

English Style Poems

Upon the Heights of Sarawat

The mountain peak bleeds cold and high,
Where eagles dare the razor sky,
A lioness upon the crest,
No loom could cage her iron chest.
She turns her face from valley floor,
To seek a horizon vast and more;
For what is strength if forged in granite,
If bound to please another's spirit?

Down in the dust of al-Batha's heat,
Where silver counts and markets meet,
A youth of silk and cunning mind
Leaves all his heavier fears behind.
No sword he bears, no shield of brass,
His words like sharpened daggers pass;
Yet clay-built flesh must yield to stone,
When wisdom stands in dust alone.

The hunter came with roar and pride,
To claim a wild mountain bride,
Yet brute force bent before her grace—
He fell to earth and lost his place.
For iron cast without the flame
Is brittle, weak, and knows no name;
And strength that only seeks to break
Will shatter for its own poor sake.

Now destiny weaves thread by thread,
Where silent mountain passes tread.
The father's terms, the merchant's
scheme,
Will bind the shadow to the dream.
No gentle maid, no sword-girt king,
Shall claim the song the deserts sing—
When mountain Iron meets the Silk,
A grander truth is born than gold.

The Great Lie:

He is the Silk who endures the burning day,
and she is the Iron who commands the cooling night;
and the world breaks upon them like rain upon the earth,
for they receive its fury without bending or fear.
Their love is a treasure buried deeper than the wells of old,
a truth concealed not by shadow, but by the Lie they wear in daylight—
a truth no Elder can fathom, for none imagine her Shield of the tent.

Khawla's Pledge of *Himāyah* (Chapter 9, *When Silk & Iron Lie*)

The desert winds hunt the fragile,
scattering their names like dust across the dunes.
But you—your place is carved in the stone of my palm.
Your life rests in me as a sacred Amānah,
a trust I guard with the weight of my own breath.

Let the tribes come with their blades and thunderous pride;
they will meet only the iron wall of my chest,
and the fire of a heart that has found, at last,
something worth more than the kill—
something worth living for.

Nabil's invitation to grant intimacy with him:

The desert wind knows only the edge of the blade,
But only the tent knows the silence of the unstrung bow.

O My Shield, do not fear the stillness within our walls;

Even the stallion seeks the cooler shelter of the valley
When the sun's gate has closed.

Nabil's Offer of Intimacy:

The Lioness hunts because her nature is Fire,
But she returns to the pride because her nature is Love.
You are the Fire, Khawla; you are the Iron.
But even Iron must be warmed by the hearth
Lest it grow brittle in the cold of its own strength.
Allow me to be your hearth, O my Shield.

Nabil Explains Why Khawla Can Trust Him:

The desert palm is bound by the gardener's rope,
And the falcon is hooded to serve a master's pride.
Your father saw a treasure to be bartered in the *souq*,
A stone for his wall, a coin for his greed.

But I am not the gardener, and tonight I am not the seller.
I am the soil that receives the storm without flinching.
I am the valley that does not seek to move the mountain,
But finds its glory in the mountain's shadow.

How can you trust me?
You fear the snap of the dry branch in the gale,
The breaking of the thread that dares to pull taut.
But look upon the silk that drapes your heavy shoulder;
It does not break, for it lacks the will to resist your weight.

The blade tears only that which stands against it.
Because I yield, I am the only thing you cannot shatter.
Because I am soft, I am the only thing that will never fail.
For I have nothing left with which to betray—
I have become your shadow that moves only as you move.

Khawla's Challenge to Zayd:

"I stand where his courage faltered,
 not to shame him, but to shield him.
 My oath is Iron, my arm the spear —
 face me, if your honor can bear the weight."

Zayd's Response:

Woman, your courage shames the man who failed you,
 but honor binds me more tightly than pride.
 I strike for the oath you carry, not your weakness —
 let your husband learn strength from your price paid this day.

Arabic Style Poems

Antarah ibn Shaddad, *Mu'allaqat (Suspended Ode) excerpt:*

"My horse and armor have grown weary of the clash,
 And I am spent from the endless striking of swords.
 If my steed could speak, it would complain of the pain,
 And if it knew words, it would weep from the sorrow."

Because this poem is translated from Arabic, it loses both the original meter and rhyme, but the translation preserves the sentiment.

If you would like to experience the poem as Nabil might have, you can read and hear this entire poem chanted by a *rawis* (professional poetry reciter) at <https://thearabicpoetry.com/poem.php?id=14>

Epigraph from the Prequel in English

On Sarawat's high ragged peaks, where wild winds blow		the lioness stands in the storm beside the night;
In dust below, where silver glints and secrets flow,		a quiet silk weaves through the shadows out of sight.
The thread of Qadar draws them close in silent threat—		what clash awaits when wild iron meets the light?

This poem illustrates Arabic hemistich structure (separated by the vertical bar) and preserves the rhyming in English.

Khawla's Lament as originally written in Arabic (with the English translation that was shown in the novel), note the rhyming at the end of each line in Arabic:

Yā layta al-layla yabkī fawqa ṣadrihā,

Would that the night itself would weep upon her breast,

wa-lā yaṣrifu al-qadarī ilā arḍin lam tarāhā.

and not send her fate toward a land her eyes have never seen.

