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Man's "Hollow Core": ethics and aesthetics in *Ḥadīth* literature and classical Arabic *adab**

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Abstract

Classical Arabic *Ḥadīth* literature is largely composed of micro-narratives recording the sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muḥammad. This study seeks to examine their literary form by focusing on selected examples listed in the canonical *Ḥadīth* compendia under the heading of *adab*, a term which may be rendered here as "practical ethics" but which is also commonly used to designate classical Arabic *belles-lettres*. While the latter is a type of literature quite distinct from the literature of *Ḥadīth* the texts here studied point to a certain interface between them. The ethical dimension of *adab* as it appears in *Ḥadīth* is examined further in the light of Haydon White's theory on the relation between narrativity and law. Contrasting the micro-narrative of *Ḥadīth* with the "macro-narrative" of the epic provides further insight into its approach to *adab* and serves to highlight its distinct literary and religious aesthetic.

Works of classical Arabic prose often consist of brief statements and tales narrated by transmitters and covering a range of topics for the purpose of generating the composite image of a history, a personality or an idea. This style of writing, in which the author's acclaimed function is primarily that of editor and compiler, is manifest most notably in the canonical *Ḥadīth* collections which cover the deeds and sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad, and the *Adab* anthologies which comprise the bulk of classical Arabic *belles-lettres*.[1]

The preference for the accumulation of brief, at times apparently disjointed, narratives is one of the distinguishing features which set classical Arabic literature apart from the Western literary tradition, in which long narrative forms have, since the period of classical antiquity, occupied a pre-eminent status both in fiction and historiography. As pointed out with

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1 Henceforth "*Ḥadīth*" refers to the literature known as such whereas "*ḥadīth*" refers to a single tradition; likewise "*Adab*" refers to the literature known under that name whereas "*adab*" refers to the concept indicated by this term. For concise surveys of the range and significance of the term *adab* and its literary connotations see Kilpatrick (1998), Allen (1998: 220–2), Heath (with special reference to Muslim Spain, 2000: 107–8) and Levey (with respect to practical ethics, 1967: 6–8). A more detailed overview of the extraordinary range of classical Arabic *Adab* is found in Horst (1987).

respect to the latter by Hayden White, the European tradition has long equated the "growth and development of historical consciousness" with a "concomitant growth and development of narrative capability".[2] Hence narrativity came to be seen as a mark of cultural achievement and, with respect to historical discourse, as a sign of its "objectivity, its seriousness and its realism". In the light of post-modern consciousness, however, the superior status and authority of the "large-scale narrative" is no longer to be taken for granted. White's work has played a crucial role in this respect by revealing the fictional nature of all historical narrative which, in his view, reflects no more than the need to have real events display "the coherence, integrity, fullness and closure of an imagined life that can only be imaginary";[3] indeed, "real events do not offer themselves as stories".[4]

Post-modern doubts about the nature of narrative are not limited to historiography. Gérard Genette observes that literature as a whole "seems to have exhausted or overflowed the resources of the representational mode" and concludes that narrative may already be "a thing of the past" which we must "consider before it has completely deserted our horizon".[5] Jean-François Lyotard, for his part, diagnosed the post-modern condition as "incredulity towards metanarratives"[6], grand unifying and totalizing narrative frameworks providing a binding source of consensual beliefs. In this context it is interesting to note that, as remarked by Caroll:

> a disbelief in metanarratives … provides an explosion of non-totalizable little narratives – the smaller and more diversified in Lyotard's view the better – whose conflictual multiplicity and heterogeneity resist all forms of totalisation. Narrative, at least as long as it remains "little", is taken by Lyotard to be a kind of open, highly mobile form that in each instance determines on its own how the various elements it contains will be interrelated.[7]

In unmasking the alleged objectivity of historical narrative as a fiction and in witnessing the dissolution of fictional narrative itself, post-modern consciousness opens the way for a reappraisal of narrativity in cultures where different narrative strategies prevail. This is what the present article aims to achieve with respect to the literature of *Ḥadīth* as codified in the canonical collections of the late ninth century AD: the *Ṣaḥīḥ*s of Bukhārī (d. 870) and Muslim (d. 875), and the *Sunan* works of Ibn Māja (d. 886), Abū Dāwūd (d. 888), al-Tirmidhī (d. 892) and al-Nasā'ī (d. 915). Awareness of the fictional nature of all narrative historiography must engender a new sense of understanding for the stance adopted by the authors of these extensive compilations who remain silent and see their sole task in the collection, authentication and ordering of the voices of the past. They thus

2 White (1980: 17).
3 *Ibid.*, 27.
4 *Ibid.*, 8.
5 Genette (1976: 12).
6 Lyotard (1992: xxiv).
7 Cited in Niall (1997: 69).

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desist from the illusory enterprise of seeking "fullness and continuity in an order of events"[8] which, as White argues, can only be imaginary. Fullness and continuity are sought instead in an order of hieratic concepts which provide the chapter headings of their compilations, a liberating procedure which allows for the production of works of epic scope and function through the inclusion of events in their thousands, unfettered by the need for chronological or narrative coherence.

One of these concepts – that of *adab* – has been singled out for particular attention in this study. While it is usually applied to classical Arabic *belles-lettres*, the term is also found in the *Ḥadīth* compendia, and all but that of al-Nasā'ī contain chapters devoted to the topic. Focusing on this term invites reflection upon certain analogous features in the literatures of *Adab* and *Ḥadīth*, a subject relevant to our purpose which is discussed in the first part of this paper. The next section provides examples of *ḥadīth*s drawn from the *adab* chapters of the compendia in order to illustrate the extent to which the juxtaposition under one heading of texts dealing with very different issues allows for the exploration of an abstract concept. The interplay between narrative and non-narrative features of these and other related examples is discussed in more detail in the third section. The aim is to show that *Ḥadīth* is a literary form with seemingly post-modern features. Like Lyotard's "little narratives" mentioned in the quote above, it is characterized by a high degree of "openness" and "mobility": openness with respect to both form and content, and mobility with respect to its propensity to be cited, dissembled or realigned at will. These features are a function not of the absence of a metanarrative but of its all-pervasive presence.

The paper argues throughout that creativity in *Ḥadīth* is quite deliberately not directed towards narrative expansion; rather it aims at condensing narrativity to the maximum in order to detach events from their past chronological and circumstantial context. The aesthetic consequences of this procedure are analysed in the concluding section, which compares the narrative features of *Ḥadīth* with those of the archetypal "long narrative" of the Western tradition, the epic.

Ḥadīth and *Adab*: the Hollow Man

Ḥadīth nr. 2611 in Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ* reads as follows:[9]

> (1) From Thābit Ibn Anas that the Prophet said: "When God created Adam in Paradise he left him as he wished to leave him and Satan began to walk around him to see what he was. When he realised that he was hollow he knew that he had been created unable to control himself".

8 Niall (1997: 13).
9 Muslim (1978: 4/2016).

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With characteristic brevity and some degree of humour this tradition evokes what will henceforth be called the metanarrative which underlies the phenomenon of *Ḥadīth* as a whole and is rooted as such in the Quran. Man is "unable to control himself" and hence in danger of perdition through the workings of Satan. Since the beginning of time help has been at hand through the admonition and guidance provided by a succession of divine messengers despatched to earth as a sign of God's mercy. However, the disbelief and rejection with which the majority of mankind met their warnings brought ruin upon numerous nations of the past. Muḥammad, being the Seal of Prophets, represents the final chance for mankind to open its eyes to the truth and save itself from damnation; his narration of the *ḥadīth* is yet one more word of warning.

The brevity of this summary belies the extreme diversification and complexity of this background narrative which encompasses the whole of Islamic prophetology, eschatology as well as the life story of the Prophet Muḥammad himself. It is, by implication, an integral part of every individual *ḥadīth*, and knowledge thereof is tacitly assumed; indeed it is instantly evoked by the words *qāla rasūl Allāh* with which *ḥadīth*s such as the one cited above are introduced. Through it, the smallest details of the Prophet's life acquire paradigmatic and eschatological significance, and it thus provides a framework allowing for the accumulation of thousands of traditions.

The anecdote narrated by the Prophet points to the stage on which the episodes of this great narrative are acted out: it is the hollow core of man detected by Satan on the day of creation; here the prophetic message ceaselessly clashes with the injunctions and whisperings of lust-induced doom.[10] A brief glance at T. S Eliot's famous poem evoked by this *ḥadīth* reveals an antithetical parentage between two conditions of hollowness which is instructive for our purpose. In the *ḥadīth*, man's hollow core provides the abode for the very substance of the Islamic metanarrative; in Eliot's poem *The Hollow Men*, on the other hand, it denotes not a space to be filled by contending forces but an absolute void at the core of being which marks the onset of a new and troubling age. On the face of it, the Christian metanarrative peels off and fragments, as illustrated in the concluding verses:

> *For Thine is the Kingdom*
> For Thine is
> Life is
> For Thine is the
>
> This is the way the world ends (…)[11]

10 *Ḥadīth* nr. 4246 in Ibn Māja (1952–53) may be read as a gloss on the meaning intended by *ajwaf* ("hollow") in this tradition. In response to the question, what is most likely to lead man to hell, the Prophet is said to have replied *al-ajwafān al-fam wa 'l-farj* ("the two hollow ones: the mouth and the pudenda").

