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# LOVE POETRY BY ARAB WOMEN A SURVEY

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## *Abstract*

Poetry by Arab women has often been neglected to a point, that many thought of it as hardly playing any role at all in the Arabic literary heritage, an exception being pre-Islamic *marāṭī*. This contribution tries to assess the importance of medieval love poetry by women in relation to Bauers far reaching conclusions about male love poetry in his *Liebe und Liebesdichtung*, etc. and its outline of Arab medieval “Mentalitätsgeschichte”.

The contribution that female love poetry offers to understand medieval Arab society is disappointing for two reasons:

1. It is very much inspired by the everyday, almost banal vicissitudes that come with love;
2. It hardly contains any *wasf* of the beloved, the means by which the poet(ess) might have been able to construct the necessary perspective to understand the emotional implications of love and passion and the intellectual reflection on it.

An intriguing feature of Thomas Bauers recent publication, *Liebe und Liebesdichtung in der arabischen Welt*<sup>1</sup> is the absence of a Conclusion. This decision has probably been taken with a purpose. It is as if it is left to the reader to determine wether or not the author succeeded in his undertaking, which is to present an analysis of late Abbasid love poetry in order to work out a “Mentalitätsgeschichte” of the Abbasid period. Nothing less than that.

In his introduction the author creates two opposite ends, the observer and the observed, in this case, the modern reader and a number of love poems from the Abbasid period. This opposition is certainly meaningful.

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<sup>1</sup> Bauer, Th., *Liebe und Liebesdichtung in der arabischen Welt, Eine literatur- und mentalitätsgeschichtliche Studie des arabischen Gazal*, Wiesbaden, 1998. Henceforth *LLAW*.

Another opposition he creates is that between the “pre-modern” world and our actuality, be it modern or even post-modern. This opposition allows the author to address a few fundamental mistakes in the image “modernity” conveyed of pre-modern Islamic society, by using epithets as “medieval” or “courtly”. Bauer argues that the use of such adjectives leads to false conclusions and will blur our understanding of history significantly. One of the examples of misunderstanding he mentions is the tendency, often observed in Arabic Studies, to assume, that the main day-to-day concerns of an Arab or a Muslim in that period had to do with matters of religion.

As one of the factors that underly such misunderstandings Bauer mentions the problem of communication: all too easily a modern writer assumes, that the Abbasid poet composed his poem in order to communicate with us, modern readers, whereas Bauer emphasises the obvious fact that this poet only meant to communicate with certain members of his own contemporary society. This faulty attitude among modern readers—Bauer rightly argues that to us an Abbasid poet has nothing to say—presupposes a kind of universality between concepts that humans have or create, a universality that Bauer argues against.<sup>2</sup>

It is far beyond the intentions of this contribution to review Bauers subtle and well wrought monography and it is not difficult to agree with many of the author’s observations and comments<sup>3</sup>. On the other hand one might be tempted to place a question mark here and there. It is quite clear, that the procedure of throwing all poetical themes and

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<sup>2</sup> The problem that Bauer tackles is an intriguing one, especially in the context that he is writing in, because the *corpus* of poetry that he tries to analyse and classify—love poetry—seems to defy cognitive reasoning by its very nature; in modern (post Romantic) times love poetry seems to be the declared domain of affections, whims and other individual feelings, that defy intellectual description. Somehow we may have come to regard this domain as emotional, unpredictable and non-intellectual, but at the same time modern culture would make us believe, that the phenomenon of love and its derivative—love poetry—is universal in form and nature. Bauer denies both:

1. His object (love and love poetry) can be classified through an intellectual analysis;
2. He rejects claims of universality for cultural-historic, mainly Western notions like “courtly love” or concepts like “the Middle Ages”.

If we add this to Bauers assumption, mentioned earlier, that essentially a poet from the Abbasid period had nothing to say to us—a denial of transcultural, time transgressing communication—the very effort of analysing and classifying love poetry and love’s concepts seems pointless.

<sup>3</sup> For a summary see *LLAW*, pp. 14-17.

motifs together, everything that a poet of a bygone era had to say, on a huge universal pile of meanings and concepts that we—moderns—can understand and appreciate, and to determine that as a means of communication is grotesque. One might on the other hand wonder whether the ambition to communicate is so prominent and whether Abbasid poets with each and every poem tried to communicate *at all*, even with their contemporaries. As a child of his time he creates for other children of his time, but the creative process does not always have to be one of communication: it cannot be excluded that a poet might feel the urge to create, invent and convey something brilliant and unique, just for the sake of it.

And even so: communication has to do with distance and distance is a relative concept. Some cultural spheres are more distant and outlandish than others, even contemporary ones. And although we should avoid to overestimate, many or most of the scholars in Arabic studies know and understand more about Abbasid society than they would about Ceaucesku's Bucharest, rave parties or the everyday life of the modern student.

If we were to apply Bauers proposal of how to deal with this *corpus* of poetry to his own work, then the author himself should be considered to have fallen in his own trap, because what else could he have done than what he actually did: choose and translate (i.e. communicate the meaning of) the poems of his choice and analyse and interpret them from the perspective that he, a "modern", is interested in. From a theoretical side it is very useful to take Bauers views into consideration, but if these views were to lead to an undesirable polarization, I would prefer to be found in the universalist camp.

Bauer stresses the relationship of the *lyrical* in Abbasid love poetry to its social and historical context as defined by a subtle pattern of actions and reactions, expectations and unexpected turns between the poet and his *client*, the consumer of poetry. What Bauer intends to do is to (re)construct a *mentalitätsgeschichtliche Entwicklung* in this poetry, that mirrors a wakening awareness in the individual as well as in society. It is a hazardous undertaking, because one might argue: does the particular reflect the general; does a limited—although in its context important—human activity in the field of elite culture, i.e. the creation of poetry, reflect a major and abstract development like the "Sammelbegriff" *Mentalitätsgeschichte*?

One thing to ensure that his statements are of a general character is the authors choice for *agrād* to filter the themes and motifs in this

*corpus*: poetical categories like *madīḥ*, *wasf*, *ḥabar* and *lawm* are likely to have been productive in the communicational patterns between poet and public in that age. These categories as genres may seem unbalanced to a modern reader, but they are well known in contemporary, indigenous literary theory.

A large number of poems that Bauer discusses are situated in the realm of the metropolitan, affluent, homosexual or rather paederastic scene, an exclusive domain of men. It may well be, that many of the intellectual and “mentality historic” innovations that Bauer detects in this poetry originate in this context, setting further the boundaries of the tradition of *ḥiǧāzī* love poetry, but one might wonder whether Bauers corpus reflects the practice of love poetry and a possible development of accompanying spiritual values in every day life, on household level urban medieval Arab cities.

If Bauers observation is right—if significant changes in mentality and esthetical/ethical points of view occurred in upper class, late Abbasid Arab society—then the more trivial utterances are probably voiced by a complementary part of society: women. These voices may well be of various natures, associated with the court as well as with the market place, and they do not necessarily reflect deep underlying changes; they might just as well be ambitious literary compositions as well as marginal poetical utterances that reached us merely by accident.

A great help to enable us to have a closer look at love poetry by women is the collection edited by ‘Abd A. (sic) al-Muḥannā (Beirut, *Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya*, 1990), the *Muǧam al-Nisā’ al-Šā‘irāt fī l-Ġāhiliyya wa l-Islām*<sup>4</sup>, with the promising subtitle *ḥuṭwa naḥwa muǧam mutakāmil*. As a source this is not a definitive collection, but it brings together an impressive number of poems by women from a considerable number of sources. Alongside it I used some sources that were at hand at this moment like the *A‘lām al-Nisā’* by Kaḥḥāla<sup>5</sup> and the *Balāǧāt al-Nisā’* by Ṭayfūr<sup>6</sup>.

For the lack of a critical and complete edition of love poetry by women, that which is presented here can neither be considered a general overview of this kind of poetry nor an attempt to contribute to the

<sup>4</sup> Henceforth *Mu*.

<sup>5</sup> ‘U. R. Kaḥḥāla, *A‘lām al-Nisā’*, Damascus, 1959.

<sup>6</sup> Aḥmad b. Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr, *Balāǧāt al-Nisā’*, ed. Aḥmad al-Alfī, Cairo, 1908; the new (censored) edition by ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Handāwī, Cairo, 1997.

field of gender studies; in the best of cases it sets some boundaries to other generalisations.

A limit to this selection of poems by women is, that I decided to exclude most of the poems attributed to women in al-Andalus, because some of these have been studied already<sup>7</sup>.

Another self imposed limit is the exclusion of innumerable quotations by women on a wide variety of subjects—also on “love”—that abound in *adab*-literature (no tautology intended) : to single out *poetry* for this contribution has a practical reason (size) but also a more theoretical one. It may be, that short lines of poetry could act as a vehicle for the contents, presented here, as well as (witty) utterances in prose would, but I think nonetheless, that poetry just demands that bit more of reflection to distinguish it from prose. For that reason one might expect some more reflection underlying these pieces of poetry. Apart from that, we may argue, that in Arabic culture *šīr* of course had an added value to it.

Finally: the main body of material presented here consists of poetical utterances *by* women, not *about* women. A recent publication, *Verse and the Fair Sex*, subtitled *Studies in Arabic Poetry and in the Representation of Women in Arabic Literature*<sup>8</sup> limits itself to what it says it will do: the representation of women in Arabic poetry. This fairly well coincides with my own view on the contribution of women to Arabic literature at the time this useful contribution appeared: I felt that after the *Ġāhiliyya* and the prominent role of women in the field of *marāṭī*, a few poetesses were accounted for in Sezgin's Band II of *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums* (pp. 623-625; 704-705), but that that was it: no female contribution to literature to speak of, at least in a quantitative sense.

The opposite may well be the case: the last decades have seen a considerable number of sources of female literature being published in the Arab world. My earlier experience in ferriting out *marāṭī*, tells me, that it is worthwhile to leaf through these sources, because a lot of material is probably still to be found.

First of all it is useful to divide the poems presented here into groups. To avoid any premature classification of these poems along literary

<sup>7</sup> See Schippers, A., “The Role of Women in Medieval Andalusian Arabic Story-Telling”, *Verse and the Fair Sex* (F. de Jong ed.), Utrecht, 1993, pp. 139-152; especially the bibliographical footnotes on pp. 140-141.

<sup>8</sup> See note 6.

lines, I chose to superimpose an arrangement according to the main topic of a particular poem, its predominant theme. Within each group I have tried to work along a rough chronological order, mainly based on the kind of environment that a particular poem is situated in. If this is a Bedouin environment the poem will probably be older than a poem located in an urban or a courtly setting. This is clearly not the most elegant approach, but ultimately a closer analysis of inter-relationship between poems and of possible clues to a relative chronology can only be achieved once we have an idea of how these clues might look like. The chronology proposed here does not have any ambition of being definitive.

### *Love as a Concept*

The first group of poems that will be considered here might be called “maxims” (*ḥikam*); their theme is love but the perspective is philosophical or reflective as opposed to “based on experience”.

#### I.1

Although divorced by a man she passionately loved, a Bedouin woman called Umm al-Ḍaḥḥāk al-Muḥāribiyya<sup>9</sup> says:

1. I see love as indestructable and those who<sup>10</sup> loved were not able to destroy it, even though they were in bygone ages
2. And each and every one of them has felt all of it to be in his heart; they tell that in their poetry
3. What else is love if not the hearing by an ear<sup>11</sup> and a glance (an accidental word or glance) and negligence by the heart of all that is being said and remembered
4. If it were otherwise, then love would vanish and the one who loves would wear it down, even if it (love) were made of stone.

1. *Arā l-ḥubba lā yafnā wa lam yufnihi l-ulā aḥabbū*<sup>12</sup>

2. *Wa kulluhumū qad ḥālahu fī fiʿādihi*

3. *Wa mā l-ḥubbu illā samʿu uḍnin wa nazratun*

4. *Wa law kāna šayʿun ghayru/ahu faniya l-hawā*

*wa qad kānū ʿalā sāliḥi l-dahri  
bi-aḡmaʿihi yakūnu ḍālika fī l-šʿri  
wa ḥannatu qalbin ʿan ḥadīṭin  
wa ʿan ḍikri  
wa ablāhu<sup>13</sup> man yahwā wa law  
kāna min šaḡri*

<sup>9</sup> *Mu.*, p. 299; *Balāḡāt* (1997 ed.), p. 312.

<sup>10</sup> Both spelled *al-ulā* and *al-ūlā*; for this variety in spelling see Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, Cambridge, reprint 1975, I, p. 271C.

<sup>11</sup> *Balāḡāt* reads ʿaynin for *uḍnin*.

<sup>12</sup> *Mu.* reads *uḥinū*.

<sup>13</sup> *Balāḡāt* reads *balāhu*.

From a considerable distance this woman points to the conflict between the inevitability of love and the frustration that goes with it. The generalisation is made effective by her view of this conflict as a stable factor through all generations.

The idea of the subtle balance of equanimity, threatened by lurking passion, is brought forward by this unknown Bedouin woman. When asked about the meaning of love she says<sup>14</sup>:

### I.2

1. The beginning of love is an inclination with which the lover's mind gets astray until he faces death as a kind of play
  2. It starts with a glance that is thrown or a jesting remark that is sparkled in the heart like a flame
  3. Like a fire it starts with a sparkle, but when it is burning, it will blaze away all the collected (of the) firewood
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|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Al-ḥubbu awwaluhu maylun tahīmu bihi</i></li> <li>2. <i>Yakūnu mabda'uhu min nazratin 'awadat</i></li> <li>3. <i>Ka-l-nāri mabda'uhā min qidḥatin fa-idā</i></li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>nafsu l-muḥibbi fa-yalqā l-mawta ka-l-la'ibi</i></li> <li>2. <i>aw mazḥatin uš'ilat fi l-qalbi ka-l-lahabi</i></li> <li>3. <i>taḍarramat aḥraqat mustağma'a l-ḥaṭabi</i></li> </ol> |
|--|--|

Both women mention the accidental look or word that makes people fall in love, But this second poem offers a much more dynamic description of what happens, once the (innocent?) defenceless victim is being toppled. As opposed to I.1 this poem sounds much more like a warning against consuming passion.

One might think, that good judgement, sharp intelligence or proven courage could well contribute to an effective defense against the threat to the subtle balance, but history has shown this hope to be false, because love's folly will affect even the best in society as in the words of this woman of Qays<sup>15</sup>:

### I.3

1. There is no intelligent man among people whose opinion is praised, but who then falls passionately in love, who is not foolish in his love
  2. And there is no hero who tasted the hardship of life, but who then falls in love tasting the hardship being in love
- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Wa mā kayyisun fi l-nāsi yuḥmadu ra'yuhu</i></li> <li>2. <i>Wa mā min fatan mā dāqa bu'sa ma'īšatin</i></li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>fa-yawğadu illā wa hwa fi l-ḥubbi aḥmaqu</i></li> <li>2. <i>fa-ya'saqu illā dāqahā wa hwa ya'saqu</i></li> </ol> |
|---|---|

<sup>14</sup> *Mu.*, p. 313; Ibn Qayyim, *Aḥbār al-Nisā'*, ed. Nizār Riḍā, Beirut, 1985, p. 58.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 327.

Umm al-Ḍaḥḥāk is being told, that the pain of unfulfilled love can only be healed by another love affair, by distance and solitude or by time, the great healer<sup>16</sup>:

#### I.4

1. I asked the lovers who have borne the agonies of this love since times long past
2. In these words: what makes love go away after it has settled between the sides and the chest
3. And they answered: the healing of love is love for someone else, which makes it come to an end or a long absence in being apart
4. Or despair until the soul forgets after it strived for passion; despair is a help to endurance

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|---|---|
| 1. <i>Sa'altu l-muḥibbīna llaḏīna taḥammalū</i>     | <i>tabārīḥa hādā l-ḥubbi min sāliḥi l-dahri</i>     |
| 2. <i>Fa-qultu lahum mā yuḏhibu l-ḥubba ba'damā</i> | <i>tabawwa'a mā bayna l-ḡawāniḥi wa l-ṣadri</i>     |
| 3. <i>Fa-qālū šifā'u l-ḥubbi ḥubbun yuzīluhu</i>    | <i>min āḥara aw na'yun ṭawīlun 'alā ḥaḡri</i>       |
| 4. <i>Awī l-ya'su ḥattā tadḥala l-naḡsu ba'damā</i> | <i>raḡat ṭama'an wa l-ya'su 'awnun 'alā l-ṣabri</i> |

#### Experience

Once the lovers are united, it may become clear that not all dreams come true and hardship in their relationship can be their fate, as this Bedouin woman sighs in her complaint<sup>17</sup>:

#### II.1

1. Every day there is enmity and reproach; our time passes on while we are furious
2. If I only knew why I was chosen for this in stead of another being, or is that the way lovers are?

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|---|--|
| 1. <i>Kulla yawmin qaṭ'atun wa 'itābu</i> | <i>yanqaḏī dahrnā wa naḥnu<sup>18</sup> ḡidābu</i> |
| 2. <i>Layta šīrī ana ḥuṣiṣtu bi-hādā</i>  | <i>dūma ḏā l-ḥalqi am kaḏā l-aḥbābu</i>            |

Note that this woman does not blame the choice of others (i.e. an arranged wedding) for her plight, but fate, and that she leaves open the possibility of lovers always ending this way.

But some may have reason to be satisfied, looking back on all the happiness enjoyed in love, like 'Išriqa l-Muḥāribiyya who says in the best of *fahr* tradition<sup>19</sup>:

<sup>16</sup> Al-Qālī, *al-Amālī*, ed. Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, Beirut, s.d., II, 86-87) ; Kaḥḥāla, *A'lām an-Nisā'*, II, pp. 357-358.

<sup>17</sup> *Mu.*, p. 338.

<sup>18</sup> The text reads NHN.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

## II.2

1. I ran with the other lovers in the arena of passion and I outran them in the contest, though I went (litt.: came) with ease
  2. If ever did other lovers dress in the garments of passion or undress themselves (from them), they were only the clothes I had worn out
  3. If ever they drank a cup of love, be it bitter or sweet, what they drank was what I spilled
1. *Ġaraytu ma'a l-ʿuṣṣāqi fī ḥalbatī l-hawā* *fa-fuqtuhumū sabqan wa ġi'tu ʿalā ristī*  
 2. *Fa-mā labisa l-ʿuṣṣāqu min ḥalalī l-hawā* *wa lā ḥalaʿū illā l-tiyāba llatī ubtī*  
 3. *Wa lā šarībū ka'san minā l-ḥubbi murratan* *wa lā ḥulwatan illā šarābuhum faḍlī*

In the *Iqd al-Farīd*<sup>20</sup> we find this story about two “contesting” slave girls: a man had married a new wife besides the one he was already married to. The slave girl of the new wife passed by the door of the slave girl of the other saying nastily:

## II.3

1. The two feet are not equal, the sound foot and the foot that has been affected by Time so that it has become stiff
1. *Wa mā yastawī l-riġlāni riġlun ṣaḥīḥatun* *wa riġlun ramā fihā l-zamānu fa-šallat*

On another occasion she adds:

1. Nor are the two garments equal, a garment that is worn out and another in the hands of the sellers, new
1. *Wa mā yastawī l-tawbāni tawbun bihi l-bilā* *wa tawbun bi-aydi l-bā'īna ġadīdu*

But then the slave girl of the earlier spouse passes by the one of the new wife citing these verses by Abū Tammām:

1. Carry around your heart wherever you want in (the field of) love, but your heart will only belong to your first love
  2. Many a house on earth will a man become familiar with, but his longing will always be for his first dwelling
1. *Naqqil fu'ādaka ḥaytu ši'ta minā l-hawā* *mā l-qalbu illā li-l-ḥabībi l-awwali*  
 2. *Kam manzilin fī l-arḍi ya'lafuhu l-fatā* *wa ḥanīnuhu abadan li-awwali manzili*

In a most remarkable poem, expressing understanding of male psychology, Asmā' *ṣāḥibat* Ġa'd b. MHĠ<sup>c</sup> al-ʿUdrī explains to her husband after her marriage, why she hid her love from him before they married<sup>21</sup>:

<sup>20</sup> Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-Iqd al-Farīd*, ed. ʿAbd al-Maġīd al-Tarḥīnī, Beirut, 1983, VII, p. 110.

<sup>21</sup> *Mu.*, p. 15.

## II.4

1. I hid love because I thought you would shy away; I said (to myself) : he is a hero who wants the distance of a friend
2. In case you would have rejected me or said: It's just a teenage girl, who is (now) struck by the distress of love, but she will recover
3. That's why I kept secret what love was inside me and in my liver and in my heart of hearts: a distress—you should know—that was strong

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|---|--|
| 1. <i>Katamtu l-hawā innī ra'aytuka ḡāzī'an</i>       | <i>fa-qultu fatan bu'da l-ṣadīqi yurīdu</i>          |
| 2. <i>Fa-in taṭraḥannī aw taqūlu fatiyyatan</i>       | <i>yaḍribuhā barḥu l-hawā fa-tā'ūdu<sup>22</sup></i> |
| 3. <i>Fa-waraytu 'ammā bī wa fī l-kibdī wa l-ḥašā</i> | <i>mīna l-waḡḍi barḥum fa-'lamanna ṣadīdu</i>        |

*The "Romantic" Escape*

There is a tension between the inescapable nature of love and the threat it holds to equanimity. Experience shows, that the outcome of the initial infatuations may not always be paradise. Furthermore the whole situation is dominated by the possible doom of boredom and mutual enmity between partners. The escape from this tension between (semi) consciousness that love teases and threatens and that it pleases and hurts can be realized by what could be called "the romantic escape", the idealisation of the lovers role and his behaviour within the existing or desired relationship.

We find the expression of this—almost modern—idealisation of love in the answer of a girl to her lover's denial when she had asked for his permission to visit him when he was in the war against the Ḥārīḡites under al-Muhallab<sup>23</sup>:

## III.1

1. A lover is not someone who fears punishment, even if in his love his punishment would be the Fire
2. On the contrary: a lover is the one whom nothing can repel or make stick to his dwelling, because in whom he loves is his dwelling

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| 1. <i>Laysa l-muḥibbu llaḏī yaḥšā l-'iqāba wa law</i> | <i>kānat 'uqūbatuhu fī ifīhi l-nāru</i>                    |
| 2. <i>Balī l-muḥibbu llaḏī lā ṣay'a yamna'uhu</i>     | <i>aw yastaqirru<sup>24</sup> wa man yahwā bihi l-dāru</i> |

The ideal lover behaves contrary to the social *ma'rūf*, he takes formidable risks because of a "belief" in a higher good. Only against the background of this courage (or: recklessness) can the subject (here: the

<sup>22</sup> The metre (*ṭawīl*) would require: *wa/fa-yaḍribuhā barḥu l-hawā fa-tā'ūdu*.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 351.

<sup>24</sup> The text reads *tastaqirru*.

poetess) declare that she is willing to take the same risk: throw herself into the situation for better or for worse.

Most of these poems, except the one connected to the war against the Ḥārīḡites, are hard to date, but they seem to be *ḡāhili* or early Islamic: not only are they attributed to women who bear “old” names, but some of them also reflect a Bedouin state of mind. And though some can be called “elegant”, their diction does not show the same playfulness as one expects in poetry of the Abbasid age.

Still these poems reflect a more or less “modern” state of mind. The idea of the individual as a victim to love, which we are probably inclined to associate with “cheap” modern romanticism, seems not to be absent from this early period in Arabic literature. Moreover these poems bear witness to some extent of individuality in this emotional state of mind: to point to love as a problem shared with every other individual, even with the sturdiest of men, expresses a frame of mind that can be called individualistic.

The “romantic” idea comes to a full expression in the allusion to recklessness to which love’s folly can lead: ultimately to objectionable social behaviour by the individual that transgresses accepted borders and will readily undergo any punishment, even the unreasonable: hell.

### *Various Aspects of Love*

#### *Passion*

So falling in love is a threat to the inner equilibrium of the individual. The strain within the individual may be caused by the tension between passionate desire and doubt whether body and soul will endure this tension, calculating that the object of desire is a human being and therefore unpredictable in behaviour and unreliable in relationships.

Probably few will know that Ishāq al-Mawṣilī’s pet name was Ğuml. In this poem the passion, that Zahrā’ al-Kilābiyya expresses for him, reaches extreme dimensions<sup>25</sup>:

#### IV.1

1. My passion for Ğuml, though I hide it, is like the joy of a sick one in healing after being seriously ill

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.



social position of the poetess—apparently at the Abbasid court—may on the other hand have been helpful in protecting her against slander. Umm al-Kirām (?) bint al-Mu‘taṣim bi-llāh says<sup>30</sup>:

## IV.3

1. You folk! Wonder about what the heat of love has provoked:
2. If it were not for him, the moon of darkness would not have come down from its upper region to the ground
3. He whom I love is enough for me; if he would forsake me, my heart would follow him

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. <i>Yā ma‘šara l-nāsi a-lā fa-‘ḡabū</i>    | <i>mimmā ḥanathu law‘atu l-ḥubbi</i>    |
| 2. <i>Lawlāhu lam yunzal bi-badri l-duḡā</i> | <i>mīn ufqihī l-‘ukwiyyi li-l-turbi</i> |
| 3. <i>Ḥasbī bi-man ahwāhu law annahu</i>     | <i>fāraqanī tāba‘ahu qalbī</i>          |

Umm al-Ḍaḥḥāk al-Muḥāribiyya is subject to serious doubts whether she will be able to endure her own passion. Starting off in the best of *aṭṭāl* traditions she complains<sup>31</sup>:

## IV.4

1. Oh you rider in the morning towards his aim; hold still that I may tell of some of the things I feel
2. Never have people suffered from passion that encompassed them, or my love for him was above that which they felt
3. All I want is his pleasure, but how will I endure until the end of time in pleasing and loving him

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. <i>Yā ayyuhā l-rākibu l-ḡādī li-ṭiyyatihi</i>   | <i>‘arrig‘ abuttaka ‘an ba‘di llaḏī aḡidu</i>           |
| 2. <i>Mā ‘alaḡa l-nāsu min waḡḏin taḍammanahum</i> | <i>illā wa waḡḏī bihi fawqa llaḏī waḡaḏū</i>            |
| 3. <i>Ḥasbī riḏāhu wa annā fī masarratihi</i>      | <i>wa wuddihi āḥira l-ayyāmi aḡṭahidū</i> <sup>32</sup> |

The same theme is expressed by Rābi‘a bint Ismā‘īl, though some degree of despair seems to shine through<sup>33</sup>:

## IV.5

1. My provisions are little; I don’t see them taking me through. Is it for the provisions I am weeping or for the length of my journey?
2. Are you burning me with fire, oh end of all my wishes? But where is my hope in you? Where is my love?

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. <i>Wa zādī qalṭun mā arāhu muballigī</i>      | <i>a-li-l-zādī abkī am li-ṭūli masāfatī</i> |
| 2. <i>A-taḥriqunī bi-l-nāri yā ḡayata l-munā</i> | <i>fa-ayna raḡā‘ī fika ayna maḥabbatī</i>   |

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 307; al-Maqqarī, *Nafh al-Ṭīb*, ed. Yūsuf al-Šayḥ Muḥammad al-Biqā‘ī, Beirūt, 1998, V, p. 103.

<sup>31</sup> *Mu.*, pp. 299-300.

<sup>32</sup> The text in *Mu.* reads *annī* . . . etc. This would yield the following translation: “It is my fate to content him and that I will strive to please and to love him until the end of time”.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92

And Ḥasnā<sup>34</sup>, a *ḡāriya* of Yaḥyā b. Ḥālid al-Barmakī asks<sup>34</sup>

#### IV.6

1. How can there be salvation for me, when I am surrounded by a sea of love which has no shore
2. The meeting (of lovers) grabs you and you are saved by it (sc. from drowning), or separation may occur and you sink (to drown)<sup>35</sup>

1. *Wa kayfa maṅḡāya wa qad ḥaffa bī*
2. *Yudrikuka l-waṣlu fa-taṅḡū bihi*

*baḥru hawan laysa lahu ṣaṭṭu*  
*aw yaqā'u l-ḥaḡru fa-tanḥaṭṭu*

The ambiguity of passion is nicely expressed by Ḥayra Umm Ḍaygham al-Balawiyya. Passion is all consuming but leaves the lover with an unsatiable hunger for more, in this case another night of passion<sup>36</sup>

#### IV.7

1. A drop of sweet [. . .]<sup>37</sup> water that is refused/enjoyed<sup>38</sup> from the hands of servants [and] which I long for is not
2. more pleasant than his mouth; If only you tasted it when the night turns to light and its stars vanish
3. Would the night of the plain return to us, (a night) for which all nights would be given, the best and the worst
4. If this night would return likewise then I swear: I will fast on the hot days

1. *Fa-mā nutfatun min mā'i [BHMYN] 'adbatun*
2. *Bi-atyaba min fihi law annaka duqtahu*
3. *Fa-hal laylatu l-baḥḥā'i 'ā'idatun lanā*
4. *Fa-in hiya 'ādat miṭluhā fa-aliyyatan*

*tumanna'u/tumatta'u min aydi l-suqāti*  
*arūmuhā*  
*idā laylatun aṣḥat wa ḡāba nuḡūmuhā*  
*fadathā l-layālī ḥayruhā wa ḍamīmuhā*  
*'alayya wa ayyāmu l-ḥarūri aṣūmuhā*

The famous Faḍl al-Šā'ira complains about passion when she replies to a letter:<sup>39</sup>

#### IV.8

1. Endurance is failing and emaciation has the better of me; home is near but you are far away
2. I'm complaining to you or complaining about you, because that is all the tormented can do

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55

<sup>35</sup> The text in *Mu.* reads *mahyāya* and *ḥaffa* but this should be *maṅḡāya* and *ḥaffa* as in al-Suyūṭī, *al-Mustazraf min Aḥbār al-Ġawānī*, ed. Aḥmad 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Ta (m) mām, Cairo, s.d., p. 16. This source also gives the correct rhyme-word *tanḥaṭṭu* in stead of the hideous *tatta'izu* in *Mu.*

<sup>36</sup> *Mu.*, pp. 81-82.

<sup>37</sup> BHMYN is the reading in *Mu. A'lām*, I, p. 394 and *Balāḡāt* (1997 edition) have *min mā'I NHŠ' ḌBH*. The poetess is called Ḥayra bint *Abī Ḍayḡam* al-Balawiyya.

<sup>38</sup> *Tumatta'u* is the reading in *Mu.*; *tumanna'u* in *A'lām* and *Balāḡāt* (1997 edition).

<sup>39</sup> *Mu.*, p. 210.

3. I'm seeking my refuge in my love, exclusive to you (i.e. in you as my only love) to prevent the one who envies me to have his way by what you do

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. <i>Al-ṣabru yanquṣu wa l-saqāmu yazīdu</i>  | <i>wa l-dāru dāniyatun wa anta ba'īdu</i> |
| 2. <i>Aškūka am aškū ilayka fa-innahu</i>      | <i>lā yastaṭīru sūwāhumā l-maḡhūdu</i>    |
| 3. <i>Innī a'ūdu bi-ḥurmatī bika fī l-hawā</i> | <i>min an yuṭā'a ladayka fyya ḥasūdu</i>  |

Faḍl almost sounds modern about the ambiguity of passion in this passage that she wrote to one of her lovers:<sup>40</sup>

#### IV.9

1. Yes, for God's sake, I *am* in love with you; will you—let me never lose you!—return this?
2. In whose heart are you pictured and in whose eye is the image of (actually) seeing you when you are absent?
3. Have trust in a passion the like of which you show; all the more so because in me there is sickness to which you are the doctor

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. <i>Na'am wa ilāhī innanī bika ṣabbatun</i>     | <i>fa-hal anta yā man lā 'adimtu muṭību</i>                 |
| 2. <i>Lī-man anta minhu fī l-fu'ādi muṣawwaru</i> | <i>wa fī l-'ayni nuṣbu<sup>41</sup> l-'ayni ḥīna taḡību</i> |
| 3. <i>Fa-tiq bi-wadādin anta muḡhiru miṭlihi</i>  | <i>'alā anna bī suqman wa anta ṭabību</i>                   |

Sometimes the poetess may envisage the most serious of consequences if she is left behind like in the case of Qurrat al-ʿAyn al-Muʿaṣimiyya who asks her lover for forgiveness<sup>42</sup>:

#### IV.10

1. Look at me with an eye of forgiveness for my fault and do not leave me in fear of what happens to me
2. Your spirit and mine are intertwined in unity; how could I leave the one in leaving whom is my death

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. <i>Unzur ilayya bi-ʿayni l-ṣafhi ʿan zalalī</i> | <i>lā tatrūkanniya min amrī ʿalā waḡali</i> |
| 2. <i>Rūhī wa rūḥuka maqrūnāni fī qaranīn</i>      | <i>fa-kayfa aḡūru man fī haḡrihi aḡali</i>  |

In contrast to these fierce poems of passion, we find an anonymous woman, who quietly expresses her love and devotion in these charming words<sup>43</sup>:

#### IV.11

1. The best thing you can offer me is sincerity, as long as I live, and (your) love like the water from clouds, undiluted
2. The last thing for me when I go to sleep is you and you are the first thing (for me) when I rise

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212.

<sup>41</sup> Text reads *nuṣba*.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 314.

1. *Qis̄āra/uka minnī l-naṣḥu mā duntu ḥayyatan*      *wa wuddun ka-mā'i l-muzni ḡayru maṣūbi*  
 2. *Wa āḥiru ṣay'in anta lī 'inda marqadī*      *wa awwalu ṣay'in anta 'inda hubūbī*

The Iraqi poetess Šuhda bint Aḥmad al-Baḡdādiyya knows how to use ancient poetic Arabic diction elegantly as a kind of parody to express her passion and to point at the two inevitable causes of this passion, stemming from within and from accidental glances of her loved one. This poem offers many problems of interpretation, mainly by the changing of grammatical persons. I established this line of interpretation, but cannot exclude other possibilities<sup>44</sup>:

#### IV.12

- A. The poetess begs her companion to a quiet place and warns him for the devastating seductional effect of female glances (1-5)  
 B. She recalls a love affair that she was part of herself (6-8)  
 C. She succumbs to passion (9-10)  
 D. The melancholic part: let my love not be forgotten after our good-bye; I suffer dearly, but my tears keep me going (11-16)
1. Take me to the place where the soft wind blows and make the two Nu'mān-trees into your resting place
  2. And when the eyes launch the attack of their spell and shoot (their arrows) from all sides of the fortress of deadly fate
  3. Then take care lest your heart be hit by a glance as its bull's-eye, because the eye-looks are the bane of your heart
  4. (the looks) of every slender woman being swayed by the supple joy of youth like a ben-tree
  5. White-skinned women who make jewels superfluous (*ḡanayna*) by their beauty; therefore women are called *ḡawānī*
  6. They (the men) live in the (wadi) 'Aqīq region and move with their passion a heart that almost flies from pounding
  7. I burdened it (viz. my heart) with the weight of love but it could not bear and I summoned it to be obedient in rejecting it, but it disobeyed me
  8. A vanguard ransacked it (stole it) on the "Day of the Two Trees", a vanguard that "descended with the whole tribe of Ḡaṭafān"
  9. How long will my heart indulge in passion and (how long) will my eyes persist with shedding their tears
  10. When his teeth smile with a glistening shine, they urge the tears of the eye to flow
  11. You driver of camels, will you ever in your life make an evening journey along the pastures of the pasturing cattle
  12. So that you could remind those who have forgotten how I used to be familiar with the tribe's protected territory; what was new of it became worn out by the one who wore me out

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 141-142; al-Suyūṭī, *Nuzhat al-Ḡulasā'*, ed. 'Abd al-Laṭīf 'Aṣṣūr, Cairo, s.d., pp. 55-56

13. I remembered the agitation<sup>45</sup> of our farewell and my eye loosened the bridle to forever crying
14. I did not fear the thirst of fate when it occurred to me since I had the equal of a flowing stream (of tears) with me
15. If starvation touches me, its leather bucket will offer me food or when thirst torments me, it will spill water and quench my thirst
16. When the swords talk to their sheaths, its words will be deep red by it

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. <i>Mil bī ilā mağrā l-nasīmī l-ʿānī</i>         | <i>wa ġal maqīlaka dawḥatay nuʿmānī</i>     |
| 2. <i>Wa idā l-ʿuyūnu sananna ġārata siḥrihā</i>   | <i>wa ramayna ʿan ḥiṣnī l-manūnī ġawānī</i> |
| 3. <i>Fa-ḥfaz fuʿādaka an yuṣāba bi-nazratin</i>   | <i>ʿaraḍan fa-āfatu qalbika l-ʿaynānī</i>   |
| 4. <i>Mīn kullī ġāʾilati l-wiṣāḥi yahuzzuhā</i>    | <i>mariḥu l-ṣabābi l-ladnī hazza l-bānī</i> |
| 5. <i>Bīḍun ġanīna bi-ḥusnīhinna ʿani l-ḥulā</i>   | <i>wa li-dāka asmāʿu l-niṣāʾi ġawānī</i>    |
| 6. <i>Sakanū l-ʿaqīqa wa ḥarakū bi-ġurāmihim</i>   | <i>qalban yakādu yaḥīru bi-l-ḥafaqānī</i>   |
| 7. <i>Ḥammaltuhu ṭiqḷa l-hawāʾi fa-lam yuṭīq</i>   | <i>fa-aṭʿtuhu fī ṭarḥīhi wa ʿaṣānī</i>      |
| 8. <i>Salabathu yawma l-dawḥataynī ṭalʿʿatun</i>   | <i>nazalat bi-hāḍā l-ḥayyi min Ġaṭafānī</i> |
| 9. <i>Ḥattāma tufriṭu fī l-ṣabābati adluʿī</i>     | <i>wa tulīḥu min ʿabarātihā aḡṣānī</i>      |
| 10. <i>Wa idā tabassama ṭaġru barqin munġīḍin</i>  | <i>aġrā dumūʿa l-ʿaynī bi-l-hamalānī</i>    |
| 11. <i>Yā ḥādīya l-nukrānī hal laka rawʿatun</i>   | <i>bi-l-ʿumri ʿinda masāriḥi l-ruʿyānī</i>  |
| 12. <i>Fa-tuḍakkira l-nāsīna ʿahdī bi-l-ḥimā</i>   | <i>fa-ġādīduhu ablāhu man ablānī</i>        |
| 13. <i>Wa ḍakartu maydāna l-wadāʿi fa-arsalat</i>  | <i>ʿaynī ilā amadī l-bukāʾi ʿinānī</i>      |
| 14. <i>Lam aḥṣa min zamaʾi l-ḥawādīṭi id ʿarat</i> | <i>wa maʿī nazīru l-ġadwālī l-rayyānī</i>   |
| 15. <i>In massanī saġabun qarānī ġarbuḥu</i>       | <i>aw qallanī zamaʿun FRY fa-saqānī</i>     |
| 16. <i>Wa idā l-suyūfu taḥaddat li-ġūfūnihā</i>    | <i>fa-ḥadīṭuhā minhu bi-aḥmara qānī</i>     |

These are the images that this poetess is using: her heart is moved by her lovers passion (6b), a conquest she compares with a raid by the tribe of Ġaṭafān (8), unbearable passion that can only be quenched by tears (9 and 13-14), every time she meets her lover (10).

The following peculiar story may show, that sometimes uncompromising passion could lead someone to end up in the wrong place: Sarī l-Saqāṭī, the mystic (d. in Baghdad 253/867) tells this story about a slave girl he heard in prison, chained with her hands to her neck, saying:<sup>46</sup>

#### IV.13

1. My hand is chained to my neck, though it neither deceived nor stole
2. Within me there is a heart, that I feel is burning

- |                                     |                                  |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Tuġallu yaḍī ilā ʿunuqī</i>   | <i>wa mā ḥānat wa mā saraqat</i> |
| 2. <i>Wa bayna ġawānīḥī kabidun</i> | <i>uḥiṣsu biḥā qadī ḥtaraqat</i> |

When he asked about her, he learned that she was insane and was locked up for treatment (*ḥubīsat laʿallahā taṣluḥ*). But when she heard this she said smiling:

<sup>45</sup> I vocalise *maydān* as a *maṣdar* of *māda*, though it should be *mayadān*. The reading *maydān/mūdān* seems pointless here.

<sup>46</sup> *Mu.*, pp. 343-344; al-Ibšīḥī, *al-Mustaṭraf*, Beirut, Muʿassasat ʿIzz al-Dīn, 1991, pp. 253-4.

## IV.14

1. Oh you people, it is not that I have gone mad, but I am drunk while my heart is sober
2. Why did you chain my hand though I committed no greater crime than for my shame exposing myself in my love for him
3. I am dazzled by the love for a loved one from whose door I do not seek to be leaving
4. Someone who loves a master and contents himself with that, bears no blame

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. <i>Mašāra l-nāsi mā ḡunintu wa lākin</i>   | <i>ana sakrānatum wa qalbiya šāḥī</i>   |
| 2. <i>Lim ḡalaltum yadī wa lam āti dānban</i> | <i>ḡayra hatkī fi ḥubbihi wa fūdāḥī</i> |
| 3. <i>Ana maftūnatum bi-ḥubbi ḥabībīn</i>     | <i>lastu abḡī ‘an bābihi min barāḥi</i> |
| 4. <i>Mā ‘alā man aḥabba mawlā l-mawālī</i>   | <i>wa riḏāḥu li-nafsihi min ḡunāḥi</i>  |

The reason why her master had her locked up in prison was, that he had bought her as a singer, but that she used to weep a lot which kept the whole household awake. When al-Saqaṭī asked how all this came about, her master told that she sang this song to her own lute play:

## IV.15

1. Be sure that I have never broken a bond and that I have never made murky a love after it has been clear
2. I have filled my flanks and my heart with love so how can I be consoled, you cause of my comfort, and be at ease
3. Oh you whose like of a master I do not have, do you think you could be pleased to have me as a slave at your door?

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. <i>Wa ḥaqqika lā naqaḏtu l-dahra ‘ahdā</i> | <i>wa lā kaddartu ba‘da l-ṣafwi waddā</i>             |
| 2. <i>Mala’tu ḡawāniḥī wa l-qalba waḡdā</i>   | <i>fa-kayfa aqirru yā sakanī wa ahdā<sup>47</sup></i> |
| 3. <i>Fa-yā man laysa lī mawlan siwāḥu</i>    | <i>turāka raḏitanī bi-l-bābi ‘abdā</i>                |

al-Saqaṭī then offers to buy her, but lacks the money to pay the price. When she hears this she says:

## IV.16

1. I have been enduring until I can no longer bear my love for you anymore
2. I could not bear anymore being chained and cuffed and contempt by you
3. My plight was not hidden for you, oh you my heart’s wish and my treasure
4. You could have freed me from slavery and could have payed my bail today

- |  |                                |
|--|--------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Qad taṣabbartu<sup>48</sup> ilā an</i> | <i>‘ila min ḥubbika ṣabrī</i>  |
| 2. <i>Dāqa min ḡallī wa qayḏī</i>            | <i>wa mihānī minka ṣadrī</i>   |
| 3. <i>Laysa yuḥfā ‘anka amrī</i>             | <i>yā munā qalbī wa ḏuḥrī</i>  |
| 4. <i>Anta qad tuṭtiqu riqqī</i>             | <i>wa tafukku l-yawma asrī</i> |

<sup>47</sup> For *ahda’u*.

<sup>48</sup> *Mu.*, p. 344 reads *taṣaṣartu*.

As stories go she is of course set free by her master, but the story ends unhappily: she meets her former master again during the *ṭawāf* in Mekka. Her heart breaks and she dies, as does her former master of course. The two are buried in the same grave, according to al-Saqaṭī who is a witness to all this.

The whole story may well be fiction, but it illustrates the deadly effect that unanswered passion may have, according to contemporary imagination.

### *Vulnerability and Fear of Betrayal*

Lovers (probably especially women) were in a vulnerable position. One of the dangers they faced was, that their true feelings would become exposed in society, even by their own carelessness. This was all the more dangerous in case the lover left you for another, as in this case where Umm al-‘Alā’ says:<sup>49</sup>

#### V.1

1. Woe, when I let my love for you subsist and took no other lover so that the love in me for you was evident
2. I talked about you openly amidst people until my openness damaged me, woe to those I was open to
3. You were like the shade of a branch: while it shaded me and it delighted me, lo!, it was shaken by storms
4. So it became someone else’s and its shadows turned around, away from me and it left me with the glow of the heat (or: gossip)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. <i>A-lahfa abī lammā adantu laka l-hawā</i>      | <i>wa asfaytu ḥattā l-waḡdu bī laka zāhīru</i>            |
| 2. <i>Wa ḡāhartu fika l-nāsa ḥattā aḍarra bī</i>    | <i>muḡāharatī yā wayḥa fīman uḡāhīru</i>                  |
| 3. <i>Fa-kunta ka-fay’i l-ḡuṣni baynā yuzillunī</i> | <i>wa yuḡībunī id̄ za’za’athu l-a’āsīru</i>               |
| 4. <i>Fa-ṣāra li-ḡayrī wa stadārat zilāluhu</i>     | <i>siwāya wa ḥallānī wa lafḥa l-hawāḡrī</i> <sup>50</sup> |

But of course the lover who left could expose the intimate relationship, as a kind of added damage, so to speak, after separation. Umayma *imra’at* b. al-Damīna found herself in this unpleasant situation, after being blamed by her husband:<sup>51</sup>

#### V.2

1. You have broken your promise to me and you have made those who used to blame (me) because of you, take malicious pleasure in me
2. You have put me in the open for the people and then you left me alone for them (to see) as a target to be aimed at, while you were safe

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 301; al-Qālī, *al-Amālī*, ed. M. al-Aṣma‘ī, Beirut, s.d., II, p. 293.

<sup>50</sup> A case of *iqwā’*.

<sup>51</sup> *Mu.*, p. 23.

3. If words could hurt the body, then on my body the wounds from the words of blamers would be openly visible

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. <i>Wa anta llaḡī aḥlaftanī mā waʿadtanī</i>        | <i>wa ašmatta bī man kāna fika yalūmu</i>   |
| 2. <i>Wa abraztanī li-l-nāsi ḡumma taraktanī</i>      | <i>lahum ǧaraḡan urmā wa anta salīmu</i>    |
| 3. <i>Fa-law kāna qawlun yaklumu l-ǧisma qad badā</i> | <i>bi-ǧismiya min qawli l-wuṣāti kulūmu</i> |

From this short poem by (Maǧnūn's) Laylā l-ʿĀmiriyya it seems that women were in this respect in a more vulnerable position than men:<sup>52</sup>

### V.3

1. Never was Maǧnūn in a state or I was like he was
2. But he disclosed the secret of our love, whereas I dwindled away in secret

- |  |                                    |
|--|------------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Lam yakuni l-maǧnūnu fī ḥālatin il</i> | <i>lā wa qad kuntu kamā kānā</i>   |
| 2. <i>Lākinnaḥu bāḥa bi-sirri l-hawā</i>     | <i>wa innanī qad ḡubtu kitmānā</i> |

And in the same vein:

### V.4

1. The fool of ʿĀmir speaks openly about his love, but I hid it and so died of passion
2. When on Judgement Day it is proclaimed: “Who has died from love?”, then I will be the only one to step forward.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. <i>Bāḥa maǧnūnu ʿĀmirin bi-hawāḥu</i>  | <i>wa katamtu l-hawā fā-muttu bi-waǧḡī</i> |
| 2. <i>Fa-iddā kāna fī l-qiyāmati nūḡī</i> | <i>man qatīlu l-hawā taqaddamtu waḥḡī</i>  |

Another example of how damaging the openness of one of the lovers can be is this poem by Sāmīr:<sup>53</sup>

### V.5

1. By God, you breaker of bonds, in whom can we have trust among the people we love (our lovers) after you?!
2. Woe! Would that you had never mentioned my name, when lovers mention the ones they love
3. Would that I had not been blinded by a well educated secretary, a refined and intelligent dandy
4. With that tongue of yours you were (“carrying me around”?)<sup>54</sup> for a while, without me knowing that it was just flattering

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. <i>Bi-llāhi yā nāqīḡa l-uhūdi bi-man</i>   | <i>baʿdaka min aḥli wuddinā naṡīqu</i>   |
| 2. <i>Wā sawʿatā mā staǧabta lī abadan</i>    | <i>in ḡakara l-ʿāšiqūna man ʿašiqū</i>   |
| 3. <i>Lā ǧarranī kātibun laḥu adabun</i>      | <i>wa lā zarīfun muḥaḡḡadabun labīqu</i> |
| 4. <i>Kūnta biḡāka l-lisāni muḡtamilī (?)</i> | <i>dahrān wa lam adri annaḥu malaqu</i>  |

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 233.

<sup>53</sup> Al-Suyūṡī, *Mustazraf*, p. 28

<sup>54</sup> The text in the *Mustazraf* reads *muḡtamilī*, but that reading does not yield any meaningful sense. I am reluctant to propose the reading *muḡtamilī*.

*Conflicts with Others*

So on the one hand a lover faces a psychological crisis, being torn by passion and its ensuing effect of uncertainty, on the other the mere fact of participating in a love affair, especially when the identity of the beloved is publicly known, causes a complicated social reaction: the phenomenon of the *wāšūn*, the *reproachers* or *blamers*. It is difficult to ascertain what the role of these individuals may have been in the reality of social context. In early *riṭā'* blamers often trigger the reaction of wailing, expressed by the *martiya* itself. They are the fictional or non-fictional, maybe even ritual impetus for the poetess to transgress the limit set by *ṣabr*, acknowledging the legitimacy to enumerate the qualities of the deceased. For medieval Arabic society a socio-anthropological approach may well yield a number of valuable theories concerning function, origin and context of these *wāšūn* in the context of love poetry, but that is beyond the scope and purpose of this contribution. It may well be, that the *wāšūn* are a fiction, serving to underline the vulnerability of the love-sick, but at the same time they might function as a trigger to aggravate the agonising dilemma between equilibrium and folly and the impossibility of retreat. In this sense they would act as the threshold after which the victim of love can consider him/herself to be beyond shame and salvation: the truth has come out in the open.

The complaint by Su'dā l-Asadiyya sounds very realistic. Her anguish is caused by both internal and external circumstances:<sup>55</sup>

## VI.1

1. My beloved! Do not hurry that you may understand my reasoning: I have had enough of the torment and strain inside of me
2. Of the tears that torture me and of the sighing by which (?) my soul almost became liquid of passion
3. You overwhelmed my soul in broad daylight whilst I could not bear to have a conflict with (?) my family, neither in earnest nor in jest
4. They will not prevent me from dying by saying tomorrow [that it was] from fear of this shame that I am in a grave alone
5. Do not forget to go there and then touch my resting place and we will (together) complain about the torment I bore

1. *Ḥabībiya lā ta'ḡal li-taḡhama ḥuḡḡati*
2. *Wa min 'abarātīn ta'tarīnī wa zafratīn*
3. *Galabta 'alā nafsi ḡihāran wa lam uṭīq*
4. *Wa lan yamna'ūnī an amūta bi-za'mihim*
5. *Fa-lā tansa an ta'tī hunāka fa-taltamīs*

- kafāniya mā bī min balā'in wa min ḡahdi takādu lahā nafsi taṣīlu minā l-waḡdi ḡilāfan 'alā ahlī bi-hazlīn wa lā ḡiddi ḡadan ḥawfa hādā l-'ārī fī ḡadaṭīn waḡdī makānī fa-naškū mā taḡammaltū min ḡahdi*

<sup>55</sup> *Mu.*, p. 122.

When the love affair is over it can become all the more painful to fall victim to the *wāšūn* as we can see in this poem by Ḥayra Umm Ḍayḡam al-Balawiyya<sup>56</sup>. She had fallen in love with her nephew, but was kept away from him by her family. She seems to be saying, that love will survive, though it may be hidden for a while.

## VI. 2

1. I kept away from you; As soon as I did so, those stealthy looks would start gloating over us
  2. Let the blamers not be joyful about the separation; it may be, that the lover's absence becomes long, while the heart stays honest (true)
  3. The morning of separation between both lovers will come, but love is with the heart, its sides folded over it
- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Hağartuka lammā an hağartuka aṣbaḥat</i></li> <li>2. <i>Fa-lā yafraḥi l-wāšūna bi-l-ḥağri wa rubbanā</i></li> <li>3. <i>Wa tağdū l-nawā bayna l-muḥibbayni wa l-hawā</i></li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>binā šummatan tilka l-uyūnu l-kawāšihu</i></li> <li>2. <i>aṭāla l-muḥibbu l-ḥağra wa l-ğaybu nāšihu</i></li> <li>3. <i>mā'a l-qalbi maṭwiyyun 'alayhi l-ğawāniḥu</i><sup>57</sup></li> </ol> |
|--|---|

The lover that has been lost can become a threat too, because the intimacy once shared could now be disclosed. Umm al-Ḍaḥḥāk al-Muḥāribiyya said when she started to forget her lover from the Banū l-Ḍibāb<sup>58</sup>:

## VI.3

1. I had found comfort for the love of the Ḍibābī for a while, but all the follies of an ignorant one were to return
  2. A soul's friend said: I am concerned about you. By my life's sake you are right: we are both cause for concern
  3. But the one who deserves most concern is he who does not offer faith nor keep the secrets after he has gone
  4. Woe that you destroyed my love; if only my heart had not seduced the one that it could not take revenge on
- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Ta'azzaytu 'an ḥubbī l-ḍibābiyyi ḥiqbatan</i></li> <li>2. <i>Yağūlu ḥalītu l-naḥsi anti muribatun</i></li> <li>3. <i>Wa ayyabunā man lā yu'addi amānatan</i></li> <li>4. <i>A-lahfan bi-mā ḍayya'ta wuddī wa mā ḥafā</i></li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>wa kullu 'amāyā ḡāhilin sataṭūbū</i></li> <li>2. <i>kilānā la-'amrī qad ṣadaqta/i murībū</i></li> <li>3. <i>wa lā yahfazū l-asrāra ḥīna yağībū</i></li> <li>4. <i>fi'ādī bi-man lam yadri kayfa yuṭībū</i></li> </ol> |
|--|--|

The legendary passionate love affair between Ğamīl and Buṭayna may have been famous fiction, but the following poem suggests that it

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82. The same poem is attributed to Ḥulayba l-Ḥaḍariyya, *ibid.*, p. 74. See also al-Qālī, *al-Amālī*, II, p. 83.

<sup>57</sup> Alternative reading is *mā'a l-qalbi id tuṭwā 'alayhi l-ğawāniḥu*.

<sup>58</sup> Kaḥḥāla, *A'lām*, II, 358; al-Qālī, *al-Amālī*, II, p. 87.

had some dark sides as well. What happened exactly is not very clear, but whatever it was, it caused Buṭayna to say:<sup>59</sup>

## VI.4

1. My people threatened to kill me and to kill him. I said: kill me but free him from his crime
2. And after killing me do not make pain follow him: he has been hurt enough from the vehemence of the love he met

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. <i>Tawaʿadanī qawmī bi-qatlī wa qatlīhi</i> | <i>fa-qultu qtulūnī wa aḥriḡūhu<sup>60</sup> minā l-ḍanbi</i> |
| 2. <i>Wa lā tubiʿūhu baʿda qatlī aḍḡyyatan</i> | <i>kafā bi-llaḍī yalqāhu min ṣiddati l-ḥubbi</i>              |

The “blamers” were apparently in a powerful position. Reading the story of Ḥadīḡa bint Aḥmad b. Kulṭūm al-Muʿārifiyya and her lover Abū Marwān ʿAbd al-Malik b. Ziyādat Allāh it is not clear how these characters actually succeeded, but they managed to keep the lovers apart. The poetess still calls on her lover to persevere:<sup>61</sup>

## VI.5

1. They made us split up, but when we came together, they tore us apart by lies and false accusations
2. What they do to us today is in my opinion like what the devil does to mankind
3. Woe for you; even worse: woe against you if you go away Abū Marwān

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. <i>Farraqā baynanā falammā ḡtamaʿnā</i>    | <i>mazzaqūnā bi-l-zūri wa l-buhtāni</i> |
| 2. <i>Mā arā fīlahum binā l-yawma illā</i>    | <i>mūlla fīli l-ṣaytāni bi-l-insāni</i> |
| 3. <i>Lahfa nafsi ʿalayka bal lahfa nafsi</i> | <i>minka in binta yā Abā Marwāni</i>    |

This caution for the “blamers” is meaningful, because all too easily society despised a woman as being loose; see for instance what Umm Ḥammāda l-Hamdāniyya puts in the mouth of a woman advising her<sup>62</sup>:

## VI.6

1. I complained to her about love, but she said: you lied to me; do I not see the strong men “dressed” in what they got from you?
2. Take it easy: that passion and love may not wear out your bones lest they become visible
3. And lest whispering from the blame of love will affect you and your bones will become mute so that they will not be able to answer the Caller<sup>63</sup>

<sup>59</sup> *Mu.*, p. 27.

<sup>60</sup> The context clearly indicates this reading, but it violates the metre.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67; Suyūṭī, *Nuzha*, p. 50.

<sup>62</sup> *Mu.*, p. 291.

<sup>63</sup> This may well be an allusion to Q. 50, 41-2: *wa stamʿ yawma yunādī l-munādī . . . ḍālika yawmu l-ḥurūḡi*.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. <i>Šakawtu ilayhā l-ḥubba qālat kaḍabtanī</i>    | <i>a-lastu arā l-aḡlāda minki kawāsiyyā</i>  |
| 2. <i>Ruwaydaki ḥattā yabtalī l-šawqu wa l-hawā</i> | <i>‘izāmaki ḥattā yartaḡṣṣna bawādiyyā</i>   |
| 3. <i>Wa yaḥḍaki l-waswāsu min law‘ati l-hawā</i>   | <i>wa taḥrasa ḥattā lā tuḡba l-munādiyyā</i> |

Even later in al-Andalus the *wāšūn* still seem to have had their role in love affairs, like we can conclude from this poem by Muḡḡa bint ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ġarnāṭiyya with a fierce attack on the blamers<sup>64</sup>

## VI.7

1. When the blamers have rejected anything except our separation, when they will not have any revenge with me nor you
2. And (when) they have let loose on our ears every possible attack and (when) my protectors and helpers have become small in number
3. Then I will drive them away from your eyes, from my tears and my breath with the sword, with flood and with fire

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. <i>Wa lammā abā l-wāšūna illā firāqanā</i>  | <i>wa mā lahumū ‘indī wa ‘indaka min lārī</i>        |
| 2. <i>Wa šannā ‘alā asmā‘inā kulla ḡāratin</i> | <i>wa qalla ḥumātī ‘inda dāka wa anšārī</i>          |
| 3. <i>Gazawtuhumū min muqlatayka wa admūṭ</i>  | <i>wa min nafasī bi-l-sayfi wa l-sayli wa l-nārī</i> |

## Absence

Absence of the beloved is of course an omnipresent theme in love poetry. One of the most striking poems by a woman on the theme of separation, at least for its beginning, is probably this mixed up text that is attributed to two poetesses: al-Ḥansā’ bint al-Tayḥān and Umm Ḥālid al-Ḥaṭ‘amiyya:<sup>65</sup>

The first version has 7 vss., all rhyming in—*āmi*. Two vss. rhyming in *-āmu*, that are attributed to the same poetess, are integrated in the version of Umm Ḥālid, causing *iqwā’*. Vs. 5 in the version by al-Ḥansā’ is missing in Umm Ḥālid’s, whereas the latter has an extra verse (vs. 7 of 8 vss.) that has a rhyme in *-āmi*, but which does not fit the theme of this poem. This leaves us with the following poem by al-Ḥansā’ bint al-Tayḥān:

## VII.1

1. Has someone made a vow to kill me if the eye sees the shining of a bright cloud in the valley, the valley of the Tihāma
2. May a pouring raincloud not cease, wandering about, one that is led to the people of Gaḍā by its rein
3. That Ḡaḥwaš may drink from it and that he may see its lightning with the eyes of a white headed hawk from the North

<sup>64</sup> *Mu.*, pp. 243-244; al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-Tīb*, V, p. 206.

<sup>65</sup> See *Mu.*, pp. 76 (taken from *Balāḡāt*, p. 194) and 291-292 (taken from al-Qālī, *al-Amālī*, II, p. 10).

4. Myself and my people (in return) for Ġaḥwaš, his words and his teeth that shine from the toothbrush!
5. Ah! My love for the Ḥafāḡī Ġaḥwaš emaciated my body (away from me) so it is a worn-out garment of leanness
6. I swear that I love Ġaḥwaš as much as 'Afrā' loved b. Ḥizām<sup>66</sup>
7. I'm exactly like her except that I am urging myself towards the moment of Death

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. <i>A-muntadarun qatlī inī l-'aynu ānasat</i>             | <i>sanā bāriqin bi-l-ḡawri ḡawri Tihāmi</i>          |
| 2. <i>Fa-lā zāla munhallun minā l-ḡaytī rā'ihun</i>         | <i>yuqādu ilā ahli l-Ḡaḏā<sup>67</sup> bi-zimāmi</i> |
| 3. <i>Li-yašaba minhu Ġaḥwašun wa yašimuhu<sup>68</sup></i> | <i>bi-'aynay quṭāmiyyin aḡarra ša'āmī</i>            |
| 4. <i>Bi-nafsī wa ahli Ġaḥwašun wa kalāmuhu</i>             | <i>wa anyābuhu l-lā'ī ḡalā bi-bašāmi</i>             |
| 5. <i>A-lā inna waḡḏī bi-l-Ḥafāḡiyyi Ġaḥwašun</i>           | <i>barā l-ḡisma minnī fa-hwa niḡwu saḡāmi</i>        |
| 6. <i>Wa uqsimu innī qad waḡadtu bi-Ġaḥwašun</i>            | <i>ka-mā waḡadat 'Afrā' u bi-bni Ḥizāmi</i>          |
| 7. <i>Wa mā ana illā miṭluhā ḡayra annanī</i>               | <i>mi'aḡḡilatun naḡsī li-waḡti ḥimāmi</i>            |

A poem by Barra l-'Adawiyya reflects a Bedouin spirit in its *qašīda*-like opening. The first hemistich of the last verse echoes the traditional ending of a *martiya*:<sup>69</sup>

## VII.2

1. You two, friends of mine, when you go up and down the country in which my soul fell in love, remember me then
2. And do not stop doing that if someone there blames me in spite of the rage of the reproachers, if you both excuse me
3. My heart is emaciated after long steadfastness; the stories of Yaḥyā turn my tresses to grey
4. I will guard for Yaḥyā my love as long as the east wind blows, even if they would purposely cut my tongue for it

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. <i>Ḥalīlayya in aš'adtumā aw habaṭtumā</i>       | <i>bilādan hawā nafsī bihā fa-dkurāniyā</i>             |
| 2. <i>Wa lā tadā'ā in lāmanī ṭamma lā'imun</i>      | <i>'alā suḥuṭi l-wāšīna in ta'durāniyā</i>              |
| 3. <i>Fa-qad šaffa qalbī ba'da ṭūli taḡalludin</i>  | <i>aḡādītu min Yaḥyā tušību l-nawāšiyā<sup>70</sup></i> |
| 4. <i>Sa-arā li-Yaḥyā l-wudda mā habbati l-šabā</i> | <i>wa in qaṭā'u fi dāka 'amdan lišāniyā</i>             |

Although the next poem by the wife of Yazīd b. Sinān starts with the characteristic themes and diction of the *martiya*<sup>71</sup>, which would suggest

<sup>66</sup> The data *Mu.* gives lead to some chaos: the 'Afrā' that al-Ḥansā' is referring to here is identified as Bint Muhāšir b. Mālik (d. 50 A.H.), well known for her love for 'Urwa b. Ḥizām. Elsewhere (*Mu.*, p. 182) we find 'Afrā' bint 'Aqqāl (?) al-'Uḏriyya who belonged to (*šāḥiba*) 'Urwa b. Ḥizām (d. 28 A.H.). If we exclude the possibility that al-Ḥansā' is referring to the future, we could hardly call her a *šā'ira min šawā'ir al-Ġāhiliyya* as *Mu.* does.

<sup>67</sup> The text in *Mu.* reads *al-Qaḏā*.

<sup>68</sup> The text in *Mu.* reads *yashummuhu*

<sup>69</sup> *Mu.*, pp. 30-1; *Balāḡāt* (1908-edition), p. 199.

<sup>70</sup> The rhyme word is faulty: the other verses consistently rhyme in *-āniyā* whereas this one has *-āšiyā*.

<sup>71</sup> In a way this is a fine blend of the beginnings of three *marāṭī*: Hind bint Ḥudayfa (*taṭāwala laylī li-l-humūmi . . .*), Su'dā bint al-Samardal (. . . *wa abītu laylī kullahu lā aḡā'u*)

a pre-Islamic date, the poetess apparently was a contemporary of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān, the fifth Umayyad caliph (d. 705/86)<sup>72</sup>. This poem illustrates the passion caused by separation.

### VII.3

1. This night is long, my eye is loosing tears, my grief is keeping me awake and my heart is full of pain
2. In the dark I am bearing out the night and pasture its stars and my heart is suffering in the dark, full of fear<sup>73</sup>
3. When from among them (viz. the stars) a bright star is missing, I notice while it is setting with my own eyes another one while it is rising
4. When I remember what was between us I find my heart breaking from passion
5. Every lover thinks of his beloved; hoping and craving for a meeting with the other each day
6. Oh You, Owner of the Throne, relieve the passion you seen in me, because You are the One to guard my interests and Who listens
7. I have called upon You in happiness and grief for a sickness that burns between my ribs

1. *Taṭāwala hādā l-laylu fa-l-‘aynu tadma‘u*
2. *Fa-bittu uqāsī l-layla ar‘ā nuḡūmahu*
3. *Idā ḡaba ‘anhā kawkabun fī maḡībihī*
4. *Idāmā taḍakkartu lladī kāna baynanā*
5. *Wa kullu ḡabībīn dākīrun li-ḡabībīhī*
6. *Fa-dā l-‘arṣī farrīḡ mā tarā min ṣabābatī*
7. *Da‘awtuka fī l-sarrā‘i wa l-ḡurri da‘watan*

- wa arraqanī ḡuznī fa-qalbī muwaḡḡa‘u*  
*wa bāta fu‘ādī ‘āniyan yatafazza‘u*  
*lamahtu bi-‘aynī aḡaran ḡina yaṭla‘u*  
*waḡadtu fu‘ādī li-l-hawā yataqaṭṭa‘u*  
*yuraḡḡī liḡāhu kulla yawmin wa yaṭma‘u*  
*fa-anta lladī tar‘ā umūrī wa tasma‘u*  
*‘alā ‘illatin bayna l-ṣarāsīfi talḡa‘u*

A slave girl uttered this poem, that was overheard by Abū Bakr (al-Ṣiddīq)<sup>74</sup>:

### VII.4

1. I loved him from even before the breaking of the amulets of my childhood, because he walks proudly, bending like a soft reed
2. As if the light of the full moon is a habit to his face: he is one of the Banū Hāšim and ascends high in their nobility

1. *Wa ‘ašīqtuhu min qabli qaf‘i tamā‘imī*
2. *Wa ka‘anna nūra l-badri sunnatu waḡḡihī*<sup>75</sup>

- mutamāyisan miṭla l-qaḡḡibī l-nā‘imī*  
*yanmī wa yaṣ‘adu fī ḡu‘ābati hāšimī*

Abū Bakr then asks her about the identity of her beloved and she answers:

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and al-Ḥansā’ (*innī ariḡtu fa-bittu l-layla sāhiratan . . . ar‘ā l-nuḡūma wa mā kulliftu riṣatahā*), Borg, *Mit Poesie vertreibt ich den Kummer meines Herzens, Eine Studie zur altarabischen Trauerklage der Frau (MPKH)*, pp. 128-9.

<sup>72</sup> *Mu.*, pp. 110-111 and 333.

<sup>73</sup> The text reads *yatafarrā‘u* (“is falling to pieces”), but I do not trust this reading. More probably: *yatafazza‘u*.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 350; Ibn Qayyim al-Ḡawziyya, *Aḡbār al-Nīsā’*, pp. 219-220.

<sup>75</sup> The text in *Mu.* reads *waḡḡihī*; in *Aḡbār al-Nīsā’*: *waḡḡihī*.

## VII.5

1. I am the one with whose heart passion plays and who weeps for the love of Muḥammad  
b. al-Qāsim

1. *Wa ana llatī laʿība l-ġarāmu bi-qalbihā fa-bakat bi-ḥubbi muḥammadi bni l-qāsimi*

Subsequently he buys her and urges Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim b. Ġaʿfar b. Abī Ṭālib to marry her with this woman-unfriendly remark: *Hāʾulāʾi fitan al-riġāl: fa-kam māta bi-hinna karīm wa ʿaṭība ʿalayhinna salīm* (“These are the real trials of men: many a noble one did die by them, and many a safe one “became ruined”).

In his *Mustazraf*<sup>76</sup> al-Suyūṭī mentions Taymāʾ, a slave girl of Abū l-ʿAbbās Ḥuzayma b. Ḥāzīm al-Nahšalī, who wrote to her master while he was travelling in Syria:

## VII.6

1. May Taymāʾ be the ransom of the evil that you beware of

Because you are her heart, her ears and her eyesight

2. Now that you have travelled, you left me distress

and with it there is for me no purpose left in pleasure

3. Did you remember your bond with me in your absence as much

as sorrow, distress and worry have emaciated me?

1. *Tafḍika taymāʾu min sūʾin tuḥādiruh*

*fa-anta muḥġatuhā wa l-samʿu wa l-baṣaru*

2. *La-in raḥalta laqad abqayta lī ḥazanan*

*lam yabqa lī maʿahu fī laddatin waṭaru*

3. *Fa-hal tadakkarta ʿahdī fī l-maġībi kamā*

*qad šaffanī l-hammu wa l-aḥzānu wa l-fikaru*

Separation can cause the one who stays behind to become the target either of blame or of the arrows of sorrow, like in this poem by ʿArīb al-Maʾmūniyya, said to be of Barmakī origin<sup>77</sup>. When her lover, whom she married in secret, was sent far away on an errand by al-Mutawakkil:

## VII.7

1. My beloved has gone, despite of me, not with my agreement

2. I have mistakenly left the one for whom I have not met a substitute

3. For his absence from my sight I have become a shooting mark in my life

1. *Ammā l-ḥabību fa-qad maḍā*

*bi-l-raġmi minnī lā l-riḍā*

2. *Aḥṭaʾtu fī tarkī li-man*

*lam alqa minhu ʿiwaḍā*

3. *Li-buʿdihī ʿan nāzīrī*

*širtu bi-ʿayšī ġaraḍā*

<sup>76</sup> Al-Suyūṭī, *Mustazraf*, p. 12

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175; al-Iṣfahānī, *Aġānī* (Dār Ṣādir), pp. 21, 72.



## VII.10

1. I visit you or you visit me, because my heart always bends to what you desire
2. My teeth are a sweet and cool waterwell and the my locks are an extensive shade
3. I hope that you will be thirsty and struck by sunlight when the resting place delivers me to you
4. Hurry with your answer because it is not nice to reject Buṭayna, oh Ġamīl

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. <i>Azūruka am tazūru fa-inna qalbī</i>     | <i>ilā mā taštahī abadan yamīlu</i>    |
| 2. <i>Fa-ṭaġrī mawridun ‘adbun zulālun</i>    | <i>wa farū du‘ābatī zillun zalīlu</i>  |
| 3. <i>Wa qad ammallu an tazmā wa tadḥā</i>    | <i>idā wāfā ilayka biya l-maqīlu</i>   |
| 4. <i>Fa-‘aġġil bi-l-ġawābi fa-mā ġamīlun</i> | <i>ibā’uka ‘an Buṭaynata yā Ġamīlu</i> |

*Memory*

Absence and separation lead to cherished memories. So for instance this poem by the early Islamic poetess Ḥawla bint Ṭābit al-Anṣāriyya, the sister of Ḥassān, who composed this poem on ‘Ammāra b. al-Walīd b. al-Muġīra with whom she was in love<sup>83</sup>. The poem has a *qaṣīda*-like beginning and—like some other love poems—shows features that we know from *marāṭī*, e.g. the *dayl* and “negative praise”—i.e. praise with negations of bad qualities—in 4b and 5b. It seems to be a love poem, though, and not a *martīya*, according to the introduction: *wa qālat tuṣ-abbibu fih*:

## VIII.1

1. You both my friends, my sleeplessness has hit me, my eye has not slept, not even a little
2. My drink is not easy to swallow and I do not complain to anyone about what I feel (is in me)
3. How can you taunt me for a man, easy going, with whom my heart rejoices
4. His looks are like the shine of a full moon; he is not a coward nor difficult to approach<sup>84</sup>
5. Belonging to the tribe of Āl Muġīra, not weak, nor a coward or a liar
6. My eye saw him one day and afterward it never saw another

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. <i>Yā ḥalīlayya nābanī saḥadī</i>   | <i>lam tanam ‘aynī wa lam takadi</i>   |
| 2. <i>Fa-šarābī mā usīġa wa mā</i>     | <i>aštakī mā bī ilā aḥadi</i>          |
| 3. <i>Kayfa talḥūnī ‘alā raġulīn</i>   | <i>ānisīn taltadduḥu kabidī</i>        |
| 4. <i>Mīṭlu daw’i l-badri šūratuḥu</i> | <i>laysa bi-l-zummayli wa l-nakidi</i> |
| 5. <i>Min banī Āli l-Muġīrati lā</i>   | <i>ḥāmīlin niksīn wa lā ḡaḥidi</i>     |
| 6. <i>Nazarat yawman fa-lā nazarat</i> | <i>ba’dahu ‘aynī ilā aḥadi</i>         |

<sup>83</sup> *Mu.*, p. 80.

<sup>84</sup> The text is grammatically faulty with: *laysa bi-l-zummaylati l-nakidi*. I suggest to read: *laysa bi-l-zummayli wa l-nakidi* comp. I. Goldziher, “Bemerkungen zur arabischen Trauerpoesie”, *WZKM*, XVI (1902), p. 309.

The memory of a pleasant moment is expressed by Ḥayra Umm Ḍayḡam who apparently was on the brink of giving in to passion<sup>85</sup>:

## VIII.2

1. We found ourselves suddenly behind the clan; we were no longer amongst them nor were we mixed up with the enemies
2. And at night two sweet smelling cloaks of happiness shielded us from the dew and ripe that fell from the night
3. By mentioning God's name we drove away from us our youthful folly when our hearts were pounding inside us
4. We went away from the intention of purity but maybe we quenched the thirst of our souls by just sipping

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. <i>Waṭabnā ḥilāfa l-ḥayyi lā naḥnu minḥumū</i>  | <i>wa lā naḥnu bi-l-a'dā'i muḥtaliṭāni</i>  |
| 2. <i>Wa bitnā yaqīnā sāqīta l-ṭalli wa l-nadā</i> | <i>mīna l-layli burdā yumnatīn 'aṭīrāni</i> |
| 3. <i>Naḍūdu bi-dīkri llāhi 'annā mīna l-ṣabā</i>  | <i>idā kāna qalbānā binā yaḡṣfāni</i>       |
| 4. <i>Wa naṣḍuru 'an amri l-'aḡfīfi wa rubbamā</i> | <i>naqa'nā ḡatīla l-nafsi bi-l-raṣafāni</i> |

In some cases like the one of this woman of the Banū 'Āmir b. Ṣa'ṣa'a the memory of a pleasant time can become something she would rather forget<sup>86</sup>

## VIII.3

1. May rain and water pour down over days that affected us with passion, coming from where the dry winds sometimes come
2. They (the winds) appear to us arising from the passes of mount Ḍumr<sup>87</sup> as if their foremost parts are higher than oak trees (?)
3. A dry wind in which my body takes pleasure when it blows like a wind from Ḥaḍramawt that offers<sup>88</sup> musk and sweet smells
4. O you dear traveller by night in weakness, that affected us between al-Dirā'ayn<sup>89</sup> and al-Aḥrāb (?) who was it (that travelled) (?)
5. I imagined him to be a king—o this beloved image!—belonging to mankind or to the jinn's
6. What do you remember from the Yamani land without remembering the one who was in Ġawzān<sup>90</sup> that night?!
7. Willingly I cheat myself (to refrain) from remembering you, like the sober one cheats the drunk

- |  |
|--|
| 1. <i>Saqyan wa raṣyan li-ayyāmin tuṣawwiqunāmin ḥaytu ta'tī riyāḥu l-ḥayfi aḥyānā</i> |
| 2. <i>Tabdū lanā min tanāyā l-ḍumri ṭālī'atan ka'anna a'lāmahā ḡallalna siḡānā</i>     |

<sup>85</sup> *Mu.*, p. 82.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 336.

<sup>87</sup> Yāqūt, *Muḡam al-Buldān*, Beirut, 1990, III, p. 527: *ḡabal yudkar ma'a Dā'in fi bilād Qays*.

<sup>88</sup> *Ḥunā* does not make much sense here. Yāqūt, *Muḡam al-Buldān*, Beirut, 1990, III, p. 5 reads *ḥafā*, which does not help. Maybe read *hanā* as a *muḥaffaf*-form for *hana'a*.

<sup>89</sup> See Yāqūt, *loc. cit.*

<sup>90</sup> Ġawzān is a *qarya fi miḥlāf* (province) *Bu (?) 'dān* in Yaman: Yāqūt, *Muḡam al-Buldān*, II, p. 211.

3. *Hayfun yaladdu lahā ġismī idā nasamat ka-l-ḥaḍramiyyi hanā miskan wa rayḥānā*
4. *Yā ḥabbadā ṭāriqun wahnān alamma binā bayna l-dirāʿayni wa l-aḥrābi man kānā*
5. *Šabbatu lī mālikan yā ḥabbadā šabhan immā mina l-insi aw mā kāna ġinānā*
6. *Mādā tuḍakkiru min arḍin yamāniyyatin wa lā tuḍakkiru man amsā bi-ḡawzānā*
7. *ʿAmdan uḥādīʿu nafsi ʿan taḍakkurikum kamā yuḥādīʿu šaḥī l-ʿaqli sukrānā*

A sad *ġāriya* remarks<sup>91</sup>:

#### VIII.4

1. We were like a couple of Qaṭā birds in a desert area, living a carefree life, wonderful, pleasant and without sorrow
2. They were hit by the fortune of time and driven apart; I have never seen anything more lonesome than someone on his own

1. *Wa kunnā ka-zawġin min qaṭan fi mafāzatin ladā ḥafḍi ʿayšin muġġibin mūniqin raġdi*
2. *Ašābahumā raybu l-zamāni fa-ufriḍāwa lam ara šayʿan qaṭtu aw awḥaša min fardi*

A *ġāriya* who was sold by her master because of her insubmissiveness wrote to him from afar<sup>92</sup>

#### VIII.5

1. Verily if your far away heart burns, then my heart is cracking up
2. By the Lord of heaven, you must know, my master, in me there is desire for you
3. Find yourself comfort<sup>93</sup> over “us” with what you find in us, even if we are emaciated by passion
4. My soul is warm for you (i.e. it is burning me), passionate, and my eye is weeping, shedding tears (i.e. spending coolness)
5. Our death is in the hand of fates (?) as is our life close to each other (?) and my return<sup>94</sup>
6. O fates, wherever you, my master, may be, my heart is now submissive to him (i.e. you)
7. So, peace be upon you from me, as long as the sun rises

1. *La-in kawā qalbuka l-šasūʿu fa-l-qalbu minnī bihi šudūʿu*
2. *Wa bī wa rabbi l-samāʿi fa-lam ilayka yā sayyidi nuzūʿu*
3. *Iʿziz ʿalaynā bimā tulāqī finā wa in šaffanā l-walūʿu*
4. *Fa-l-nafsu ḥarrā ʿalayka walḥā wa l-ʿaynu ʿabrā lahā dumūʿu*
5. *Fa-mawtunā fi yadi l-tanāʿi wa ʿayšunā l-qurbu (?) wa l-ruġūʿu*
6. *Wa ḥayṭamā kunta yā manāyā fa-l-qalbu minnī bihi ḥušūʿu*
7. *ʾUmma ʿalayka l-salāmu minnī mā kāna šamsuhā tu/alūʿu*

#### *Rejection of the Candidate*

If the poetess would reject a candidate for his looks or out of pure contempt, then that of course is a fatal disgrace. In such a case we

<sup>91</sup> *Mu.*, p. 345.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 349-50.

<sup>93</sup> I read *iʿziz* (I) instead of *aʿziz* (IV).

<sup>94</sup> Probably a *hysteron proteron*.

would be close to the genre of *hiġġā'*-poetry. There are however factors by which the theme of rejection may still be closely associated with love poetry, so for instance in a case of the inability of the poetess to marry for external reasons like the negative view of her family towards the candidate. And of course rejection may even be part of the game of love as such.

These are a few examples of classic *hiġġā'*. Umm Ġa'far bint 'Alī l-Hāšimiyya had been having a relationship with a nephew of hers. After this ended Šālīḥ b. Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Hāšimī proposed to her. He was rejected, so he said to her in anger:<sup>95</sup>

### IX.1

1. You, pain in my heart, eyesore that you are
2. You slush of vomit in diarrhea, you waste of a fool
3. Are you, people, ordering me to marry her? Then where, where is my right hand?!  
(sc. to swear that I won't)
4. Her husband was by her behaviour in a thicket of horns (instead of only wearing two)

1. <i>Yā šawṣatun fī fu'ādī</i>	<i>wa yā qadan fī ġufūnī</i>
2. <i>Yā qayyatun fī sulāḥin</i>	<i>yā faḍlata l-ma'fūnī</i>
3. <i>A-ta'murūnī bi-tazwiġihā</i>	<i>fa-ayna ayna yamīnī</i>
4. <i>Wa zawġuhā kāna minhā</i>	<i>fī ġaydatin min qurūnī</i>

Umm Ġa'far answers saying:

### IX.2

1. Make your anger turn away from us: for me you are no equal party
2. You possess neither earthly things nor religion (decency?)
3. You [health of . . . .], you diarrhea of a fat bellied man
4. I have given him the slave as a mate<sup>96</sup> with all his sturdy stick
5. You want my possessions with a weak mind and persevering stupidity

1. <i>Arġ' bi-ġayzika 'annā</i>	<i>fa-lastā lī bi-qarīnī</i>
2. <i>Wa lasta šāḥiba dunyā</i>	<i>wa lasta šāḥiba dīnī</i>
3. <i>Yā šihhata . . .</i> <sup>97</sup>	<i>yā salhata l-mabṭūnī</i>
4. <i>A'ṭaytuhu [?] l-'abda ba'lan</i>	<i>bi-kullī 'ūdīn maṭīnī</i>
5. <i>Tarūmu milkī bi-'aqlīn</i>	<i>wāḥīn wa ḥumqīn ḥarūnī</i>

If the correct way of getting married implies, that the partners would not have had an opportunity to meet and to get to know each other,

<sup>95</sup> *Mu.*, pp. 288-289; *Balāġāt*, pp. 209 (1997 edition), 114-115 (1908 edition).

<sup>96</sup> The text has *maṭīyyatuhu l-'abdu*, which results in a faulty metre. Just as a playful suggestion: *a'ṭaytuhu l-'abda*.

<sup>97</sup> Text broken.

then the wedding and consummation could sometimes become a bitter disappointment, like these two women apparently experienced:

‘Uṣayma bint Zayd al-Nahdiyya<sup>98</sup>

### IX.3

1. They say ‘Uṣayma did not touch/take her dowry as if the one who gave to ‘Uṣayma jewelry was (only) playing
2. If they would experience what I have been through they would shrug behind me and no-one would strive for that dowry
3. As if the winds from Sa‘īd b. Sālim are the winds of a stretch of land on which the hyena’s have pissed
4. If from that (land), bounty would be given, I would be locked away during the nights as long as someone who wishes things calls upon God<sup>99</sup>

1. *Yaḡūlūna lam ta’ḥud ‘uṣaymatu mahrahā*
2. *Wa law mārasū mā kuntu fihi la-uḥriḡū*
3. *Ka-anna riyaḡhan min sa‘īdi bni sālīmi*
4. *Fa-in wafīlat minhu fa-innī ḡabīsaton*

1. *ka’anna llaḡī yaḡlī ‘uṣaymata lā‘ibu*
2. *wawā’ī wa lam yaḡlub ilā l-mahri ḡālibu*
3. *riyaḡhu ḡibbatin bālat ‘alayhā l-ḡālibu*
4. *ḡuwāla l-layālī mā da‘ā llāha rāḡibu*

And ‘Amra bint al-Nu‘mān b. Baṣīr al-Anṣāriyya said bitchily when al-Ḥārīt b. Ḥālid proposed to her<sup>100</sup>

### IX.4

1. The old men and the young of Damascus are dearer to me than the men from the Ḥiḡāz
2. They have a stench like the stench from the armpits of goats, impossible for musk and frankincense to get rid of

1. *Kuhūlu Dimaṣqin wa ṣubbānuhā*
2. *Lahum ḡafarun ka-ṣunāni l-tuyū*

1. *aḡabbu ilayya mina l-ḡāliyah*
2. *si a’ya ‘alā l-miski wa l-ḡāliyah*

The Andalusian poetess Nazhūn is merciless in her rejection of an ugly man who proposed to her:<sup>101</sup>

### IX.5

1. Bring an excuse for me (to get away) from an ill-tempered lover, stupid in his advice and his behaviour
2. He desires a meeting (with me) with something that, would he come to desire a slap in the face for it, he would not be stricken for it (i.e.: that does not even deserve a slap in the face)
3. With a head that needs plastering (litt: putty<sup>102</sup>) and a face that needs a veil

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181; *Balāḡāt*, p. 203 (1997 edition) ; p. 109 (1908 edition).

<sup>99</sup> It is interesting to observe, how images of *riḡā’* are incorporated: on the topos of “... for ever and ever” see Borg, *MPKH*, pp. 171-3.

<sup>100</sup> *Mu.*, p. 193.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.

<sup>102</sup> So in Dozy, R., *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes*: putty, kit (“mastic”).

- |  |                                      |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1. <i>‘Aḏrīya min ‘āṣiqi anūkin</i>      | <i>ṣafīhi l-iṣārati wa l-manza‘i</i> |
| 2. <i>Yarūmu l-wiṣāla bi-mā law atā</i>  | <i>yarūmu bihi l-ṣafa lam yuṣfāi</i> |
| 3. <i>Bi-ra’sin faqīrin ilā kiyyatin</i> | <i>wa waḡhin faqīrin ilā burqu‘i</i> |

In the case of Umm Ṣarī‘ (al-Ṣarīḥ) al-Kindiyya the problem that she and the rest of her family seem to have with her husband is more of a psychological kind<sup>103</sup>:

## IX.6

1. It is as if the house on the day you are in it is a pit over us, filled with smoke
2. If only you were on the ship of the Banī ‘Ibād, deported ; we wouldn’t see you and you wouldn’t see us
3. If only you were away in India, away from us, [and would that we had a friend so that he would treat us gently (?)]
4. If the gifts from him would stop (?), I would be given them hundredfold (?) he would scold us (?) ]

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. <i>Kā’anna l-dāra yawma takūnu fihā</i>       | <i>‘alaynā ḥufratun muli‘at duḡānā</i>              |
| 2. <i>Fa-laytaka fī safīni banī ‘ibādi/a (?)</i> | <i>ṭarīdan lā narāka wa lā tarānā</i>               |
| 3. <i>Wa laytaka ḡā’ibun bi-l-hindi ‘annā</i>    | <i>[wa layta lanā ṣaḏīqan fa-qtanānā</i>            |
| 4. <i>Wa law anna l-nuḏūra takuffu minhu</i>     | <i>la-qad aḥdaytuhā (uḥḏītuhā?) mi‘atan ḡaḡānā]</i> |

Danānīr was much more subtle and diplomatic when she rejected Abū l-Ṣa‘tā’s proposal in these words:<sup>104</sup>

## IX.7

1. Abū l-Ṣa‘tā’ has a hidden love in which there is no power (to resist) for the accused (i.e. me)
2. Oh heart hold back from him and oh you whom love follies: sit down and (then) stand up (to leave?)
3. Adequate words reached me from him; the media of lovers are words
4. A hunter that is trusted by his gazelles like gazelles of the Holy Places (where hunting is prohibited?)
5. If you (really) are in love, then pray to God that your wishes be fulfilled, Abū l-Ṣa‘tā’, and fast
6. If God is merciful, He will sort out your appointment on the Day of the Gathering in the garden of eternal life (Paradise)<sup>105</sup>
7. Where I will meet you (when you will be) as a fullgrown youthful boy in whom all good things have become perfect

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. <i>Li-Abī l-Ṣa‘tā’i ḥubbun kāminun</i> | <i>laysa fīhi nahḏatun li-l-muttahim</i> |
| 2. <i>Yā fu’ādi fa-zdaḡir ‘anhu wa yā</i> | <i>‘abaṭa l-ḥubbi bihi fa-ḡud wa qum</i> |

<sup>103</sup> *Mu.*, p. 298. See for this woman also al-Ḥaṭīb: *Ṣarḥ Dīwān al-Ḥamāsa li-Abī Tammām*, Beirut, s.d., II, pp. 201-2 and *Balāḡāt* (1997 edition), p. 213. Vss. 3b and 4 are hard to interpret.

<sup>104</sup> *Mu.*, pp. 88-9.

<sup>105</sup> This poem is not easy to understand. The damage in my edition of verse 6 does not help. I read *lamma*. This verse might well be a pun on the name of Abū l-Ṣa‘tā’: “*lamma llāhu ṣa‘tahu*”, “may God repair the disorder of his affairs”.

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|---|---|
| 3. <i>Zāranī minhu kalāmum šā'ibun</i>    | <i>wa wasīlātu l-muḥibbīna l-kalīm</i>    |
| 4. <i>Šā'idun ta'manuhu ġazlānuhu</i>     | <i>miṭla mā ta'manu ġazlānu l-ḥaram</i>   |
| 5. <i>Šallī in aḥbabta an tuṭā l-munā</i> | <i>yā Abā l-Ša'itā' i li-llāhi wa šum</i> |
| 6. <i>Lima mī'āduka yawma l-ḥasari fi</i> | <i>ġannati l-ḥuldi ini llāhu raḥim</i>    |
| 7. <i>Haytu alqāka ġulāman yāfi'an</i>    | <i>nāšī'an qad kamilat fihi l-nī'am</i>   |

An anonymous woman ridicules her husband at his weakest spot: impotence<sup>106</sup>

## IX.8

1. Abū Šālīḥ loves to fuck, but his dick does not obeye him
2. He has taken out the “avarice” from its “plentiful partner”<sup>107</sup> and it turned out to be beyond hope
3. If only he had in his ass what I have in my pussy! If only another man than he would take me in his possession

- |   |                                    |
|---|------------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Yuḥibbu l-nikāḥa Abū Šālīḥin</i>      | <i>wa laysa yuṭāwī'uhu ayruh</i>   |
| 2. <i>Wa qad amsaka l-buḥla min kaffihi</i> | <i>fa-aṣbaḥa lā yurtaġā ḥayruh</i> |
| 3. <i>Fa-yā layta mā fi ḥirī fi stihi</i>   | <i>wa mallakanī raġulun ġayruh</i> |

Another story about an impotent man runs like this:<sup>108</sup>

## IX.9

Abū l-Baydā', an impotent, wanted to marry two women. When the clan assured him, that one was enough for him, he insisted. They agreed to let him marry one and evaluate things after a week. If not satisfied he could marry another then. They picked for him a bedouin woman and after a week they asked him how he had been on the first day. “Fantastic” he replied. “And on the third?” they asked. “Don't ask me!”. His wife then replied from behind the curtain:

1. Abū l-Baydā' a jumped into the pitfall (“lasso”)
2. Until he was led into a nice house/tent
2. In it was a gazel, well playing coyness, frightened
4. He worked on it until his sweat flowed continuously
5. The key was broken and the lock remained closed

1. *Kāna Abū l-Baydā'a yanzū fi l-wahaq*
2. *Ḥattā idā udḥila fi baytin aniq*
3. *Fīhi ġazālun ḥasanu l-dalli ḥariq*
4. *Mārasahu ḥattā idā rfaḍḍa l-araq*
5. *Inkasara l-miftāḥu wa nsadda l-ġalaq*

<sup>106</sup> *Balāġāt* (1908 edition), p. 115.

<sup>107</sup> I can think of at least three other interpretations of this passage. The reading “*umsika*” would double that number.

<sup>108</sup> Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, *Iqd*, VII, p. 154.

A woman might not only reject someone who proposed to her, but also a husband regretting to have separated from her, like in this case al-ʿUryān b. al-Aswad when he asked his divorced wife to consider returning. She wrote:<sup>109</sup>

## IX.10

1. If you are in need of something then ask something else in stead, because the gazelle that you lost is occupied

1. *In kumta dā ḥāḡatin fa-ḥlub lahā badalan* *inna l-ḡazāla llaḏī ḡayyāʿta mašḡūlu*

But her husband wrote:

1. She who has occupations, let Allah protect her, we have been enjoying her and the bond is still present

2. We have just discovered a new side of reappraising her: because in the nights and in the ensuing days there is length (i.e.: they are boring)

1. *Man kāna dā šuḡulin fa-llāhu yaklaʿuhu* *wa qad laḥawnā bihi wa l-ḥablu mawḡūlu*

2. *Wa qad qaḡaynā mina stiṭrāfihi ṭarafan* *wa fi l-layālī wa fi ayyāmihā ṭūlu*

*Regret and Separation*

Umm Ḥālid al-Ḥaṭʿamiyya<sup>110</sup>

## X.1

1. O Soul that has been led by love, if you now strive to evade (him), then certainly something awful has led you astray

2. So turn away from him, because something has come in between: he has been distracted by a relationship of old, other than the one with you

1. *Ayyatuhā l-naḡsu llatī qādahā l-hawā* *amālaka in rumti l-ḡudūda ʿazīmu*<sup>111</sup>

2. *Fa-taṣarifi ʿanhu fa-qad ḥīla dūnahū* *wa alḥāhu waḡḡun min siwāki qaḏīmu*

One of the judges in al-Bahnasā had to handle a case of divorce in which the husband did not agree. The wife would not let herself be persuaded and said:<sup>112</sup>

## X.2

1. When al-Allīd (?) started to violate his bond with me and wanted the cloth of “togetherness” to be torn

2. I left him and freed my hand from his and I read to me and to him the verse: “But if they [both] separate . . .”<sup>113</sup>

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, VII, p. 133.

<sup>110</sup> *Mu.*, p. 292.

<sup>111</sup> The metre is *ṭawīl*, but the first short in the ʿaḡuz is missing.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 327; al-Suyūṭī, *Nuzḡa*, p. 97.

<sup>113</sup> A case of *iqtibās*. Arberry’s translation of Sūra 4, 129: “But if they separate, God will enrich each of them of His plenty; God is All-embracing, All-wise”.

1. *Lammā ġadā l-Allīdu (?) ‘ahdī nāqīdan* wa arāda tawba l-waṣli an yatamazzaqā  
 2. *Fāraqtuhu wa ḥalaʿtu min yadihi yadī* wa talawtu lī wa lahu “wa in yatafarraqā”

In this case of separation the woman nicely tricks her husband:<sup>114</sup>

### X.3

A man from Kūfa was sent on a mission (*ḍuriba l-baʿt*). He went away to Azarbaijan and led a *ġāriya* and a horse with him although he was married to his niece. He wrote to her in order to make her jealous:

1. Tell “Umm al-Banīn” that we have nothing to wish for; beardless heroes see to our wishes
2. As far away (from you) as “the two “mankib”-stars” (sc. one in Orion, the other in Pegasus) when they pass, while the far away “bayḍā” star is like it is adorned with a string of pearls (?)
3. The first because of the battles with the enemy, the second for my own sake when the army retreats

1. *A-lā abliġū Umma l-Banīna bi-annanā* ġanīnā wa aġnatnā l-ġatārifatu l-murdu  
 2. *Baʿdu manāṭi l-mankibayni idā ġarā* wa bayḍāʿu ka-l-timṭāli zayyanahā l-iqdu  
 3. *Fa-hādā li-ayyāmi l-ʿaduwwi wa hādīhi* l-ḥāġati nafsī ḥīna yanṣarifū l-ġundu

When his letter had reached her and she finished reading it, she said: “Boy, give me the ink pot!” and she wrote in reply:

1. Return his greeting to him<sup>115</sup> and tell him: beardless heroes see to our wishes, so breathe your last breath!
2. By his grace the caliph left them to stay, the young men as reservists in the army, and sent your lot to battle
3. When I want, a strong boy sees to my wishes<sup>116</sup> and I undo him from rose water
4. And if a young man from among them wants to stretch out his hand to a soft belly or curved buttocks
5. And if you are not attending to the needs of your people, then we will attend to them far, far away

1. *A-lā aqrīhi minnī l-salāma wa qul lahu* ‘unīnā bi-fityatin ġatārifatin murdī<sup>117</sup>  
 2. *Bi-ḥamdi amīri l-muʿminīna aqarrahum* šabāban wa aġzakum ḥawālifa fi l-ġundi  
 3. *Idā šp̄tu ġannānī ġulāmun muraġġalun* wa nāzāʿtulu min māʿi muʿtaