

Strategies of Sound and Stringing in Ebenezer Pocock's West–East Verse

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Abstract:

In an effort to capture how Orientalist translations, imitations and criticism of Asian poetry came to inform the idealization of lyric as a universal genre, this paper focuses on the practice of poetic metre in the nineteenth century. How did Victorian conceptions of recitational communities, bounded by shared ‘national’ metres, square against the wealth of translated works that were a major component of Victorian print culture? The amateur Orientalist Ebenezer Pocock explained various metres and musical practices associated with ‘Persian lyrics’ in his book *Flowers of the East* (1833) and offered equivalent metres in English before replicating these shared English/Persian metres in his own imitative poem ‘The Khanjaruh: A Fragment’. This article sketches how Pocock’s casting of this hybrid material in metres that would already have been recognizable to his English readers seems to have the intended effect of both orienting his work towards his domestic audience and grounding such a flexible approach within the Persian tradition itself. Pocock’s poem sits amongst a range of accompanying materials including translations of Sa’dī and scholarly essays on comparative philology and Persian literary history. Each of these different pieces supports the collection’s greater effort – best encapsulated by ‘The Khanjaruh’ – to both remember and imagine the shared poetic history between Asia and Europe. Pocock’s writing thus emblemizes how the nineteenth-century ‘West–East lyric’ was a product of both historical and philological recovering as well as the willed creation of poets and poetry enthusiasts. As a category, lyric performs a binding function in Pocock’s work to pull together a linguistically and professionally diverse community of writers.

Keywords: metre, Victorian, amateur, lyric, imitation, Persian

SOUNDED LYRICS

In its popular imaginary as an ancient genre, lyric poetry is usually remembered as having a definitively aural capacity since the term

'lyric' derives from the musical instrument – the lyre – that historically provided accompaniment to the recitation of poetic verses.¹ In the classical context, lyric poems were also distinguished by the particular metres used – specifically, the strophic – while other verse forms that would have similarly been characterized by their metre (like elegiacs) would not have been considered lyrics.² In contemporary practices of lyric poetry, of course, this aspect of metrical identification is almost completely absent. Even in numerous instances of twentieth-century literary criticism, musicality and metre appear less as defining aspects of the genre, while the association of lyric with private and introspective utterance becomes primary.³ The fact that metre, which was once such a defining feature of lyric poetry, has waned in significance over the past century means that we often forget how to read and interpret older lyrics. In an effort to demonstrate the illuminating effects of a historical approach to lyric, this article returns to some of the practices of musicality and metre in the nineteenth century when lyric poetry was routinely set to music, performed publicly, and discussed in terms of its sounded and metrical qualities.

One facet of the 'sounded' dimension of lyric poetry can be sought in the many nineteenth-century debates surrounding the role of poetic metre in fomenting recitational communities and the designation of specific metres as *naturally* felt rhythms. Debates about metre and – in due course, a more abstracted conception of rhythm⁴ – were closely tied to ideals of natural expression and nationalism. For Matthew Arnold, one of the foremost Victorian literary critics, the importance of poetic recitation in British education had less to do with the thematic or narrative content of poems than its metrical qualities which provided 'an idealized concept of rhythm [...] that had] everything to do with a concept of national history, rhythmically marching through time to a naturally, instinctively felt "beat." [...] that was] "native" to England'.⁵ We may imagine this as the following classroom scene: school children (particularly school *boys*) reciting in unison and thereby becoming a nation bound by the ties of shared metres. The voiced and metrical properties of lyric poetry were both central to its conception in the nineteenth century and centralizing in terms of the effect they were imagined to have.

While a number of studies have depicted the Victorian scene of metrical practice and theory to be one of diverse opinion and lively debate, such studies have largely concerned themselves with a transatlantic Anglophone discussion in which the metrical translations between Latin, Greek and English are the primary site of renegotiation.⁶

Fewer studies have noted how the context of British colonialism and the wider interest in foreign literature—dubbed World Literature, in Goethe's formulation—featured in these debates. We know that the appetite for Oriental verse, particularly translations of Hafiz, Sadi and Omar Khayyam, energized the scene of Victorian poetry immensely.⁷ Yet, Oriental metres were explained little and mimicked even less by nineteenth- and twentieth-century European translators. As I will suggest in this essay, the relative dearth of metrical translations of Oriental verse is best understood in terms of the translation and compilation strategies that Europeans employed to situate their work rather than simply as being reflective of difficulty or disinterest. The abstracted ideals, functions and significations of metre are yet more helpful parameters for examining why certain qualities of 'Eastern verse', transformed or dwindled through the translation and marketing processes of Victorian publishing.

