be employed neutrally, as in discussions of "*gharīb al-Qurʾān*" (the strange or uncommon words of the Quran). It is usually clear from the context if the description is intended positively or negatively (for discussions of the distinctions between *ʿajīb* and *gharīb*, see Nasser Rabbat, "*ʿAjāʾib* and *Gharīb*: Artistic Perception in Medieval Arabic Sources," *The Medieval History Journal* 9, no. 1 (2006): 106–7; and Kamal Abu Deeb, *al-Adab al-ʿajāʾibī wa-l-ʿālam al-gharāʾibī fī kitāb al-ʿAẓma wa-fann al-sard al-ʿArabī* (Beirut: Dār al-Sāqī, 2007), introduction). Ultimately, however, the exact employment of the *term* for wonder is not as important for our purposes as the presence of the *concept* of wonder, as I will clarify in the next section. The presence of the term *taʿajjub*, in turn, does not in and of itself signal an aesthetic of wonder.

[12] Wonder does not necessarily have to be pleasurable. Sophia Vasalou has pointed out the feelings of pain and fear that could be associated with wonder in Western Philosophy (Sophia Vasalou, *Wonder: A Grammar* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2015), ch. 2). However, the effect of beautiful poetry that our medieval authors describe is always something positive and pleasing. I am trying to pinpoint more specifically the nature of this pleasure by narrowing it down to wonder. Therefore, the wonder we will be talking about in the context of the experience of poetry must be pleasurable as well.

for moments where the *term* wonder (*taʿajjub*) is employed in medieval texts when describing poetry. Rather, it seeks to expose the presence of wonder as an aesthetic underlying Arabic criticism. This aesthetic is implicit in the logic of their explanations of poetic beauty and eloquence.

WONDER

Wonder has a complex and variegated global history. One must be cautious in assuming that it is a universal singular human experience. Nevertheless, there seem to be certain basic ingredients that one consistently finds in relation to wonder in terms of its triggers and the ensuing consequences: (a) It is an experience evoked by matters that are judged to be novel, strange, out of the ordinary, and/or inexplicable, which (b) consequently provide the impetus to search for a clarification. Attitudes toward this two-layered experience of wonder have varied across time and place. While it is an emotional experience that can be delightful, it can also involve pain and fear. While it can be associated with knowledge, it can also be associated with ignorance. Wonder can be a positive incentive to contemplate and reflect and advance human knowledge. It could also play out negatively as a desire to control and dominate. In the Islamic Middle Ages, wonder was largely spoken of as a positive experience triggered by the strange and mysterious, which also drove one into an intellectual search to discover the meaning behind such matters. This meaning could be religious, involving the mysteries of God's creations; or, it could be poetic.[13]

Much modern scholarship on wonder has rightly highlighted the negative aspects of wonder, especially with respect to the age of exploration and discovery of the New World and the beginning of Enlightenment. As Caroline Bynum has delineated in her presidential address to the American Historical Association in 1997, modern scholarship has described wonder in three main ways: as the impulse to collect and control, serving as an agent for colonial appropriation;[14] as associated with ignorance that can

[13] The poetic could be religious of course, especially when it comes to mystical poetry, which was an important genre in Arabic poetry. However, I will not be discussing mystical poetry in this book mainly because it was not the focus of classical Arabic literary theory as such. However, this does not preclude the applicability of the aesthetics of wonder to mystical poetry as well.