Quddiya al-amru—ka-mā yaqūlu abūhā—wa-qalbuḥā mā qaḍāhā,

“The matter is decided,” her father says — yet her heart has not accepted it,

fa-kayfa tuzaffu liman lā sami‘a ismāhā wa-lā shaqqā ṭarīqahā.

for how can she be given in marriage to one who never heard her name nor walked her path?

Wa-qalbuḥā, wa-in lam ya‘rif man yuḥibb, ya‘rifu mā yanfa‘uhā,

And though her heart does not yet know whom it loves, it knows what keeps her whole:

lā yusallimu lil-ghurabā’, wa-lā yarghabu fī faqdi ḥurriyatihā.

it does not surrender to strangers, nor desire the loss of her freedom.

This illustrates Arabic hemistich structure & rhyming written in Arabic, so you can see how it is lost in the English translation.

More About Arabic Poetry (for poetry geeks)

Differences Between English Style & Classical Arabic Poetry (*Qasida*)

English Meter vs Classical Arabic Meter ('*Arud*)

- English meter is based on alternating stressed and unstressed **syllables**.
- e.g., *iambic*: da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM
- Classical Arabic poetry is based on fixed patterns of long and short **vowels** (morae), divided into rhythmic feet
- e.g. *Fa'ūlun*, *Mufā'alatun*, or *Fā'ilātun*

Two-Part Lines (*Bayt*):

- Each full line is split into two balanced halves (hemistichs): *Sadr* and '*Aruz*.

Monorhyme (*Qafiyah*):

- Every line ends on the exact same rhyme sound throughout the entire poem.

The Five Circles and 15 Seas of Classical Arabian Meters

There are 15 poetic meters, or "seas" (*buḥūr*), grouped into five rhythmic families called "circles" (*dawā'ir*).

Each sea has a distinct psychological mood and structural pattern made of rhythmic feet (*tafā'il*).

1. Circle of the Different (*Dā'irat al-Mukhtalif*)

Mixes different types of rhythmic feet, alternating between three-consonant and four-consonant blocks.

- Al-Ṭawīl (The Long): The most frequently occurring meter. It is majestic, serious, and used for grand topics like pride, philosophy, and laments.
- Al-Madīd (The Extended): A rarer, gentle meter. Often used for emotional or elegiac expressions.
- Al-Basīṭ (The Simple/Extensive): A stately, flexible meter. Second to *Al-Ṭawīl* in popularity and used for wisdom and praise poetry.

2. Circle of the Agreeable (*Dā'irat al-Mu'talif*)

Repeats a single, uniform rhythmic foot, creating a highly smooth, symmetric cadence.

- Al-Wāfir (The Ample): A highly musical and energetic meter. Popular for passionate love poetry, boasting, and intense pride.
- Al-Kāmil (The Perfect): The most flexible classical meter. It has a beautiful, rolling cadence that fits almost any subject, from harsh satire to deep philosophy.

3. Circle of the Monotonous (Dā'irat al-Mujtalab)

This circle "attracts" or repeats a specific four-consonant foot multiple times across the line.

- Al-Hazaj (The Trilling): A light, dancing, and cheerful meter. It was historically used for short, joyous folk songs.
- Al-Rajaz (The Trembling): Known as the "donkey of the poets" because it is so easy to compose in. It mirrors natural Arabic speech and is used for long educational poems or spontaneous battle chants.
- Al-Ramal (The Trotting): A soft, weeping, and rhythmic meter. It is perfectly suited for sorrowful themes, longing, and spiritual reflections.

4. Circle of the Disagreeable (Dā'irat al-Mushtabih)

Features meters with intricate variations that "resemble" one another, often shifting rhythms mid-line.

- Al-Sarī' (The Swift): A fast-paced, dramatic meter. It drops off sharply at the end of a line, making it ideal for quick storytelling.
- Al-Munsariḥ (The Flowing): A smooth but difficult meter to master. It flows rapidly and requires precise syllable placement.
- Al-Khafīf (The Light): A graceful, airy, and highly elegant meter. A favorite for delicate love poetry and Andalusian strophic verse (*muwashshah*).
- Al-Muḍāri' (The Similar): An incredibly rare meter. Rarely found in classical anthologies and is hard to recite naturally.
- Al-Muqtadab (The Improvised): A very short, clipped meter. Used for brief, spontaneous witty remarks or epigrams.
- Al-Mujtathth (The Uprooted): Cut from a larger rhythm, this is the shortest meter in the classical canon. Highly musical and heavily used in modern Arabic songs.

5. Circle of the Agreeing (Dā'irat al-Muttafiq)

Consists of repeating a simple, three-consonant rhythmic foot.

- Al-Mutaqārib (The Convergent): A rhythmic, marching meter. Its repetitive, bouncing beat makes it the ultimate meter for epic narratives, tales of heroism, and descriptions of journeys.
- *Al-Mustadārik*, was added to this circle later and is not associated with pre-Islamic poetry.