This paper examines the scholarship of Ebenezer Pocock (1807–1864), a little-known amateur Orientalist whose book *Flowers of the East with an Introductory Sketch of Oriental Poetry and Music* (1833) includes the following: an essay on Oriental poetry, music and metre titled 'Sketch of the Poetry and Music of the East'; an essay on shared philological traits between English and Persian titled 'The Analogy and Structure of Language; with some brief notice of Primitive Dialect, and the influence of the Persic on European Languages'; translations from Sadi's *Gulsitan*; and an original poem written 'in the Oriental style' titled 'The Khanjgaruh: A Fragment'. Following an impressive explanation of Oriental metre (complete with demonstrations) in the first essay, Pocock employs the same metres associated with Persian 'lyrics' in 'The Khanjgaruh', while weaving in translations of Persian poems in a variety of metres and forms.

Pocock's book is a fascinating example of European approaches to the representation of Eastern poetic practice—particularly methods of compilation and metre—and clearly participated in broader nineteenth-century debates on versification. While there are many aspects of Pocock's publication that may shine light on the phenomenon of the 'West–East lyric', this article focuses on Pocock's portrayal of lyric as a sounded genre, in general, and on the role of metre and compilation, in particular. I will outline three distinct facets of Pocock's 'sounded strategies': i) The figuration of West–East poetic exchange through an imagined bardic figure that is depicted in terms of a migrating poet that eschews national boundaries and treats the field of song and poetry as a

designated space for intermixing; ii) the trope of poetic restraining that underpins Pocock's approach to anthologizing lyric poetry; iii) the issue of metre and how 'metrical unity' or continuity might be understood in Pocock's portrayal of a shared West–East lyric. In examining these specific qualities of Pocock's lyrics, I demonstrate the particular function that metre served in construing poetic communities in the nineteenth century.

As of yet there is not much information widely available on Ebenezer Pocock, nor have his writings had much traction in wider academic studies on Victorian poetry or British Orientalism. For the sake of our present purpose, it would be enough to say that this self-professed 'amateur' seems to have made his living primarily as a schoolmaster and tutor.⁸ *Flowers of the East* appears to have been Pocock's only work, which he published in 1833 at the age of twenty-six. In the introduction to *Flowers of the East*, Pocock presents himself as an amateur enthusiast of Oriental poetry whose contributions are different to yet building upon the work of 'veteran[s]' like Sir William Jones; he writes, 'the author does not presume to direct the studies of the Eastern scholar, nor invade the province of the veteran orientalist'.⁹ As Maddalena Italia and Sara Landa also point out in their respective articles in this special issue, this self-conscious differentiation between amateur and scholarly engagements in Orientalist scholarship – and the relative strengths of either – seems to have been an active subtext to the wider debates in the field. Pocock's amateur status is a salient factor in my reading of his work and in its consequences for the larger question of 'West–East lyric' practice more generally. In particular, we may notice how Pocock's numerous references to scholars like Willian Jones positions his own scholarship and poetry amongst a coterie of compatible scholarly works, just as his pastiche-poem of 'The Khanjgaruh' arranges Pocock's original material alongside the prototypical Persian verses he imitates. Pocock's work particularly resembles that of Jones's in its routine effort to illustrate the shared 'bonds' of union between East and West, arguing (much like Jones) that the East was the site of origin for many European poetic and musical practices. Both the scholarly essays in the publication make this point too by accentuating the shared or parallel features between the 'Persic' and British poetic traditions. Such a combination of scholarly strategies undoubtedly gravitates towards demonstrating continuity between East and West but also sketches a community of poetry enthusiasts that is differentiated not simply by language or culture (Persic and British) or tribe (Afghan and Shirazi) but profession and

expertise too; scholars, populizers, and ‘humble’ amateurs alike belong in this ‘circle of friends’.¹⁰

A HYBRID HISTORY OF MINSTRELSY

Pocock’s pastiche poem ‘The Khanjgaruh’ may be formally described most simply as a narrative poem. The story revolves around archetypal star-crossed lovers – here named Shireen and Yoosef – that meet by chance one morning and then again on the fateful day that the bulk of the poem narrates. Shireen and her ‘maiden’ friends gather to listen to the musical strains of Yoosef (a roving minstrel, or *Khanjgaruh*, ever since he abandoned his tribe) and in time this joyous group is also joined by an older, ‘silver-haired shykh’. The group recites a number of ghazals and songs with different participants taking turns to remember older Persian classics. The second canto of the poem begins after the long day of song is drawing to a close. Just as evening is setting, the group is attacked by a band of Afghan warriors. Yoosef fights them all and is joined by the silver-haired Sheikh but Shireen is killed in this attack. We learn that the attacking forces are led by none other than Yoosef’s father who, incensed by the betrayal of his son ‘that left [his] tribe, to band with those/[his] brethren deem their bitterest foes’ seeks revenge on Yoosef (p. 179).¹¹ It is only at this point in the narrative that readers come to understand that Yoosef’s transformation from a warrior to a minstrel was at the behest of his forbidden love for Shireen. As Yoosef’s murderous and vengeful father is killed, the poem’s many previous allusions to progeny and contest between Sire and Son come to light.

The themes of cross-pollination and hybridity are undoubtedly at the core of ‘The Khanjgaruh’. Before we turn to how such themes appear in more formal aspects of the poem – such as its use of hybridized form, metre and language – we might consider how Yoosef’s love for an ‘enemy’ squarely sets the theme of anti-miscegenation at the heart of the narrative too.¹² Where Yoosef’s warring father is driven to the strict divisions of tribe, Yoosef turns to music as the heavenly medium that binds and bridges across earthly divides.

The plaintiveness of music’s charm,
That scarce the minstrel had surceas’d
From that blest strain, which dying, ceas’d
To hold all hearts like linked hands
Join’d in sweet friendship, or the bands. (p. 128)

While the fictional characters of Khanjaruh are divided along tribal affiliation – Yoosef is from the Oomayek tribe and Shireen from the Eelat – yet both still from Asiatic nations, the larger premise of *Flowers of the East* unabashedly pushes towards sketching the shared bonds between the English and the Persic, or the West–East divide itself. For example, though Pocock blends all manner of ‘Eastern’, and particularly ‘Persic’ tropes in the poem (Shirazi gardens, the endless figuration of lovers as flowers, feuding Oriental tyrants), numerous aspects of the poem draw explicit links to a more properly British terrain too. In his introduction to the poem, Pocock writes,

The following tale, into which are introduced select Persian lyrics, (some of which have appeared with a verbal translation, very different from the spirit of the original), does not confine itself exclusively to Oriental imagery; the reader will not therefore be surprised at occasional allusions to European and even national ideas. (p. 107)

The most striking of such ‘European and even national ideas’ would be the very figure of the minstrel itself, which Pocock explains in a footnote as ‘basically the old English minstrel, [who] formerly roved with harp in hand, singing the national victories and tradition’. Pocock subsequently stretches the familiarity of the Khanjaruh (or Persian minstrel) towards an even broader British history by comparing Yoosef’s first notes of music to what would have been recognizable to nineteenth-century readers as a quintessential trope of Gaelic folk culture.

The first soul-thrillings – and the first
Deep tones of bliss, that trembling burst
From that wild instrument, the heart, –
(Sweetest, untuned by human art;
Anon it preludes hope and joy,
When finger’d by the Paphian boy;
Anon in cadences, divine,
It wakes the strain of “Auld Lang Syne”; (p. 116)

This echo of ‘Auld Lang Syne’ – a phrase that has been used in numerous Scots-language poems, including Robert Burns 1788 poem ‘Auld Lang Syne’, and which would translate into standard English as ‘Old Long Since’ – in Pocock’s poem would have undoubtedly drawn British readers to consider Pocock’s Persian tale in more recognizably national terms. Yet Pocock’s method is not one of simply setting Persian lyrics into British moulds. It is, instead, a more bidirectional practice – moving

back and forth between the poles of an either foreignizing or domesticating translation method – that remains aware of its hybridizing effort.¹³

Pocock's narrativization of Persian lyrics through the *Khanjgaruh* or minstrel figure also participated in a popular trend of this period to imagine all manner of poets that could be conceived of as writing in a 'national' style as 'bards'. Katie Trumpener has described the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Romantic revival of bardic history (both by Scottish nationalists and English appropriations of the trend) as a kind of 'bardic nationalism'.¹⁴ As I have argued elsewhere, the reverberations of neobardism was by no means contained to British or American literary history alone and came to influence the representation of classical Persian poetry for European and American readers too. Firstly, much like some of these other examples of the bardification of Persian literary history, Pocock's redeployment of a bardic figure for the narrativization of Persian poems centralizes the oral or musical history of Persian verse at the expense of its textual history. Such a prioritized and enchanted view of sounded verse is, of course, germane to the central aims of *Flowers of the East* in particular, but this historiography comes with its own consequences for the perception of Persian-language writing across Asia.¹⁵

Pocock's restaging of the tropes of bardic nationalism in his introduction to 'The Khanjgaruh' also reveals a distinct awareness of the colonial context in which he wrote and through which, accordingly, the trends of bardic nationalism might be understood in light of contemporaneous appetites for Oriental poetry. Pocock begins 'The Khanjgaruh' with an introductory poem that imagines a sad state where the bards of a country are all departed and the treasure trove that would be the heritage of any remaining poet is laid empty. After describing this haunting scene, the narrative of the poem suggests that to restore this empty trove, the 'orphan' poet must go to 'strange lands' to come back 'rich in Song'

... take thy slender lute in hand
And wander to a foreign land.
Perchance, some "pearl-blest orient shore"
May swell thine early treasure store
That though returned, once more mayst stand
In wealth of song, upon the land
That gave they poet-sires their birth,
The noblest royalty on earth! (p. 109)

In fact, the scene of desolation that begins ‘The Khanjgaruh’ was itself a widely used trope of bardic revivalist literature in which a now silent or lost poetic culture is often depicted in terms of ‘Harps Unstrung’; Pocock narrates the silence as when ‘bardic fathers, fell/ To deathless slumber, in the dell’. Where other writers treat the scene of bardic silence as a prompt for a nationalist revival of the tradition, Pocock instead prompts his orphan poet to travel east. In effect, Pocock redeploys recognizable features of British folklore in a manner that gestures to Britain’s colonial relationship with the Orient. We might say that Pocock’s use of these ‘national’ ideas serves at best to (again) imagine the shared colonial histories between Britain and ‘Orient shores’ or, perhaps more disturbingly, to recast the British imperial project as a remedy to the silent bardic father.