[14] Early modern European fascination with the marvelous led to the emergence of the museum in the form of the *Wunderkammer* (wonder cabinet). See Joy Kenseth, ed., *The Age of the Marvelous* (Hanover, NH: Hood Museum of Art, 1991), 81–102. See also

be eliminated through rational thought; or as a purely physiological Darwinian startle response to the unfamiliar and potentially dangerous.[15] Bynum, however, calls for reclaiming a more positive view of wonder and reaches back to medieval European understandings of the concept for inspiration. She reminds us that the capacity to wonder at that which cannot be explained is a proof of our humanity and that, rather than being appropriative, wonder can also simply signal one's amazement at the inimitable and the singular. Wonder, therefore, has the potential to be a magical, respectful, and humbling experience of matters that are beyond our grasp, rare, and unfamiliar.[16]

In the medieval Islamic world, wonder also had positive connotations. In fact, marveling at God's creations was a spiritual duty.[17] Everything in the world, from the most despicable to the most marvelous, was considered a sign of God deserving our wonder. This was one of the factors motivating encyclopedic writing as early as al-Jāḥiẓ's (d. 255/868–9) *Kitāb al-ḥayawān* (*Book of the Living*).[18] Encyclopedic descriptions of the world and its creations were also the subject of a number of later works sometimes described collectively by modern scholars as a genre of *ʿajāʾib* (marvels). In one of the most prominent examples of this genre, *ʿAjāʾib al-makhlūqāt wa-gharāʾib al-mawjūdāt* (*The Wonders of Created [Things] and the Oddities of Existing [Things]*), Zakariyyā al-Qazwīnī (d. 682/1283) exclaims that the world is filled with wonders. The only reason we are not constantly in awe is that "wonder fades [. . .] as a result of familiarity and frequent observation."[19]

Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), who argues that wonder was a useful concept for the early encounters with the New World that allowed for the mediation between the unknown and the known, ultimately serving to control and appropriate the former.

15 Caroline Walker Bynum, "Wonder," *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 1 (1997): 4–5.

16 More recent studies have recuperated the concept of wonder, namely: Philip Fisher, *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), who defines wonder as "a sudden experience of an extraordinary object that produces delight"; and Vasalou, *Wonder*, who builds on Fisher's definition.

17 For an analysis of wonder in classical Arabic thought, see Fāṭima Mubārak, *al-ʿAjab fī adab al-Jāḥiẓ: Dirāsa sīmyāʾiyya fī Kitāb al-ḥayawān* (Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūnisiyya li-l-Kitāb, 2015), 47–83.

18 See James E. Montgomery, *Al-Jāḥiẓ: In Praise of Books*, ed. Wen-chin Ouyang and Julia Bray, Edinburgh Studies in Classical Arabic Literature (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013). For a study of wonder specifically in al-Jāḥiẓ's *Kitāb al-ḥayawān* (*The Book of the Living*), see also Mubārak, *al-ʿAjab fī adab al-Jāḥiẓ*.

19 Zakariyyā al-Qazwīnī, *ʿAjāʾib al-makhlūqāt wa-gharāʾib al-mawjūdāt*, ed. Fārūq Saʿd (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīda, 1973), 35. On al-Qazwīnī's monumental encyclopedia of

Wonder is therefore an emotional reaction that is triggered by unfamiliarity and infrequent observation, as we learn from al-Qazwīnī. A near contemporary of his, Ibn Manẓūr (d. 711/1311), the author of one of the most comprehensive medieval Arabic dictionaries, *Lisān al-ʿArab* (*The Tongue of the Arabs*), lists the factors that trigger wonder in his definition of the term as:[20] (a) being in denial of an occurrence due to its infrequency (*qillat iʿtiyadih*); (b) seeing that which is rare (*yaqill mithluh*), unfamiliar (*ghayr maʾlūf*), or unusual (*lā muʿtād*); (c) being in awe of that whose cause is hidden (*khafiya sababuhu*) and unknown (*lam yuʿlam*); or (d) being in awe of something if its stature is great (*ʿaẓuma mawqiʿuhu*) and its cause hidden (*khafiya sababuhu*). Wonder is therefore defined as the reaction of awe and disbelief one experiences as a result of seeing something unexpected, rare, unfamiliar, unusual, mysterious, magnificent, or obscure whose cause is unknown. In short, wonder is an emotional reaction triggered by the strange and inexplicable.