11 Eliot (1969: 85–6).

Much in contrast to this fragmentation, the above-cited *ḥadīth* is not only firmly grounded in the Islamic metanarrative, it hints at the vital function *Ḥadīth* literature as a whole performs therein, as can be gleaned from the context in which the tradition occurs in Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ*. It is found in a chapter entitled *Kitāb al-Birr wa 'l-Ṣila wa 'l-Ādāb* ("Book of Devoutness, Relationships and Ethics"), and the traditions which immediately precede and follow upon it explain why the editor chose to include it under this heading. The preceding *ḥadīth* gives practical advice on how man may win mastery over his anger, whereas the following one enjoins those who engage in fights to avoid hitting each other in the face.[12] The unifying theme is thus the conduct of relationships by way of restraint and self-control, the very qualities which Satan found to be lacking in God's creation. Calling upon them and strengthening them is the purpose of these *ḥadīth*s.

The manner in which *Ḥadīth* can function to this end is perhaps most succinctly conveyed by al-Nawawī (d. 1277), the great Syrian commentator on Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ*. In the introduction to his own selection of prophetic traditions entitled *Riyāḍ al-Ṣāliḥīn* ("Gardens of the Righteous") he emphasizes the need for self-control by pointing out that man was created to worship God and must therefore refrain from engaging in the transient pursuits of this world. The most effective way to this end is *al-ta'addub bi-mā ṣaḥḥ ʿan nabiyyinā* ("the acquisition of moral rectitude through the authentic reports about our Prophet").[13] His selection of traditions is thus intended to serve the reader as a path to the Hereafter and assist him in acquiring "moral integrity inward and outward" (*muḥaṣṣil l-ādābih al-bāṭina wa 'l-ẓāhira*).[14]

What interests us here in particular is the semantic spread of the term *adab* and its derivatives (*ādāb, ta'addub, ta'dīb*) since a deeper understanding of this may help to comprehend the shared aesthetic features of the *Ḥadīth* compilations and the *Adab* anthologies, including the function of the "little narrative" which is such a prominent feature in both of them. In this context it is notable that acquisition of *ta'addub*, or moral rectitude, which al-Nawawī describes as the prime objective of his compilation of *Ḥadīth* is also cited as the prime motivating force behind that most classic of all *Adab* anthologies, *ʿUyūn al-Akhbār* ("Quintessential Reports") by Ibn Qutayba (d. 889). In its introduction the author states: "I undertook to compose a book on knowledge and the straightening of tongue and hand for secretaries deficient in *ta'addub*".[15] This is clearly a reference to what van Gelder calls the "moralistic component regularly exhibited by works of *Adab*".[16] The question here is: where lies the interface between the *ta'addub*

12 Muslim (1978), *ḥadīth*s nr. 2610, 2612.
13 Al-Nawawī (2001: 18).
14 Ibid.
15 Ibn Qutayba (1996): *ṭā'*. The "secretaries" (*kuttāb*) Ibn Qutayba has in mind here are the administrators of the Abbasid state for whose edification this book may have been chiefly intended. The work, which is generally considered the prototype of the *adab* anthology, "offers a synthesis of Arabic, Persian and Greek material" (Van Gelder 1998).
16 Van Gelder (2000: 3).

of *Ḥadīth* as intended by al-Nawawī and the *ta'addub* of *Adab* as intended by Ibn Qutayba? Is there a common nucleus in the usage of this term?

Ibn Qutayba himself seems to provide an answer when he suggests that knowledge has different facets which share a single underlying purpose. It is "acquired and dispensed for the sake of God", but there is more than one way to reach Him. Even though it does not deal explicitly with religious topics such as the Quran and the Sunna, his anthology nevertheless provides "guidance to high morals, restraint from lowliness, proscription of evil and incitement to proper conduct".[17] In thus imparting moral restraint and self-control (and hence shielding man's "hollow core" from Satan's designs), it is inspired by the same metanarrative as *Ḥadīth* and shares with it analogous objectives. The analogy even extends to the structure of Ibn Qutayba's book, as noted by Khalidi: "the division into chapters (*kutub*) parallels the division of the renowned and contemporary *Ḥadīth* collections (*Ṣaḥīḥān*) by Bukhārī and Muslim".[18] Ibn Qutayba's work has in turn served as a model for a number of other anthologies which exhibit a similar, "*ḥadīth*-like" approach to their material.

The structural similarity arises from the fact that the compilers of *Ḥadīth* and *Adab* find themselves in an analogous position with respect to their material. Both are confronted with an overwhelming multiplicity of "little narratives" or *akhbār* which they feel called upon to collect, sift, select and arrange according to particular headings. The difference resides in the selection criteria. As explained by Muslim in the introduction to his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, for *Ḥadīth* it is authenticity as vouchsafed by the chain of transmission which is the determining factor, and his work thus seeks to assemble "the little that is genuine" (*al-ṣaḥīḥ al-qalīl*) from among the *ḥadīth*s in circulation, to the exclusion of the majority which is deficient (*izdiyād al-saqīm*).[19] For *Adab*, on the other hand, the selection criteria are principally moral and aesthetic, though the selection process itself is no less challenging than that of *Ḥadīth*: according to Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, "choosing discourse is more difficult than composing it" (*ikhtiyār al-kalām aṣʿab min ta'līfih*).[20]

The reason for the difficulty may reside in the fact that the authors of medieval Arabic *Adab* saw themselves as heirs to a vast storehouse of learning derived from pre-Islamic sources, other civilizations as well as their contemporaries which, while of lesser order in the hierarchy of knowledge than *Ḥadīth*, still contained a valuable moral dimension that made it worthy of preservation for the edification of souls. As explained by Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, every nation has engaged in collecting the best sayings of its predecessors so that now "even the abridged is in need of further abridgement and the already chosen in need of further selection" (*aktharū fī dhālik ḥatta iḥtāj al-mukhtaṣar minhā ilā ikhtiṣār wa 'l-mukhayyar ilā ikhtiyār*).[21] We may thus discern here one of the reasons

17 Ibn Qutayba (1996: *yā'*).
18 Khalidi (1994: 109).
19 Muslim (1978: 4).
20 Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih (1983: 4).
21 In a rather different vein al-Tanūkhī gives humorous expression to the potentially limitless when, in the introduction to his *Nishwār al-Muḥāḍara*, he lists some

for the brevity of the micro-narratives in both *Ḥadīth* and *Adab*: it represents the fruit of judicious efforts to record only the choicest and best of an otherwise unmanageable quantity of material.

The analogy here posited, between the pursuits of *Adab* and *Ḥadīth*, is not meant to obscure the rather different orientation of the two branches of learning, a point discussed in illuminating detail by T. Khalidi. He detects in the works of early *Adab* "a 'humanistic' spirit which did not always coexist in peace with the rapidly maturing *Ḥadīth*", and proceeds to examine the difference between them from various perspectives. However, he appears to overstate the point when he concludes by contrasting the scholars of *Ḥadīth* and their "sacralisation of the past" with the "free and iconoclastic spirits" of *Adab* who "conjured up an alternative image of the past whose many revered models of piety were seen to be falling short of the ideal".[22]

The "revered models of the piety" of *Ḥadīth* are the Prophet and his companions, and the great *Adab* anthologies contain no hint that these exemplars may have fallen short in any way. On the contrary, prophetic *ḥadīth*s are an integral part of every anthology and are often given pride of place. Ibn Qutayba's *ʿUyūn al-Akhbār*, for instance, begins its first chapter with sayings by the Prophet, who remains the most frequently cited authority throughout the work. The eminent status of prophetic *Ḥadīth* and, with it, prophetic mastery of the art of speech, could be documented at length by reference to other works at the core of the classical *Adab* tradition. Al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 869), hailed by Khalidi as being foremost among those who used *Adab* "as a rational method of exploring nature, society and history" (1994: 108), devotes several pages to the eloquence of the Prophet, whose "words are few but meanings numerous" – an aesthetic judgement which contains another pointer to the issue of brevity. His endorsement of the Prophet's powers of expression concludes in ringing tones: "never have people heard speech more widely beneficial, more concisely expressed, more equitably poised, more beautifully phrased, more noble in intent, more soundly placed, more easily articulated or more elevated in meaning" (1985: 17).