While many of these features of ‘The Khanjgaruh’ seek to imagine various kinds of continuity between English and Persian poetry, the many scholarly pieces featured in *Flowers of the East* also seem vested in arguing for a bridge between Eastern and Western terrains, albeit in historiographic and genealogical terms. The case for Pocock’s hybridized bardic figure, who both gestures to British tropes even as his primary references are overtly ‘Asiatick’, is already prefigured in his essay ‘Sketch of the Poetry and Music of the East’.

Nor should we forget, that from the east descended to our forefathers, the Norman jongleur, the Arabesque morris dance, and the English minstrel. We have been long accustomed to hear of the wonders of Orphean melody, and from frequent repetition to attach no inconsiderable degree of credit to its power; and, like the above mentioned musician, the eastern cultivators of this delightful art seem to have been equally skillful in moving the passions [...]. (p. 40)

The essay on music, in other words, sets the stage for a familiarized reading of the Persian ‘bard’ by offering a transcontinental historiography of the English minstrel in which the East is remembered as the original site of various musical customs and cultures now recognizably European. This historiography of Asiatick primacy undoubtedly borrows from the philological scholarship of Sir William Jones, who introduced the idea of English, Persian and Sanskrit emerging from a shared proto-Indo-European root language to European audiences in the third of a series of lectures delivered at the Royal Asiatick Society in 1786.¹⁶ In restaging this history, Pocock’s essay on music effectively sets a historiographical precedent for the hybridized bardic figure of Khanjgaruh. The emphasis on the figure of a bard – both as a poetic trope and historical figure – is

surely in the very foreground of Pocock's imagined and remembered East-West lyric tradition.¹⁷

We may think of this pairing of the historiographic account of West-East poetic terrain with a poetic rendering of the same as a strategy of anthologization. Anthologies, of course, are formatted to offer a representative sample of materials from a specific, though often broad, field. As such, their internal logic is at least in part built on drawing continuity without providing *so much* uniformity that the variances and distinctions between their individual parts should be obscured. In the next section of this essay, I will focus on the practices of anthologization that Pocock both draws from and self-reflexively recreates as a means to think more broadly about the undertones of community formation that underpin this work and, arguably, the field of imitative and translated works in general.

RESTRINGING AS A METHOD OF ANTHOLOGIZING

Pocock's 'The Khanjgaruh' begins addressed to a 'poor child of Poesy' whose heritage has been 'squandered' by 'princely sires of old' (p. 108). We might understandably want to read the child of Poesy here as none other than Pocock himself who collects the pearls from afar to return 'in wealth of song' to English shores. Who else, after all, is bringing together Oriental images with 'European and national ideas' (p. 107)? The mention of pearls, we might argue, seems to both gesture to Orientalist stereotypes of Eastern wealth and luxury as well as to its function as a metaphor for literary gems that are seemingly both small and portable enough to be relocated and restrung; such an allegory seems perfectly poised to contribute to the idea of lyric as a broad nomenclature that connotes short and pithy poems. Pocock not only begins his poem with the idea of the hybrid bard collecting pearls from afar but, much like the history of West-Eastern minstrelsy, also comments directly on the practice of restringing in his essay on music.

With regard to the arrangement of the subsequent lyrics, the idea was suggested of the 'Nizam' or 'Rows of Pearls,' which, as wandering poetic ideas, the eastern bard represents himself as stringing. These scattered pearls, then, are selected from the 'Deevan,' or 'collection,' or various poets; and thus an attempt is made, to range them on the string of humble composition. It is hoped that the following notices of Eastern poetry and music will supply a desideratum in general literature, [...] with regards to the last of the detached pieces in this work, it was composed expressly to

demonstrate the closeness of the affinity still uniting the east and west, and pointing to the early colonization of this country by the Saxon. (p. v)

This practice of ‘stringing pearls’ was a feature of both written and oral Persian verse. A poet could pull together a number of couplets either from the same or sometimes different ghazals, and string them along a shared *radif* (ending rhyme, often described as refrain) or metre. In the context of such Orientalist reuse, we may understand ‘stringing pearls’ not simply a metaphor but a poetic posture that understands curation and rearrangement as fundamental to the craft of poetry.¹⁸ By using the metaphor and practice of stringing pearls in his translation practice, Pocock surely demonstrates his understanding of Eastern poetic convention. We may argue that his use also illustrates the particular relevance of this device to European Orientalists for whom the task of curation and arrangement was just as important as the writing or translation of poems, allowing, as it did, for poets to arrange their own poems amongst a textual coterie of likeminded verses. The motif of ‘pearls’, as such, offered an authenticating trope for European translators and poetic imitators by exemplifying a historically more communal and playful mode of authorship than the kind of individual production that notions of genius would come to connote by the twentieth century, but which already carried significant literary currency in Pocock’s time.

While Pocock’s vocabulary of stringing stems from its use within a number of Persian forms, it is the ghazal’s unrivalled ‘irregularity and unconnectedness’ (p. 6) that draws explicit mention in Pocock’s writing (p. 6). Considering that Pocock describes the ghazal as ‘strictly speaking, the true lyric’ (p. 5), it’s worth nothing how Pocock’s image of ‘the lyric’ draws from the ghazal tradition, imbuing the former with unconnectedness and irregularity. Indeed, this feature of the ghazal’s unconnectedness was noted with much perplexity by many European commentators before Pocock, and continues to be so.¹⁹ Pocock explains ‘any distich might be omitted, without injury to the sense of the whole; each being complete in itself’ (p. 6). While Pocock imagines the disconnectedness of the ghazal through the – perhaps expected – image/tropes of spontaneous improvisation,²⁰ Urdu scholars have offered a slightly different, though wholly complimentary, account of the ghazal’s disconnection, suggesting that perhaps the ghazal should be more properly recognized as an organizational method for compiling and memorizing *ashā’r* (couplets), wherein the couplet itself is the *proper*

poetic unit.²¹ The rich citational use of individual *ashā'r* (couplets) or *shi'r* (couplet) in letters, speeches and everyday interaction strongly supports such a view of the couplet, rather than the compilation of multiple couplets with a shared 'refrain', as the *actual* unit of poetry. In Pocock's work, thus, the idea of lyric as a relocatable and restringable unit of verse emerges out of the history of ghazal performance in which poetic form and poetic anthologization were intertwined. While Victorian practices of collecting and curating 'loose' specimens – most notably in the fields of botany, anthropology and folk music – undoubtedly influenced nineteenth-century practices of world poetry too, there is much reason to believe that the anthological logic of the ghazal carried its own weight in this characterization of the lyric as an especially circulatable and collectable genre.

Lastly, we might note that the centrepiece of Pocock's 'stringing pearls' technique is itself *performed* in 'The Khanjgaruh' when he uses the narrative frame of the minstrel's story as a thread upon which to also string the 'Pearls' of Persian poets like Jamee, Khosroo, Hafiz, Ruqeeb, Senai and Oorfi.²² The most obvious comparison with the use of such a technique would be – the other major Orientalist hit of this period – *A Thousand and One Nights* which, like Pocock's poem, stages oral recitation or telling in a way that enfolds other stories within itself. Yet unlike its prose counterpart, Pocock's inclusion of other poems also entails the inclusion of various metres that differ from that of the main-frame narrative. In this regard, Pocock strays from the historical practice of ghazal writing: nineteenth-century Persianate ghazal writers and reciters would not have strung loose lyric fragments with differing metres and still considered such an organization technically a ghazal.²³ Pocock would have undoubtedly known this, as one of the most impressive and comparatively rare features of his publication is the detailed attention he directs towards describing the different types of short verse in Persian poetry, along with their metrical qualities too:

As it respects the metrical department of the Persic, [...] There are 19 'bohoor,' or metres, (literally 'seas'); [...] The Persian measures are not unfrequently analogous to those of the English; thus the following by Suudee, is not unlike the English anapoëtic [...] This is a favorite measure [...] Another species is the English diambic [...] Another measure used by the poet above [Hafiz] [...] is not unlike a combination of the Choriambic and Trochaic; as, [...] Another light and airy form of the ghuzul would very easily agree with the shorter species of choriambi as the following from Hafiz [...] In this metre is composed the great heroic poem of Firdouse, the 'Shah Namuh.' [...] Being nearly the English Anapoëtic. (pp. 19–22)

When providing English equivalents to the Persian metre (or more properly, Arabic metres), Pocock relies on demonstrating *likeness* and *similarity* rather than outlining a shared history, as he does in the accompanying essays on philology and musical history. Perhaps such a synchronic comparison reads as less argumentatively binding than those built on historical precedence; ‘analogous’, ‘not unlike’, ‘nearly’, Pocock frames the convergences between Persian and English metres as coincidental. In this respect, Pocock’s experimentation with restringing seeks not only to *recover* a shared West–East lyric but to go beyond the historical precedent, building on what he might have understood as the spirit of transcontinental poetic exchange in new creative directions. Pocock demonstrates his working knowledge of the variety of Persian metrical forms (and *similar* English equivalents) by using an iambic tetrameter (‘a favorite [Persian] measure’) for the frame narrative of his poem while the fourteen translations of poems by Persian poets woven into ‘The Khanjgaruh’ vary considerably in their metrical qualities. The string of Pocock’s poem is, thus, metrically more flexible than the classical ghazal which Pocock considers the ‘true lyric’. It is, instead, closer to the ‘musnuvee’ or *masnavī* form which, like ‘The Khanjgaruh’, regularly employs topics or narrative as a binding element across the different couplets, as well as more formal aspects of rhyme and metre. Indeed, the rhyme scheme and metre of Pocock’s frame story corresponds to his explanation of the ‘English diambic’ metre, which was ‘particularly adapted to ‘musnuvee’ (p. 20). Based on these formal characteristics, we might wish to think of ‘The Khanjgaruh’ as an English *masnavī*. Or we might, instead, read Pocock’s refusal to name the poem as such, together with the multiplicity of metres that ‘The Khanjgaruh’ contains, as re-emphasizing the importance of hybridity to the heart of this creative work.