Yet, wonder is also a cognitive experience. The endeavor to document the marvels of the world in the Arabic *ʿajāʾib* genre was not motivated by a desire to give the reader the thrill of witnessing the strange and the rare, but it was a call to contemplate God's creations. Ultimately, the disparate features listed by Ibn Manẓūr as triggers of wonder represent only part of the story. Wonder is an intellectual search for an explanation of the extraordinary and for the hidden through what is visible, as Fāṭima Mubārak has argued.[21] God's creations are things medieval authors like Zakariyyā

the world, see Syrinx von Hees, *Enzyklopädie als Spiegel des Weltbildes: Qazwinis Wunder der Schöpfung: Eine Naturkunde des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002). See also her discussion of the significance of *ʿajāʾib* in classical Arabic literature and of the shortcomings of classifying it as a genre in "The Astonishing: A Critique and Re-reading of *ʿAjāʾib* Literature," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 8, no. 2 (2005). For the role of wonder in *ʿajāʾib* manuscripts, see Persis Berlekamp, *Wonder, Image, and Cosmos in Medieval Islam* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011). For a discussion of *ʿajaʾib* discourse in descriptive geography in the medieval period, see Travis Zadeh, *Mapping Frontiers across Medieval Islam: Translation, Geography, and the ʿAbbāsid Empire* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011). On the concept of wonder in al-Qazwīnī's *Wonders of Creation*, see also Zadeh's article "The Wiles of Creation: Philosophy, Fiction, and the *ʿAjāʾib* Tradition," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 13, no. 1 (April 2010). More generally, on the rise of encyclopedism in the Islamic world, see Elias Muhanna, *The World in a Book: al-Nuwayri and the Islamic Encyclopedic Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

[20] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1955), s.v. *ʿ-j-b*. This definition is repeated in a similar fashion in the other major medieval Arabic dictionaries, as well as in *ʿajāʾib* literature.

[21] Mubārak, *al-ʿAjab fī adab al-Jāḥiẓ*, 37–8. Mubārak distinguishes between the marvelous as a genre that seeks to astound and instill awe and the intellectual engagement with these marvels through contemplation found in classical Arabic texts (ibid., 75).

al-Qazwīnī and al-Jāḥiẓ believed we ought to wonder at in order to contemplate God and his munificence. Even those man-made marvels of past civilizations left behind in ruins were wonders to medieval Islamic geographers and travelers to be reflected upon and learned from.[22]

"Wonder," as John Llewelyn explains, "is one of those wonderful words that face in opposite directions at one and the same time."[23] While it results from a state of ignorance, it is "not any absence of knowledge, but an ignorance that challenges us to dispel it [. . .]."[24] It is due to wonder, after all, that Man began to philosophize, as Aristotle tells us.[25] The elimination of this ignorance through discovery is also part of the experience of wonder. Linking wonder to learning, Fisher describes this moment of discovery as "the moment when the puzzling snaps into sharp focus and is grasped with pleasure."[26] The strange, unusual, and extraordinary, the unexpected, the inexplicable and puzzling, and the unfamiliar, and the rare all entail a kind of ignorance that leads us to pause, examine, and contemplate in order to grasp and bring to light the unusual or unclear meaning. While ignorance might be the impetus for wonder initially, it is the eventual discovery of the meaning and its clarification that also evokes wonder. As such, wonder is an emotional experience that is highly cognitive in nature.

The literary arts can also have the capacity to evoke wonder. In this case, the conditions that lead to wonder in nature are reproduced through language. Characteristics such as strangeness, unexpectedness, and obscurity in language can evoke wonder in the listener. Significantly, what renders it wonder in the full sense, however, (rather than mere surprise or shock and awe) is the consequent search for and discovery of the meaning hidden behind the strange, unexpected, and obscure. What these conditions look like in language, according to classical Arabic literary theory, and how they lead to an experience of discovery is the subject of this study.[27]

[22] As Elliott Colla has argued, medieval geographers saw value in marveling at ruins of past civilizations, such as the pyramids, not for their greatness, but as signs of the hubris of those who built them (*Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2007), 72–120).

[23] John Llewelyn, "On the Saying that Philosophy Begins in Thaumazein," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Inquiry* 4 (2001): 48.

[24] Ibid., 51.

[25] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 982b13–14.

[26] Fisher, *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences*, 7. Fisher explains that "wonder and learning are tied by three things: by suddenness, by the moment of first seeing, and by the visual presence of the whole state or object" (ibid., 21).

[27] One can draw parallels between the literary arts and the visual arts, where wonder has also been the subject of analysis in scholarship on medieval Islamic art. Matthew D. Saba, for example, has argued that the evolution of lusterware during the Abbasid period was also

The role of wonder and strangeness in classical Arabic literature has received some attention in modern scholarship as a narrative technique in the tales of the *Thousand and One Nights* and anecdotal literature.[28] The place of wonder in classical Arabic literary theory, however, remains largely overlooked. While its significance in the philosophical understanding of the function of poetry is acknowledged,[29] its role in nonphilosophical literary theory, instead, has been at best relegated to being of "an anecdotal nature," describing the "reaction of the listener to a poem."[30] As I hope to show, the triggers of wonder coupled with the ensuing experience of discovery form the basis of a sophisticated aesthetic theory evident in medieval Arabic explanations of the reaction poetic speech produces in the listener.

It is important to note some caveats here. This study is not an inquiry into the artificial expression of wonder in poetry, which the Arabic critical tradition identified as a type of rhetorical figure known as *taʿajjub*

driven by the desire to produce wonder in the viewer. In an artistic craft like lusterware, Saba argues that this effect is achieved through "surface effects like reflection, sheen, and iridescence," as well as "the use of complex, difficult-to-decipher motifs, the creation of a sense of motion, and the juxtaposition of dissimilar patterns, textures, and forms" (Matthew D. Saba, "Abbasid Lusterware and the Aesthetics of *ʿAjab*," *Muqarnas* 29 (2012): 206). He also draws astute parallels between this development in lusterware and the contemporaneous evolution of *badīʿ* in *muḥdath* poetry (ibid., 202–3). The theories that subsequently develop in the Arabic critical tradition to describe this aesthetic of wonder in language is what this book tries to uncover.

[28] Roy Mottahedeh has examined the role of wonder as a narrative technique in the *Thousand and One Nights* where he relates it to irony ("*ʿAjāʾib* in *The Thousand and One Nights*," in *The Thousand and One Nights in Arabic Literature and Society*, ed. Richard C. Hovannisian and Georges Sabagh (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997)). Abdelfattah Kilito also discusses the concept of strangeness in a variety of classical Arabic literary genres in *al-Adab wa-l-gharāba: Dirāsāt bunyawiyya fī al-adab al-ʿArabī* (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalīʿa, 1983), including its treatment by the literary theorist ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (ibid., 62–75).

[29] The place of wonder in the philosophical discussions of Aristotle's *Poetics* has been considered by some scholars, though in passing: Salim Kemal discusses the place of wonder in Ibn Sīnā's treatment of the poetic syllogism in Salim Kemal, "Aristotle's *Poetics*, the Poetic Syllogism, and Philosophical Truth in Averroes's Commentary," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 35 (2001): 169–76. See also Deborah L. Black, "Aesthetics in Islamic Philosophy," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 1, ed. Edward Craig (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 1:75–9. More recently, the role of wonder in Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī's Persian commentary on the *Poetics* has also been discussed in Justine Landau, "Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī and Poetic Imagination in the Arabic and Persian Philosophical Tradition," in *Metaphor and Imagery in Persian Poetry*, ed. Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2012).

[30] Wolfhart Heinrichs, "Taʿjīb," in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (London: Routledge, 1998).