The degree to which *Ḥadīth* and *Adab* may be made to work in unison for the purpose of upholding the basic moral tenets of Islam is particularly well illustrated in the anthology entitled *Adab al-Dunyā wa 'l-Dīn* ("*Adab* of Worldliness and Religion") by the jurist al-Māwardī (d. 1058). Here, *adab* is an ethical concept the principles of which the author proceeds to derive from the entire spectrum of classical Arabic letters, making no distinction between what might be termed religious or secular. One example is the list of authorities he cites to buttress his point that the acquisition of *adab* through assiduous practice and personal experience is indispensable if man is to gain mastery over his soul and, we might add, protect his "hollow

two-hundred different categories of people, ranging from Kings and Caliphs to gatecrashers and scoundrels, as sources for the material he has collected, a list which conveys the whole amplitude of the social system and may contain an ironic counterpoint to the eminent and no less numerous traditionists listed as sources of *Ḥadīth* (1971–73: 1/1–7).

22 Khalidi (1994: 130).

core'': apart from the Prophet Muḥammad, it includes Jesus, ʿAlī Ibn Abi Ṭālib, Ardashīr Ibn Bābak, Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ, al-Aṣmaʿī, Abū Tammām as well as several unnamed ''poets, wise men, rhetoricians and literati'' (*shuʿarā', ḥukamā', bulaghā', udabā'*).[23] For al-Māwardī the world of letters is clearly a single universe in which Prophetic sayings, while occupying the first rank, figure among numerous others which he proceeds to mine freely in order to construct his ethical vision.

The conclusion arises that, as a record of the sayings of the Prophet, *Ḥadīth* is not a thing apart from, or in opposition to, *Adab*, but rather constitutes one aspect of a continuum covering the vast religio-cultural legacy inherited and codified by classical Arabic letters. *Ḥadīth* and *Adab* may thus be seen as different branches of one literary pursuit sharing the same over-arching Islamic metanarrative, a similar conception of the edifying power of speech, and a similar drive to select the best. Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih sums up these three dimensions – Islam, edifying speech and judicious selection – by recourse to one quranic quote which applies not only to him but to traditionists and men of letters alike, for their task is the same: ''they listen to speech and follow the best thereof'' (*yastamiʿūna 'l-qawla wa yattabiʿūna aḥsanah*, 39: 18).[24]

While the discussion so far posits the existence of a single literary framework comprising the pursuits of *Adab* and *Ḥadīth*, a full assessment of the extent and complexity of the interface between them and its development over time would require a detailed study in its own right.[25] What concerns us here, however, is the manner in which aesthetics, ethics and religion intersect in the term *adab* as it occurs in the context of *Ḥadīth*. Perhaps the most revealing insight into this question has been provided by Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 1449) in his voluminous commentary on the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī. With reference to the heading of Chapter 78 which reads *Kitāb al-Adab*, Ibn Ḥajar provides his own definition as follows: *al-adab istiʿmāl mā yuḥmad qawlan wa fiʿlan* (''*adab* is recourse to laudability in word and deed'').[26] The way in which this definition is phrased suggests that word and deed, speech and action, are not to be understood as functioning independently of each other; rather they must be in consonance whereby one reflects and induces the other. This belief in the edifying function of laudable speech and its ability to induce laudable action may well be at the core of the common ground shared by *Adab* and *Ḥadīth*.[27] The aspect of

23 Al-Māwardī (1987: 197–9).

24 Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih (1983: 5). In her discussion of the preface to Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih's work Bray mentions, moreover, the author's intention to ''apply to the *akhbār* in his anthology the standard of proof that he thinks suitable for *ḥadīth*'' (2005: 15).

25 In recent years a substantial body of valuable research with a bearing on the nature of *adab* has been published which would have to be closely consulted, notably Leder (1998), Kennedy (2005) and Bray (2006). Of particular interest is Julia Bray's study ''Abbasid myth and the human act'' (2005), which analyses *Adab* as mythography in a manner that invites a more detailed comparison with *Ḥadīth*.

26 Ibn Ḥajar (1987: 14/414).

27 On the hoped-for salvific function of speech in *Adab* see Bray (2005: 19–20) who also cites Andras Hamori's here highly pertinent observation that ''in innumerable anecdotes in *adab* literature, word tames power'' (ibid.).

adab most specific to *Ḥadīth*, however, is covered by the other definitions cited by Ibn Ḥajar which are attributed to different sources and emphasize the ethical dimension of the term. One of these describes *adab* as *taʿẓīm man fawqak wa'l-rifq bi-man dūnak* (''deference to those above you and kindness to those below you''), a definition which, when taken together with Ibn Ḥajar's own, encompasses the semantic field of the term *adab* as it appears in the compendia of *Ḥadīth*: it denotes the expression of deference to those above you (most notably the Prophet) and kindness to those below you (including the lowliest of creatures) by recourse to laudable speech as well as laudable action. *Adab* in this guise is thus a set of behavioural principles concerned with the felicitous conduct of interpersonal relations. It will be seen, however, that this set of principles derives its true significance from a relationship of a higher order, namely that between man and God.

''Laudable speech'' implies, moreover, a form of language which is not only elevated in subject matter but also corresponds to sound linguistic and literary norms. While this topic is at the heart of *Adab* proper, it is not lacking in the compendia of *Ḥadīth*, where it appears in conjunction with traditions dealing with the ethical dimension of the term, as illustrated in the following section.

Adab in *Ḥadīth*: language in action

Five of the six canonical *Ḥadīth* collections contain chapter headings including the term *adab* or its plural *ādāb*: al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Ibn Māja, Abū Dāwūd, and al-Tirmidhī. A survey of the content of these chapters shows that while the *ḥadīth*s which appear under these headings share a common nucleus, each compiler has approached the subject from a distinct angle and adduced traditions which the others do not contain. With 502 traditions Abu Dāwūd's chapter is twice as long as the others and offers the most comprehensive treatment of the subject. Many traditions cited by him under *adab* are found in the other collections under different chapter headings. This concerns in particular traditions on the topic of *Salām* (''Uttering the Muslim Greeting'') and *Isti'dhān* (''Seeking Permission to Enter''), issues at the heart of interpersonal relations[28] and assigned to separate chapters by Muslim and al-Bukhārī respectively.[29] In addition, Muslim sets aside three shorter chapters dealing with the linguistic and literary aspects of the term, a distinction not made in the other compilations.[30] Such differences in approach are a notable feature of *Ḥadīth*, and for the traditions cited in the following pages alternative categorizations are indicated in the footnotes and referred to at the end of the section.

28 The link between *salām* and *isti'dhān* goes back to Quran 24: 27.

29 M. Shākir's edition of al-Tirmidhī's *Çaḥīḥ* (1937) also has a separate section on *isti'dhān*. It contains a number of *ḥadīth*s that in M. ʿUthmān's edition (1983) figure under the heading of *adab*. The numbering of *ḥadīth*s in the two editions is also different. This article follows the layout of ʿUthmān but references are given to both editions.

30 See Muslim (1978), *Kitāb al-Ādāb, Kitāb al-Alfāẓ min al-Ādāb wa Ghayriha* and *Kitāb al-Shiʿr*.

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On account of the large number of *ḥadīth*s cited and the complexity of the overlap between the collections, a detailed comparison of their treatment of the subject is beyond the purview of this study. The main objective here is to demonstrate how the "little narratives" of *ḥadīth* are used as a means to illustrate the beneficial role in interpersonal relations of commendable speech and action. In this respect it is striking to note how far the compilers have cast their nets to elucidate their particular vision of this term. Taken together, the *ḥadīth*s involved illustrate the issue of kindness and/or deference in word and/or deed in a seemingly comprehensive range of interpersonal relationships; these include parents, siblings, sons, daughters, wives, slaves, orphans, friends, groups of men and women, non-Muslims, as well as the sick and the dying. "Kindness to those below you" is, moreover, not restricted to humans as illustrated in the following *ḥadīth*:

> (2) I asked the Prophet about a stray camel which had come to my drinking troughs and I had included in my herd. "Is there a (heavenly) reward for me if I give it water to drink?". He answered "Yes there is a reward in any distressed creature".[31]

This example goes to illustrate one aspect of the *adab* of *Ḥadīth*, namely laudable action as such, without the involvement of language, of which there are numerous permutations in the chapters concerned. Of greater interest for this discussion are traditions dealing with laudable speech and action in combination, the most salient example of which is the act of greeting or uttering the *salām* formula. The topic is treated in detail in the compilations and foregrounded by al-Tirmidhī, who places it at the beginning of his chapter. The first *ḥadīth* he cites under this rubric is as follows:

> (3) Abū Hurayra said that the Prophet said: "By Him in whose power is my soul, you will not enter Paradise until you believe, and you will not believe until you love one another (*taḥābbu*); verily, I will show you something which will make you love one another if you do it: disseminate the practice of greeting among yourselves".[32]

While this tradition sets the scene by enunciating the salvific function of the act of greeting, the next *ḥadīth* adduced by al-Tirmidhī reports the encounter between a visitor and the Prophet and provides the occasion to stress the merit of using the correct formula of greeting in its entirety: *al-salāmu ʿalaykum wa raḥmatu l-lāhi wa barakātuh* ("peace and God's mercy

31 Ibn Māja, 1952–53: nr. 3686; *hadīth*s on kindness to animals are found in all canonical collections. According to Wenzinck's concordance, however, this one features only in Ibn Māja and the *Musnad* of Ibn Ḥanbal.

32 Al-Tirmidhī (1983: nr. 2829; 1937: 2688 where it begins the *Kitāb al-Isti'dhān*). The same *ḥadīth* appears in the *adab* chapters of Abū Dāwūd (nr. 5193) and Ibn Māja (nr. 3692), who cites it also in his introduction under the heading *īmān* (nr. 68). Muslim cites it only under the heading *īmān* (nr. 54).

and blessings be upon you'').[33] With the purpose and the wording of this form of laudable speech thus established, al-Tirmidhī goes on to cite numerous further traditions which illustrate the sound practice of greeting in a variety of circumstances and social settings. Prominent among these is greeting in the context of *isti'dhān*, or seeking permission to enter someone's domicile. The way in which the subject of *salām* is treated by him shows that the purpose of *adab*, in word and deed, lies in the preservation of the other person's dignity, integrity and well-being, and in the avoidance of unwarranted intrusion into his or her private sphere. The greeting formula, drawn from the Quran, has a symbolic function in this regard since its wording implies a wish for safety in this world and salvation in the next. However, as noted by al-Tirmidhī, even this auspicious utterance may constitute an intrusion if used in inappropriate circumstances:

> (4) From Ibn ʿUmar: ''A man greeted the Prophet while he was urinating but he did not respond to him''.[34]

Maintaining silence out of respect for a person's privacy is the aspect of *adab* which al-Nawawī chooses to foreground in his chapter on the subject in his *Riyāḍ al-Ṣaliḥīn*, though the traditions he cites are drawn from a rather different sphere from the example above. Under the sub-heading ''On Keeping Secrets'', he cites three substantial tales illustrating the merit of not divulging confidential communications and lovers' secrets even when pressurized to do so.[35] The merit of discretion in these examples relates to the key issues at stake in both *isti'dhān* and *salām*, namely ensuring the inviolability of the other. Muslim's treatment of *salām* further emphasizes this notion by including under this heading a number of topics involving the prevention of injury and harm, including what may be viewed as another aspect of laudable speech, namely incantations to be used for the treatment of illness and the effect of poisons and magic spells.[36]

While al-Tirmidhī begins his chapter on *adab* with speech-in-action designed to protect from harm – for this is what the *salām* formula in essence is – the beginning of Abū Dāwūd's chapter on the subject presents a different though related perspective. It commends the adoption of a manner of speech which spares others from harm, as illustrated in the Prophet's kind indulgence towards the youthful antics of Anas b. Mālik:

> (5) Anas said: ''The Prophet of God was exceedingly good-natured. One day he sent me on an errand and I said 'By God, I won't go', while I had in reality made up my mind to go and do what the Prophet had ordered. So I set out until I passed by some boys playing in the

33 Al-Tirmidhī (1983: nr. 2830, 1937: nr. 2689).
34 Al-Tirmidhī (1983: nr. 2863, 1937: 2720). Al-Tirmidhī lists this *ḥadīth* also in the chapter on purity (*ṭahāra*), as do al-Nasā'ī, Abū Dāwūd and Ibn Māja.
35 Al-Nawawī (2001: 210–2).
36 Muslim (1978: 4/1718).

> market (and stayed with them). Suddenly there was the Prophet grabbing hold of my neck from behind me. I looked at him and he laughed and said: 'Little Anas, go where I have asked you to go!'. I said: 'I'll go, Prophet of God!'" Then Anas said: "By God, I have served him seven years and never heard him say about anything I had done: 'Why did you do so-and-so?', or anything I had omitted: 'Why didn't you do so-and-so?'"[37]

Abu Dāwūd places this *ḥadīth* under the subtitle of *ḥilm* or forbearance, a theme which he proceeds to develop further in the subsequent traditions which focus on means to control anger, whereby speech formulae once more play a seminal role, as illustrated in the following tradition:

> (6) From Sulaymān Ibn Sard: "Two men appeared in front of the Prophet and the eyes of one of them turned red and his arteries swelled up. The Prophet of God said: 'I know a phrase which would remove what he feels if he said it: *aʿūdhu bi-Llāhi min al-shayṭān al-rajīm* (I take refuge with God from the stoned devil).' The man said: 'Do you think I am mad?'"[38]

The same *ḥadīth* is cited by Muslim just prior to the above-quoted tradition on Satan and God's creation.[39] Al-Nawawī's commentary thereon explains the meaning of this strange encounter:[40] the angry man is steeped in the mentality of the *Jāhiliya*, and for him possession by a devil can only mean madness; indeed, the Arabic word for mad, *majnūn*, means literally "possessed by a jinn". For the Prophet, on the other hand, anger is an emotion instilled by Satan, hence the formula to seek refuge from him when angered. The recitation of laudable speech in the form of the utterance recommended by the Prophet has the power to dispel anger and bring about laudable action by enabling man to control himself and avoid causing harm.

The recitation of religious formulae drawn from the Quran as *afḍal al-kalām*, the most meritorious speech of all, is a theme attested in the relevant chapters of all compilations but is particularly favoured by Ibn Māja,[41] who illustrates it with numerous traditions that mark the conclusion of his chapter on *adab*. The following example places the interface between laudable speech and action on to an altogether different plane:

> (7) From Abū Hurayra, that the Prophet of God passed him by while he was planting a shrub and said: "Oh, Abū Hurayra, what are you planting?". "I said: 'A shrub of mine'. He said: 'Have I not pointed you to a plant far better than this one? Say "God be praised, praise be

37 Abu Dāwūd (1969: nr. 4773). The same *ḥadīth* is cited by Muslim under the chapter on *faḍā'il*, the virtues of the Prophet (nr. 2310).
38 Abū Dāwūd (1969–74: nr. 4781).
39 Muslim (1978: nr. 2610).
40 Al-Nawawī (1986: 15–6/400).
41 Ibn Māja (1952–53: nr. 3811).

to God, there is no god but God, God is Great" (*subḥāna l-Lāh, al-ḥamdu li l-Lāh, lā ilāha illā l-Lāh wa l-Lāhu akbar*); through each of these a tree will be planted for you in Paradise."[42]

The planting of trees and shrubs is in itself a laudable act; in this tradition, however, it comes to symbolize man's earthly pursuits, which are ultimately in vain. Uttering words in praise of God and, by implication, changing the soul's orientation towards the divine, occasions action of a more lasting kind as invisible forces engage in preparing a heavenly reward. The tradition is highly significant because it illustrates that the twin principles in the above-cited definition of *adab*, "deference to those above you and kindness to those below you", as well as the related interface between laudable speech and action, are not limited to interpersonal relations only, but equally apply to a far more important relationship, namely that between man and his Creator. "Laudable speech" here is nothing less than the language of divine revelation with which God addresses man and which man is called upon to use in turn so as to express his deference to God. Its revelation through the Prophet is an expression of divine guidance and mercy (*hudan wa raḥma*, Quran 6: 157) and hence constitutes the supreme act of kindness "to those below". In *Ḥadīth* the principles of human *adab* are thus firmly enshrined in, and given deeper meaning by, the metaphysical frame of its metanarrative.

While *ḥadīth*s such as these assign paramount status to the language of scripture, this does not mean that laudable speech more commonly associated with literary *adab* does not figure among the traditions assembled under this title. The *adab* chapters of al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Māja and Abu Dāwūd contain traditions documenting the Prophet's attitude to poetry, a much debated subject to which Muslim dedicates a separate chapter as indicated above.[43] There are, furthermore, *ḥadīth*s on the correct use of certain words and expressions and on auspicious and inauspicious names, a topic Muslim again covers under a separate heading. Diplomatic correspondence, a favourite concern of secretarial *adab*, is also represented as shown in the following example. While its setting is practical and wordly, and as such very different from the portent of the previous citation, the interplay between laudable speech and action in an interpersonal context is once more the core issue; the meritorious act in question here is the acquisition of a foreign language so as to facilitate communication with others:

(8) From Zayd Ibn Thābit: "The Prophet of God asked [me] to learn words from the writing of the Jews for his sake; he said: 'I am not confident that the Jews will understand my letter'. Not half a month had passed till I had learned it for him. Then, whenever he wrote to the Jews I would write to them and when they wrote to him I would read their letter."[44]

42 Ibn Māja (1952–53: nr. 3807).
43 See Muslim (1978, book 41).
44 Al-Tirmidhī (1983, nr. 2858, 1937: nr. 2715). Abū Dāwūd classifies this *ḥadīth* under the chapter on *ʿilm* ("knowledge", nr. 3646).

The traditions cited in the previous pages along with their position in the compilations illustrate both the open and mobile nature of *Ḥadīth* as a literary form and the creativity and initiative of the compilers. On the surface, the subject-matter of these narratives is quite unrelated. Through their placement under the heading of *adab*, however, each of them makes a distinct contribution to the elucidation of this ethical concept. *Ḥadīth* as a literary form thus lends itself to the exploration of abstract categories by way of concrete and wide-ranging illustration as well as exemplification of the web of relationships that exist between them. It follows that, in the canonical *Ḥadīth* compendia, narrative is used as an exploratory device, as a signifier the signified of which is not the story-line, but an abstract, non-narrative reality which binds the different stories to each other and which it is the reader's task to comprehend. This exploration takes place exclusively through the categorization and classification undertaken by the compiler.[45]

Another related point is also to be noted: all but two of the traditions quoted above under the heading of *adab* are, as indicated in the footnotes, also listed by the compilers under a range of alternative headings such as *salām* ("greeting"), *isti'dhān* ("seeking permission to enter"), *ṭahāra* ("purity"), *faḍā'il* ("virtues"), *ʿilm* ("knowledge") and *īmān* ("faith"). This illustrates the extent to which actions which may be qualified as being in accordance with *adab* also conform to a wide spectrum of alternative moral criteria and hence indicate how deeply the meaning of this concept is embedded in the ethical universe of *Ḥadīth*. If literary *adab*, as aptly stated by Kilpatrick, "bears essentially upon behaviour within a given social group, which it both reflects and defines",[46] *adab* in *Ḥadīth*, by reflecting the words and deeds of the Prophet, aims at nothing less than defining the basic behavioural standards of the Muslim community as whole. It thus maps out the common moral ground of practical interpersonal relations which should ideally be shared by all the different "social groups" that make up society at large and whose specific standards of behaviour are the topic of the multifaceted literature of *Adab* proper. As such the latter incorporates not only general anthologies but also specialized works addressed to particular groups, including rulers, courtiers, secretaries, jurists and physicians.[47]

45 Among the major differences between the conventions of *Adab* and *Ḥadīth* is the rather more prominent role which may be assumed by the compilers of *Adab* works. Kilpatrick, for instance, has shown in detail how Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī's repeated critical comments and interventions give the reader of his voluminous *Kitāb al-Aghānī* "a sense that the compiler is accompanying them through the book" (2003: 239). The same cannot be said of the canonical compendia of *Ḥadīth*.

46 Kilpatrick (1998: 54).

47 The "mirrors of princes" genre forms a prominent part of *Adab*, as noted by Kilpatrick (1998); the classic *adab* work for secretaries is Ibn Qutayba's *Adab al-Kātib* (1982), which spawned numerous works on the same topic. On the *adab* of jurists and physicians see e.g. al-Māwardī (1971) and Levey (1967) respectively. Of interest here are also works on the *adab* of philosophers (e.g. Ḥunayn Ibn Isḥāq 1985) and the treatment of *adab* in the classical Sufi manuals which provides another, distinct, approach to the religious dimension of this concept (see e.g. al-Qushayrī 2001: 283–9). For a useful survey of titles in the *adab* of different professions see Horst (1987: 212–5).

Notwithstanding the difference between these groups and the standards to which they adhere, in their daily behaviour all of them will, to some extent, share in the *adab* of *Ḥadīth*, even if it is only in their manner of greeting. This has not changed to the present day.

To illustrate the semantic field of Prophetic *adab* with a further example we may turn to a specimen found in that most remarkable of classical works about the concept of *adab*, the above-mentioned *Adab al-Dunyā wa 'l-Dīn* by al-Māwardī. It contains, *inter alia*, a chapter on humour and laughter (*al-muzāḥ wa 'l-ḍiḥk*), a topic also included in several canonical compilations under the heading of *adab*. Jokes can, indeed, be a form of commendable speech, provided certain conditions are fulfilled. In analysing these, al-Māwardī resorts to the very principles enunciated by Ibn Ḥajar as distinguishing marks of *adab*. To be morally acceptable, jokes should be an expression of friendliness and affection to others by recourse to "pleasing speech" (*jamīl al-qawl*) and "agreeable acts" (*mustaḥsan al-fiʿl*).[48] Their aim should thus be to dispel sadness and worry, and hurtful or untruthful jokes should be avoided. The Prophet achieved this by jokingly telling the truth, as illustrated by al-Māwardī in the following *ḥadīth* which contains an auspicious promise of eternal youth:

> (9) An old woman from the *Anṣār* came to him and said: "Prophet of God, pray for me to be forgiven!" He said: "Don't you know old women don't enter Paradise?", whereupon she shrieked. Then the Prophet smiled and said, "Haven't you read God's word in the Quran: We have fashioned them [women in Paradise] well and made them youthful companions" (*inna ansha'nāhunna inshā'an wa jaʿalnāhunna abkāran ʿuruban atrāban*)?[49]

Narrative in *Ḥadīth*: desire and the law

The "openness" of *ḥadīth* as a literary form is not only a function of the multiplicity of contexts in which individual traditions may figure. As illustrated in the examples cited above, it also applies to the thematic scope which encompasses manifestations of daily life ranging from the most private and intimate to the most formal and official. The narrative structure of *ḥadīth* is no less wide-ranging though certain characteristic patterns predominate, as noted by El Calamawi. These include question-and-answer patterns, riddles, enumerations, folk-tale elements, as well as what she calls "genuine stories", in which the supernatural provides for "the richest source of narrative in the whole corpus".[50]

For the purpose of this enquiry, however, it is of greater significance to note that a very large proportion of *ḥadīth*, if not the majority, contain no narrative at all but only report a statement made by the Prophet or a brief

48 Al-Māwardī (1987: 271).
49 *Ibid.* Regrettably, this *ḥadīth* does not appear in the canonical works.
50 El Calamawi (1983: 311, 314).

description of his actions. An example is the following, which figures in Ibn Māja's chapter on *adab* under the sub-heading of *rifq* ("kindness"); it is cited here with full *isnād*:

> (10) Abu Bakr Ibn Abī Shayba reported from Zuhrī, from ʿUrwa, from ʿĀ'isha, from the Prophet, that he said: "God is kind, and loves kindness in all things (*inn Allāh rafīq yuḥibb al-rifq fī 'l-amr kullih*)".[51]

The narrative element in *ḥadīth*s such as these is limited to the word *qāla*, "he said", which is to be taken as having been uttered by each member of the chain of transmission through which this statement has avowedly been preserved. If narrative is, as defined by Genette, "the representation of a real or fictitious event or series of events by language",[52] then the mere incidence of the word *qāla*, which affirms that a speech event has taken place, makes this *ḥadīth*, and by extension all others like it, into a narrative notwithstanding the absence of narrative in the speech reported. The narrative dimension of *ḥadīth* thus resides primarily in the *isnād*, the manner of transmission, and not in the *matn*, the subject-matter of the tradition. The significance of the *isnād* as a narrative device is a wider issue which is discussed in more detail in the final section of this paper. What concerns us here is the relationship between *ḥadīths* that have a narrative *matn* and those that do not: what distinguishes them from one another and to what extent are they merely different manifestations of the same literary form? An answer to this question may be found when comparing the above-cited *ḥadīth* to the following tradition, which figures in al-Tirmidhī's chapter on *adab* under the sub-title of *Fī Karāhiyat al-Taslīm ʿalā 'l-Dhimmī* ("On the Undesirability of Greeting *Dhimmīs* with the *Salām*"); here, the traditional formula of greeting is subtly transformed into an insult:

> (11) Saʿīd Ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān reported from Zuhrī from ʿUrwa from ʿĀ'isha that she said: "A group of Jews came to see the Prophet and said to him *al-sām ʿalaykum* (disgust upon you), and the Prophet said: *wa-ʿalaykum* (and upon you)", ʿA'isha said : "I would have said disgust and curse upon you!". The Prophet said: "ʿA'isha, God loves kindness in all things". ʿA'isha said: "Didn't you hear what they said?". He said: "I did say 'upon you'".[53]

Clearly, the narrative cited by al-Tirmidhī provides the circumstantial context for the prophetic statement "God loves kindness in all things", a context which causes him to classify this *ḥadīth* under an entirely different sub-heading from the one used by Ibn Māja. What, then, does the context add to the utterance? This question leads to the core of the relationship between the "narrative" and "non-narrative" elements of *ḥadīth*. It may be interpreted as the manifestation of a conflict which, according to Hegel and

51 Ibn Māja (1952–53: nr. 3689).
52 Genette (1976: 1).
53 Al-Tirmidhī (1983: nr. 2844; 1937–56: 2701).

H. White, underlies narrative representation as such: "it is the conflict between desire on the one side and law on the other".[54]

This conflict arises from what White terms the intimate relationship between law, historicality and narrativity, whereby the latter habitually presupposes "the existence of a legal system against or on behalf of which the typical agents of the narrative account militate".[55] This militation for or against is driven by "desire", the dynamic force which causes narrative action to unfold. In the Islamic context, the most appropriate term to convey "desire" in its negative, antinomian form may be *hawā*, as in the quranic verse *lā tattabiʿ il-hawā fa yuḍillaka ʿan sabīli l-Llāh* (do not follow *hawā* for it will lead you away from the path of God, 38: 26). As glossed by Ibn Manẓūr, the term *sabīl Allāh* refers to all actions which bring man closer to God, including the performance of obligations laid down by the *sharīʿa*, the legal system of Islam.[56] It goes without saying that the conflict between *hawā* and *sabīl Allāh*, or desire and law in its Islamic garb, is at the core of the metanarrative of *ḥadīth*; indeed, we can safely assume that *hawā* is what Satan plans to instil in the "hollow core" of man. As noted above, however, desire can also take a positive form by militating not against but on behalf of the law. Such action is best conveyed in the quranic phrase *alladhīna āmanū wa hājarū wa jāhadū fī sabīli l-Llāh* ("those who believe, migrate and do battle for the path of God, 9: 20) which collates three fundamental Islamic concepts of positive action: *īmān, hijrah* and *jihād*.[57]

If we now turn to the *hadīth*s cited above we find that all the incidents narrated therein may be counted as manifestations of desire in keeping with or in contravention of the law in its widest sense as expressed in Ibn Manẓūr's definition of the term *sabīl Allāh*. "Negative desire" is not only exemplified in ʿĀ'isha's wish to requite the insolence of her husband's visitors and repay like with like, but also in the rage of the man whose eyes turned red,[58] the thoughtless gardening of Abū Hurayra,[59] the childish waywardness of little Anas[60] and the indiscretion of the man who addressed the Prophet while he was performing a very private act.[61] "Positive desire", on the other had, motivates the Bedouin's hope for reward through feeding the stray camel,[62] Zayd Ibn Thābit's eagerness at learning the language of the Jews to help the Prophet in his correspondence[63] and the old lady's hope for redemption.[64]

54 White (1980: 16).
55 White (1980: 17).
56 Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, see entry *sabīl*.
57 The link of such combined action to historicality and narrativity is starkly illustrated by the fact that in its original manifestation it marks the starting point of the Muslim calendar: Muḥammad's *Hijra* was occasioned by faith (*īmān*) and war against the enemies of faith (*jihād*).
58 See example 6.
59 See example 7.
60 See example 5.
61 See example 4.
62 See example 2.
63 See example 8.
64 See example 9.

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Desire in its positive or negative sense thus provides the "narrative shell" of *Ḥadīth*. Law, on the other hand, provides what may be called the "non-narrative core": prophetic statements expressing general truths, prophetic commands and prohibitions, descriptions of the Prophet's character and habitual actions, or statements referring to or describing the attributes of God. The *ḥadīth*s cited above illustrate the wide range of issues these may cover. There is the Prophet's reluctance to use harsh words in reprimand[65] and his order to learn a foreign language;[66] there are statements enjoining the correct usage of religious formulae[67] and affirming the merits of helping animals in distress.[68] Of particular relevance is the prophetic utterance in example 3, which recommends a vital form of "positive desire", namely mutual love among mankind as a means of attaining redemption. Example 10, however, is the most significant. By stating that God wishes to see His kindness (*rifq*) reflected in the actions of man, this tradition confirms that all positive desire, and with it all human *adab*, is nothing but a function of what may be called the divine or metaphysical dimension of *adab* in *Ḥadīth*: God, "the most merciful of merciful" (*arḥam al-rāḥimīn*, Quran 21: 83) is the ultimate source of all kindness. The true purpose of *ta'addub* in *Ḥadīth* is therefore only this: to follow the Prophet so as to emulate the nature of divinity in as much as the finiteness of man may permit.[69]

The issues covered in the non-narrative core of these *ḥadīth*s have this in common: that they all elucidate various aspects of *sabīl Allāh* and in doing so give expression to principles of implicitly timeless validity. The narrative shell provides a context which may dramatize, emphasize or explain the non-narrative core but may also be dispensed with altogether; indeed, by being cited without narrative context it gains in weight and universal appeal, as illustrated in example 10. Moreover, where narrative occurs, it appears to be purposefully shorn of all circumstantial detail and only the bare essentials are given, but these are chosen for maximum effect, as illustrated in the *hadīth* on the "angry man".[70] His identity, the reason for his visiting the Prophet or the motive for his wrath remain a mystery; all we hear is that his eyes turned red and his veins swelled up. Anger appears in its pure, naked, motiveless form, and this brief brush-stroke is enough to provide the most effective foil for the Prophet's intervention. Literary creativity in such *hadīth* resides not in narrative amplification but precisely in the opposite: in deliberate condensation to provide the briefest time-bound framework for the timeless message which constitutes the core.[71]

65 See example 5.
66 See example 8.
67 See examples 3, 6 and 7.
68 See example 2.
69 See example 10.
70 See example 6.
71 Bray points to an analogous compositional procedure in the "mythologizing" of *Adab*: "an event is denarrativised and rendered as a situation, as part of the unchanging structure of the human condition" (2005: 12). As she observes, the reverse process also exists: "a situation is placed within an event and turned into a narrative; it is particularised and names and even dates are attached to it" (ibid.). The latter, too, is relevant to *Ḥadīth* since it applies to the widespread process of

To return to the terminology used by Genette, the difference between "shell" and "core" in the *ḥadīth*s cited corresponds up to a point to that between "narrative" and "discourse" as formulated originally by Benveniste. In narrative, past events are "recorded as they appear on the horizon of the story", whereas in discourse "someone speaks and his situation in the very act of speaking is the focus of the most important significations". Moreover, "discourse inserted into narrative remains discourse and forms a sort of cyst easily recognized and localized".[72] In the *ḥadīth*s cited, this is equivalent to the non-narrative core, the crucial prophetic utterance which has been singled out and in numerous traditions stands on its own, devoid of any narrative casing. The term "discourse" is helpful in this context because, as defined by Genette, it indicates yet one more aspect of the "openness" of *Ḥadīth* as a literary form. According to him, discourse has, unlike narrative, "no purity to preserve since it is a natural mode of language, the broadest and most universal mode, by definition open to all forms".[73] The prophetic utterances in *Ḥadīth* are discourse in this very sense since they cover a seemingly unlimited spectrum of verbal expressions ranging from the monosyllabic to the narration of parables and tales.

It should be noted, however, that the narrative shell and the discursive, non-narrative core of *Ḥadīth* and their respective representation of desire and law in conflict or congruence are not always as readily distinguishable as in the examples cited above. In certain cases the narrative serves to illustrate the law in action and to provide living proof of it having been carried out. Seminal examples of this are found in the *ḥadīth*s on the *ḥudūd*, the punishments for theft and adultery, which provide considerable details surrounding the cases involved. One of these concerns a woman from the tribe of Ghāmiḍ Ibn al-Azd who, following the example of one Māʿiz Ibn Mālik, decided to confess that she had committed adultery and asked the Prophet to enact the penalty and thus chasten her (*fa-ṭahhirni*). When she revealed that she was pregnant the Prophet asked her to depart until she had given birth:

> (12) "When she had given birth she came to him with the child wrapped in a cloth and said: 'Here is the one I have given birth to'. He said: 'Go and suckle him until you wean him'. When she had weaned him she returned with the child holding a crust of bread in his hand and said: 'Prophet of God, I have weaned him and he is eating food'. He gave the child to one of the Muslim men and issued the order concerning her, so she was buried up to her chest and he ordered the people who stoned her. Khālid Ibn al-Walīd came along with a stone and hit her head, whereupon blood splattered on the face of Khālid

ḥadīth fabrication in which statements or paradigmatic events are given authority through association with the Prophet. This shows once more that the structural parallel between *Adab* and *Ḥadīth* is pervasive and deserving of closer study.

72 Genette (1976: 9–11).

73 Genette (1976: 11).

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> and he cursed her. The Prophet of God heard him cursing her and said: 'Calm down, Khālid, by the One in Whose Hand is my soul, her repentance is so great that it would suffice for an injurious tax-collector (*ṣaḥib maks*) to be granted forgiveness'. Then he prayed upon her and she was buried."[74]

Another version, also reported by Muslim, cites the Prophet as saying: "Her repentance is such that were it to be divided among seventy people in Medina it would suffice them; is there a greater repentance than her giving herself to God?"[75]

This tradition illustrates, perhaps better than any other, to what extent *Ḥadīth* is situated at the very ridge of the interface between "law" and "desire". As discussed in some detail by Burton, the debate over the stoning penalty for adultery which is not attested in the Quran was instrumental in prompting al-Shāfiʿī (d. 820) to formulate the theory that *Ḥadīth* be elevated to the level of a "second revelation" after the Quran and hence become one of the canonical sources of religious law.[76] The narrative contained in this *ḥadīth* thus describes a single incident which is to be taken as a timeless exemplum of the law in action whereby the twin forms of desire play once again the motivating role. Desire in contravention of the law can be assumed to have caused the adulterous acts, but the focus of the narrative is not on negative but on positive desire of a singular kind: the woman's wish for purification through the enactment of the penalty. It becomes the occasion for the Prophet to display, even in these cruel circumstances, a behaviour in accordance with the ethical principles of *adab*. The latter is evident in his concern for the welfare of the child, his reprimand for the anger of Khālid, his praying over her grave and his comment on her repentance which, in the second version cited above, elevates her almost to the level of a saint.

Epic and *Ḥadīth*: catharsis and serenity

As noted by T. Khalidi, the image of the past developed by the scholarship of *Ḥadīth* may be described as "epic" in the sense defined by Bakhtin.[77] According to the latter, the epic past is "absolute" since it represents the "single source and beginning of everything good for all later times"; it originates in a "sacrosanct tradition" and its memory serves as the "source and power of the creative impulse".[78] These features of the epic do, indeed, apply very markedly to *Ḥadīth*. The past it depicts is deemed sacred and absolute to such an extent that it came to provide the legal and behavioural standards for all later times, and the preservation of its memory by a sacrosanct body of transmitters led to a "creative impulse" second to none

74 Muslim (1978: nr. 1695(23)).
75 Muslim (1978: nr. 1696).
76 Burton (1994: 81–91).
77 Khalidi (1994: 58, 130).
78 Bakhtin (1981: 15–7).

in the literature of Islam. A further, no less striking, parallel between *Ḥadīth* and Bakhtin's view of the epic concerns his notion of the epic individual: "all his potential, all his possibilities are realised utterly in his external social position … everything in him is exposed and loudly expressed".[79] In the case of Muḥammad, the "external social position" is that of Prophecy through which all his potential is realized; *Ḥadīth* is there to record all that is "exposed and expressed" in and through him.

The parallel between *Ḥadīth* and Bakhtin's view of the epic also extends to their respective positions in literary history. As Bakhtin shows, parodies of the "high genre" of the epic, in which the homogeneity of the epic individual is fractured and the "man ceases to coincide with himself" frequently mark a transitional stage towards the rise of the novel.[80] As pointed out by ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Kilito and James T. Monroe, the literature of *Ḥadīth* is subject to a comparable parody in the *maqamāt* of al-Hamadhānī and al-Ḥarīrī, a genre frequently cited as an early precursor of the modern Arabic novel[81] which satirically draws on the literary form of *Ḥadīth* to promulgate "an immoral doctrine that stands in stark contrast to the noble message proclaimed by the Prophet Muḥammad".[82] Of particular interest for our purpose is that the Bakhtinian notion of the "fracture of the epic individual"[83] is not only clearly manifest in the *maqāmāt* but touches the very heart of the concept of *adab* if we understand it, with Ibn Ḥajar, as the confluence of laudable speech and laudable action. While the two are united in the example of the Prophet, in the case of the heroes of the *maqamāt* they are irreconcilably opposed as outstanding eloquence clashes with ignoble and outrageous acts. Here, not only does man "cease to coincide with himself", but *adab*, the moral ground on which he stands, is fractured at the core.

The correspondences noted above would seem to suggest that *Ḥadīth* may indeed be defined as a literary genre akin to the epic in subject matter, source, and socio-cultural as well as literary function. However, these similarities mask certain categorical differences of equal import which concern not only the religious status of *Ḥadīth* but its literary and, particularly, its narrative properties, as best exemplified by comparison with epic verses such as the following which mark the beginning of Homer's Iliad:

> Sing, O Goddess, the ruinous wrath of Achilles
> Son of Peleus, the terrible curse that brought
> Unnumbered woes upon the Achaeans and hurled
> To Hades so many heroic souls, leaving
> Their bodies the prey of dogs and carrion birds.[84]

79 Bakhtin (1981: 34).
80 Bakhtin (1981: 6, 35).
81 See for instance Allen (1992: 180). For a recent detailed study of these *maqāmāt* see Kennedy (2006).
82 Monroe (1983: 24).
83 Monroe (1983: 38).
84 Homer (1991: 3).

The difference between the moral universe of *Ḥadīth* and that of the classical epic is encapsulated in the treatment of anger as it appears in these verses when compared with the above-cited tradition on the Prophet's encounter with a man who had flown into a rage;[85] both treat anger as a "destructive desire", but one shows it erupting and engulfing all without restraint whereas the other shows how it can be extinguished at once by appeal to a higher force. In Homer's case, the phrasing of this beginning, the appeal to the Goddess, sets a movement in motion that is designed to sweep the listener irresistibly along its course. What is conjured up in the wrath of Achilles is the dynamism of the "absolute past", the flow of great and terrible events which are meant to arouse, in Aristotle's terms, "pity and fear" and cathartic emotional release.[86] "Every narrative since the Iliad narrated this flowing", noted P. Ricoeur in his for our purposes highly pertinent reflections on time and narrative.[87] In the epic, the manifestation of the "absolute past" as a powerful temporal continuum is particularly vital to the aesthetic experience it engenders: "the richer life is in temporality, the purer the epic".[88]

Ricoeur's discussion of the interface between "narrated time" and "time of narration", concepts first developed by Günther Müller, draws attention to a further constitutive feature of the "absolute epic past". Between the time of narration of the epic and its narrated time, or, in the case of the Iliad, between the time of Homer's appeal to the Goddess and the time of Achilles' wrath, lie aeons of unknown and unquantified time which mark what Bakhtin calls the "impenetrable boundary" that separates the epic past "from all subsequent times, … from that eternal present of children and companions in which the epic singer and his listeners are located".[89] Herein lies the distinct *Zeiterlebnis*, the "temporal experience"[90] of the epic: it conveys the sensation of a temporal flow that is both utterly captivating and utterly remote.

If we now turn to *Ḥadīth* we find that the gap between "time of narration" and "narrated time", so vital for the epic, is virtually abolished through the device of *isnād*. By stating the chain of transmitters and asserting their membership of the sacrosanct tradition which provides the source of *Ḥadīth* and hence their "right to narrate",[91] the *isnād* holds the promise of a direct, authentic and virtually unmediated access to the past. Indeed, the wording of the traditions is deemed to be that of the earliest

85 See example 6.
86 Aristotle (1973: 22–3, 1449b: 25). The passage applies to tragedy but Aristotle himself points out that "epic's resources belong to tragedy" (1449b: 15–20; on catharsis in epic poetry see also Halliwell (1998: 168–201)).
87 Ricoeur (1996: 131).
88 Ricoeur (1996: 131). This is a citation from Günther Müller's *Morphologische Poetik* which Ricoeur refers to extensively in this study (*je mehr Zeitlichkeit des Lebens desto reinere Epik*).
89 Bakhtin (1981: 15–6).
90 Ricoeur (1996: 133).
91 White (1980: 22).

source which the transmitters pass down *verbatim*, as illustrated in the following example drawn from al-Tirmidhī's chapter on *adab*:

> (13) Abū Hishām al-Rifāʿī reported to us from Ibn Fuḍayl from al-Aʿmash from Abū Ṣāliḥ who said: "ʿĀ'isha and Umm Salama were asked which action the Prophet loved best. They both said: 'The most enduring, however small (*mā dīma ʿalayh wa in qall*)'."[92]

The words we hear are not those of a narrator recalling events long ago but those of actual eye-witnesses, ʿĀ'isha and Umm Salama, who speak about a preference of their husband who would have passed away only recently. While introduced as a critical tool for the authentication of *ḥadīth*, seen from a purely literary perspective the *isnād* appears as if it is designed to abrogate Bakhtin's impenetrable boundary between the absolute epic past and the present. The "contemporaneity" achieved thereby is, according to Bakhtin's scheme, entirely alien to the epic; indeed, "contemporaneity as such … cannot become an object of representation for the high genres".[93]

At this point the question arises as to what extent *Ḥadīth* can be said to be a "high literary genre" at all. It is, in fact, rather remarkable to note that *Ḥadīth* shares certain features with a literary type which, in Bakhtin's view, is much at variance with the "high genre" of the epic, namely the Socratic dialogues. Like the latter, *Hadīth* is highly dialogized, relies more on discourse than on narrative, exhibits the question and answer pattern as a basic structural feature, and is cast in a simple, unadorned style which gives the impression of "proximity to the popular spoken language".[94] Most significantly it, too, is a "multi-styled"[95] genre in which numerous different speakers are heard alongside the chief protagonist and dispenser of wisdom, whereby the *isnād* functions once more as the device which ensures the authentic and authoritative transmission of their words.

A further parallel of significant import between *Ḥadīth* and the features of the Socratic dialogue, highlighted by Bakhtin as being at variance with the epic, concerns the incidence of what he calls "the todayness of the day … in all its randomness"; indeed, "even an accidental and insignificant pretext can … serve as the starting point for a dialogue".[96] In *Ḥadīth*, the random "todayness of the day" is manifest in the many traditions that feature events and actions of the most ordinary kind. Pertinent examples under the rubric of *adab* are the many *ḥadīth*s dealing with proper responses to sneezing and yawning in a public setting, incidents hardly likely to attract the attention of an epic poet whose task is the portrayal of the exceptional, the sublime and the heroic. The tradition cited above as example 12 encapsulates the validation of the insignificant so characteristic of *Ḥadīth* in the most succinct manner: "the best action is the most

92 Al-Tirmidhi (1983: nr. 3017; 1937: nr. 2857).
93 Bakhtin (1981: 19).
94 Bakhtin (1981: 25).
95 *Ibid.*
96 Bakhtin (1981: 25–6).

enduring, however small''. The emphasis on regularity and persistence made here goes beyond being untiring in the performance of virtuous acts. By association with the metanarrative of *Ḥadīth*, the notion of continuity expressed in the phrase *mā dīma* (''that which endures'') evokes the abiding presence of the divine which extends to and touches upon the most insignificant manifestations of daily life. What this tradition thus alludes to is the dimension of eternity that resides in the midst of all temporality and becomes tangible in the example of the Prophet. Due to this focus on eternity, *Ḥadīth* is entirely unconcerned with capturing the grand flowing of time as does the epic. Rather, through the proliferation of micro-narratives without chronological sequence, the flow of time is constantly intersected and arrested while the narratives themselves, being eye-witness accounts, convey the impression not of a remote past, but of a living present. In Bakhtin's terms the key difference between epic and *Ḥadīth* may thus be formulated as follows: while the epic forges the image of an ''absolute past'', *Ḥadīth* transforms the image of the past into an ''absolute present''.

Ricoeur's thoughts on time and narrative can be called upon once more to bring to the fore the extent to which the ''absolute present'' generated by *Ḥadīth* is due to its distinct approach to narrativity. ''The art of narrating'', writes Ricoeur, ''consists in restoring the succession of events.''[97] In individual *ḥadīth*s, however, the ''succession of events'' is, as noted above, habitually kept to a minimum and stripped of all but the most essential details; the question and answer sequence in example 13, for instance, does not state who asked the question nor does it reveal what circumstances prompted the question to be asked. Moreover, the manner in which *ḥadīth*s are aligned in the compendia is not in any way designed to restore a succession of events; rather, they move from topic to topic without concern for narrative or chronological sequence. Through this stylistic procedure, through foreshortening of narrativity and manifest disregard for the ''succession of events'', transience is seemingly abolished, the flow of time is arrested and the individual event acquires the hue of the ''absolute present''. Ricoeur reminds us that this approach to time in the narrative of *Ḥadīth* has a modern parallel in ''contemporary experiments in the art of narrative techniques'' which are aimed at ''shattering the very experience of time''. Characterized by ''a jagged chronology, interrupted by jumps, anticipations and flashbacks'', these convey a sense of time that has ''no possible overview, no overall internal cohesiveness''[98] and thus reflects the post-modern void engendered, in Lyotard's terms, by the demise of metanarratives. In *Ḥadīth*, however, the experience of time is not shattered by a void but rather the opposite: it is rendered irrelevant by the plenitude of eternity held to be contained like a seed in every word and deed it transmits.

The profound difference in the ''temporal experience'' engendered by epic and *Ḥadīth* means that the aesthetic response brought about by these texts must also be of an entirely different kind. ''Fear'', ''pity'' and catharsis

97 Ricoeur (1996: 132, again citing Günther Müller, as above, n. 86).
98 Ricouer (1996: 134).

in epic and drama are, as Aristotle points out, "aroused by the actual arrangements of the incidents",[99] and hence the consequences of the listener's involvement in a "succession of events". *Ḥadīth*, however, is a conglomeration of events without succession. Yet fear does come into play also here: according to al-Nawawī among others, the study of *Ḥadīth* is meant to arouse *targhīb wa tarhīb*, "incitement (to reward) and fear (of punishment)".[100] Such emotions, however, cannot be termed aesthetic since they spring from adherence to a religious creed rather than from the "disinterested and sympathetic attention and contemplation" which Kant for one perceived to be the hallmark of the aesthetic stance.[101] The question of the aesthetic impact of *Ḥadīth* is, moreover, problematic because of the open and mobile nature of this literary form, its brevity and variety of content and its propensity to be assembled in any number of ways or cited in any number of contexts.

When approached with "sympathetic attention and contemplation", however, the canonical works leave one in no doubt that *Ḥadīth* is more than the sum of its parts. As is the case with epic or, indeed, any extended narrative, the aesthetic impact of *Ḥadīth* unfolds only after continued exposure whereby the resulting sensation is not one of a dynamic or dramatic flow; rather, the sequence of traditions occasions a sense of stillness as it gradually forms the composite image of a personality and spreads the aura of an abiding kindly power whose beneficence appears undiminished even in circumstances where the law requires the imposition of a penalty unacceptable to modern eyes. It may be regarded as residing at the core of the "absolute presence" brought about by *Ḥadīth* and is designed to awaken in the reader a sense of reassurance and serenity best conveyed in the Arabic term *iṭmi'nān* as used in the quranic phrase *bi-dhikri l-Llāhi taṭma'innu l-qulūb* ("hearts find their peace in the remembrance of God", 13: 28).

The *ḥadīth*s that figure in the chapters on *adab* which provide the focus of this study are no exception, not least because they deal specifically with words and deeds designed to preserve the well-being of others. In its emphatic validation of the simplest act of kindness, the following tradition, when read in the context of the others, provides perhaps the most revealing glimpse of the "presence" underlying the spirit of prophetic *adab* – a spirit far removed from the elevated grandeur of the epic world:

> (14) From Abū Dharr; the Prophet of God said to me "Don't ever disdain any act of good will, even if it be meeting your brother with a cheerful face (*la taḥqirann min al-maʿrūf shay' wa law an talqā ākhāka bi-wajh ṭalq*)".[102]

99 Aristotle (1973: 49, 1453b2).
100 Al-Nawawī (2001: 18).
101 See Cooper (1992: 23).
102 Muslim (1978: nr. 2626).

This tradition serves as a final example of extreme narrative condensation and the Hegelian interplay between law and desire as it operates at the micro-level of an individual *ḥadīth*. The words *la taḥqirann* (''don't ever disdain'') are suggestive of a narrative context, of an event or statement, possibly on the part of Abū Dharr himself, which would have given rise to the Prophet's command. By omitting reference to the event and the circumstances surrounding it, the Prophet's statement gains in timeless import and universal appeal. The phrase *lā taḥqirann* furthermore implies that the said event involved an unwarranted ''desire for more'', a lack of contentment with small acts of kindness given or received, whose validation in the *ḥadīth* springs from a generosity that, through association with divine mercy and justice, appears limitless: *fa-man yaʿmal mithqāla dharratin khayran yarahu* (''whoever does an atom's weight of good shall see it'', Quran, 99: 7). Human *adab* and its divine counterpart are thus once more conjoined.

The relationship between the infinitesimal and the infinite, between *adab* human and divine, conveyed in this *ḥadīth* may be taken as a metaphor for the nature of narrative in *Ḥadīth* as a literary form. While virtually divested of narrativity, its meaning rests on a conglomeration of narratives too large ever to be fully told by man: the history of the sacrosanct tradition which has passed it down and is but summarily sketched in the *isnād*, the story of the Prophet's life in which the individual tradition marks but a brief and undefined moment, and the epic tale of man's perennial battle with his ''hollow core''.

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