To conclude the present reading of Ebenezer Pocock’s visions of poetic continuity (both imagined and historical), I put his experiments with lyric criticism and metre alongside that of his contemporaries. We may think back to Matthew Arnold’s classroom recitation in which the importance of metre was no less than one of national identity and unity. Such ideas about metre underpinned nineteenth-century debates on prosody quite broadly and inflected the work of imperialists too. Annmarie Drury gives a number of examples of what the ‘Victorian preoccupation with meter’ meant for the colonies in *Translation as Transformation in Victorian Poetry*. In one instance, Drury examines the argument over a Punjabi translation of ‘God Save the Queen’ in which

the eminent scholar of Sanskrit Max Müller contested the translation by Ram Das Chhibhar for its deviation from the original metre. Drury writes,

Müller was dissatisfied with [this translation] effort because [it] failed to preserve the rhyme and, especially, the meter of the English song. The right meter, Müller argued – in this case, the English meter – is critical for the creation of the right emotional response in Indian singers and auditors; meter is the vehicle for sentiment. Would British subjects and Indian subjects of Victoria really comprise a single empire if they sang separately? For Müller, the answer is no. Metrical difference is national difference.²⁴

As with the case of Thomas Arnold – where the move from the ‘abstract’ qualitative metres of Latin and Greek to more easily ‘felt’ rhythms, of quantitative English metres was advocated for the strategic aim of chanting in unison – Müller hoped that shared metre could create a shared community of feeling between colony and metropole. In contrast to both Arnold and Müller – and even the ghazal form itself – Ebenezer Pocock’s employment of a constellation of various metres suggests that communities could indeed be multi-metred and yet ‘strung’ together on a shared thread of lyric practice. Just as Drury and Martin have traced the significance of metre in the works of their respective writers as being fundamentally tied to broader debates on community, *Flowers of the East* speaks volumes about Pocock’s visions for poetic and intellectual community, and it does so through metre.

CONCLUSION: METRICAL PLURALITY AND POETIC COMMUNITY

As a number of the studies on English verse which I have mentioned in this article argue, the sounded qualities of poetry – a dimension of historical poetic practice that gets increasingly abstracted in late-twentieth-century criticism – were primary to Victorian publics. Ebenezer Pocock’s scholarship on Persian music and poetry offers a unique perspective on these nineteenth-century debates on metre and orality not only for its rare focus on Persian metre but, perhaps more importantly, on account of Pocock’s position within the field of Orientalist scholarship itself. Though not a ‘professed florist’, Pocock undoubtedly dedicated an immeasurable part of his life to the task of producing the ‘garland of [...] flowers’ that this article examines.²⁵ Pocock’s recurring attention to his own amateur interest may simply have served as that conventionalized gesture of humility, or *apologia*, which Annmarie Drury has characterized Victorian translations as routinely

performing.²⁶ Yet I hope that historians of lyric poetry and Orientalist literature consider Pocock's professional dimension as more than just a rhetorical feature; it is, in fact, material to the particular image of West–East collaboration that *Flowers of the East* offers.

What does the history of lyric and its relationship to Orientalism look like when we take the interests of a 'humble' school teacher like Pocock as our object of analysis, rather than towering scholars like William Jones, Max Müller, or Thomas Arnold? Even many of the 'popular' poets, translators, and imitators featured in this special issue (see the respective essays by Italia, Landa, and Orsini) seem to have been concerned with market success in a way that Pocock wasn't. Pocock's work, therefore, can neither be described as strictly 'popular', nor does the label of 'scholarly' do justice to the context of his writing, considering the very faint reception it has had. A third category of 'amateur' is more useful for thinking about the specific circumstance of Pocock's collection. This dimension of Pocock's writing, in fact, sets the tone for *Flowers of the East* as it begins with the following introduction:

In presenting to the public the following selections, originally designed for the circles of friendship, the author does not presume to direct the studies of the eastern scholar, nor invade the province of the veteran orientalist. His object is, simply to present to the European imagination a few latent beauties, which have either remained unculled, or have bloomed in obscurity. (p. iv)

Where Müller and Arnold's didactic approaches to poetic metre mirror the imperialist and nationalist endeavours of each, Pocock offers a less utilitarian and more willingly hybrid attitude; I suspect the unprofessionalized relationship that Pocock had to Persian verse plays some role here. Though we need not take Pocock at his word, *Flowers of the East* does indeed seem driven (at least primarily) by an amateurish intent to 'simply' appreciate and share verses amongst a modest circle of likeminded readers. Amateur here, of course, does not imply work that is necessarily less serious or rigorous than scholarship but, instead, activity especially propelled by a sense of 'love', or *amour*. Imitation, we might say, is an especially amateur mode of literary activity on account of the conscious employment of admiration, commemoration and roleplay it entails. In fact, scholars of Persianate poetry have long impressed the role of poetic imitation in the construction of a transregional and transhistorical community in anthological forms like the *tazkira* (poetic anthology).²⁷ While studies of world literature routinely take routes of circulation as crucial factors in the history and

transformation of literary exchange, Pocock's 'circles of friendship' point to both local spheres of material circulation and a multilingual (and multi-metred) community of 'lyric poets' that Pocock remembers and assembles; a community among which he also assimilates himself. I too focus on Pocock's work both to resituate the importance of imitation in the establishment of a lyric as a poetic norm and to advocate the role of amateur works—Pocock's in particular—in the body of lyric scholarship. Especially when compared to the better-known though more conservative approaches of his contemporaries, Pocock's generous reading of Persian poetry deserves our recognition and inclusion.

NOTES

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- 1 In discussing lyric as an imaginary, I am foregrounding the role that scholarly interpretation has on our conception of this category. For example, historiographies of the lyric that begin by framing it as an ancient genre are, indeed, picking one of many possible ways to narrate its formal traits and pedagogic uses. An alternative would be to say that our primary understanding of lyric poetry is driven by contemporary perspectives which also get retro-projected onto older contexts. In taking this latter approach, historical poetics offers a more deconstructionist treatment of lyric criticism and attempts to separate contemporary attitudes about lyric poetry from colouring our understanding of its situation in distant contexts, be they historical or geographical.
- 2 See Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 50. Culler's position in *Theory of the Lyric*—as in much of his work more broadly—might be summarized as one which validates the expanding capacity that lyric now has in literary studies, even as it acknowledges that the contours of this nomenclature have shifted throughout history. In fact, Culler's pointed interest in the 'historical connection of lyric with song' (p. 352) parallels the universalizing approaches of several editors, translators and poets studied in this volume who also emphasized the element of musicality in poetry such as Miraji (see Orsini), and Bethge (see Hutchinson).
- 3 See Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins, 'General Introduction', in *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), pp. 1–8 (p. 3–4).
- 4 By positing metre as a conceptual precursor (rather than antecedent) to 'rhythm', I'm referring to a body of verse historiography that has illustrated how the aforementioned nineteenth-century ideal of 'authentic feeling' was formative to the emergence of free verse poetry; this prioritization of 'feeling' paved the way for poets

- and critics to reconceive of the poetic units according to a more abstracted notion of ‘sound’ rather than metre. See J. P. Phelan, *The Music of Verse: Metrical Experiment in Nineteenth-Century Poetry* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Ben Glaser and Jonathan Culler, eds, *Critical Rhythm: The Poetics of a Literary Life Form, Verbal Arts: Studies in Poetics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019).
- 5 Meredith Martin, *The Rise and Fall of Meter: Poetry and English National Culture, 1860–1930*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 111.
- 6 See Martin, *The Rise and Fall of Meter*; Yopie Prins, ‘Metrical Translation: Nineteenth-Century Hoers and the Hexameter Mania’, in *Nation, Language and the Ethics of Translation*, edited by Sandra Bernmann and Michael Wood (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 229–256; Jason David Hall, ed., *Meter Matters: Verse Cultures of the Long Nineteenth Century* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011).
- 7 See Alexander Bubb’s article in this special issue; Annmarie Drury, *Translation as Transformation in Victorian Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Padma Rangarajan, *Imperial Babel: Translation, Exoticism, and the Long Nineteenth Century* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014). In this article I have used common English ways of spelling the names of Persian poets unless directly quoting from another source e.g. Hāfiẓ as Hafiz, Sa‘dī as Sadi, and O‘mar Khayyām as Omar Khayyam. When using Persian terms, I have transliterated according to the Library of Congress schema.
- 8 Pocock was born in 1807 in Hungerford, a town around sixty miles east of Bristol, to George Pocock (1774–1843) and Elizabeth Rose (1778–1854). George Pocock had also been the headmaster of a school that later became the Prospect Place Academy in Bristol; such an academic quality of family life undoubtedly influenced Ebenezer Pocock’s own scholarly pursuits; he would eventually read his essay ‘The Analogy and Structure of Language’ – which also appears in *Flowers of the East* – at the Prospect Place Academy. Though Pocock married and had two daughters, he seems to have been separated from this family by 1861 and was registered as an inmate at the Fairford Lunatic Asylum at the time of his death in 1864. Hungerford Historical Association Archives, ‘The Family of George & Elizabeth Pocock’: <[http://217.199.187.62/hungerfordvirtualmuseum.co.uk/images/phocagallery/HHA_Archives/POCOCK,%20George%20\(revised%205.4.2014\).pdf](http://217.199.187.62/hungerfordvirtualmuseum.co.uk/images/phocagallery/HHA_Archives/POCOCK,%20George%20(revised%205.4.2014).pdf)> [accessed 28 January 2019].
- 9 Ebenezer Pocock, *Flowers of the East, with an Introductory Sketch of Oriental Poetry and Music* (London: Hamilton, Adams, & Co., 1833), p. iv.
- 10 *Ibid.* Subsequent references to this work will be given in the main body of the article.
- 11 We know only that Yoosuf has abandoned his tribe and now wanders solo.
- 12 We could argue that the figure of the minstrel is, in many ways, already a racialized figure in most literary historiographies due to the connotation of travel (and, accordingly, exoticism) that the trade of minstrelsy entailed from as early as the fifteenth century. This racial component is uniquely pronounced in nineteenth- and twentieth-century American uses of the term where it commonly points to the role of black musical performance and its widely fetishized and caricaturized representation by non-black audiences, e.g. writers, critics, illustrators, etc. My thanks to the anonymous peer reviewers of this special issue for reminding me to acknowledge this already racialized dimension of minstrel history.

- 13 The lengths that Pocock goes to include, for example, the original proper nouns of Persian flowers and ethnic tribes might be just one example to consider. I invoke the discourse of hybridity here less as a means to gesture to the theoretical apparatus that Homi Bhabha's work has spawned in the field of postcolonial theory and more to direct our attention to how the scientific fields of ethnology and botany produced their own quiet strains in Pocock's approach to poetic genre. For more on the influence of botanical art and science on Oriental scholarship see Theresa M. Kelley, *Clandestine Marriage: Botany and Romantic Culture* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).
- 14 Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).
- 15 Fatima Burney, 'Locating the World in Metaphysical Poetry: The Bardification of Hafez', *Journal of World Literature*, 4 (2019), 149–168.
- 16 Sir William Jones, 'The third anniversary discourse, delivered 2nd February, 1786: on the Hindus', *Asiatick Researches*, 1 (1798), 415–431. In fact, the hypothesis that Sanskrit and Persian emerged from the same source had already been explored by the Indo-Persian philologist Saraj al-Din Khan Arzu (ca. 1689–1756) in *Muthmir*. See Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, 'Orientalism's Genesis Amnesia', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 16.1 (1996), 1–14 (p. 6).
- 17 Importantly, the very historiography that Pocock recounts here—of a travelling Asiatic bard from the tradition of a Provencal troubadour—continues to be revised and revisited by contemporary scholars working to similarly expand our vision of the lyric field; two such recent studies include *Shards of Love: Exile and the Origins of the Lyric* by Maria Rosa Menocal and *Songbook: How Lyrics Become Poetry* by Marisa Galvez. The salient point is that even as travelling musicians and poets created routes of transcontinental poetic circulation, the critical and historiographical retracing of these routes by more textually practised scholars—like Pocock, Galvez, and Menocal—is as much part of the literary phenomenon that gives shape to the West–East lyric, if only by routinely bringing that oral history back into focus.
- 18 To take a different example, Edward FitzGerald also commented on the 'stringing' convention in his translation of Omar Khayyām's *Rubā'iyyāt* and used the inbuilt flexibility of this practice to his advantage by reworking the order of verses to produce a more streamlined narrative.
- 19 See Frances W. Pritchett, 'Orient Pearls Unstrung: The Quest for Unity in the Ghazal', *Edebīyāt*, 4 (1993), 119–135; Sara Grewal, 'Urdu Through Its Others: Ghazal, Canonization, and Translation' (PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 2016), pp. 184–200.
- 20 Pocock writes 'the poet, perchance, in a moment of inspiration, from the luscious vintage of the east, may seize the lyre, and improvise those ideas only, which are most prominent; omitting the finer connecting links, as being equally comprehended, though not orally expressed. Hence, probably, arises much of the irregularity of Hafiz' (p. 6).
- 21 See Pritchett, 'Orient Pearls Unstrung'.
- 22 Here I have used the spellings that Pocock himself offers for the particular poets he cites. Pocock, *Flowers of the East*, pp. 129–165.
- 23 Other than the shared *radif* (end rhyme) and *qafiyā* (penultimate rhyme), the individual *ash'ar* of a classical ghazal are bound by a shared metre. It was also common

- for poetic recitals (*mushā‘ira*) to be organized according to designated *radīf* and *qafiyā* or metres, thus setting the grounds of poetic competition and comparison.
- 24 Annmarie Drury, *Translation as Transformation in Victorian Poetry*, p. 40.
- 25 The front page of *Flowers of the East* features the following translated couplet by the Persian poet Sadi: ‘I weave a garland of artificial flowers,/Though not a professed florist.’ Pocock, *Flowers of the East*, p. i.
- 26 Drury, *Translation as Transformation in Victorian Poetry*, p. 28.
- 27 See Paul E. Losensky, *Welcoming Fighāni: Imitation and Poetic Individuality in the Safavid-Mughal Ghazal* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1998).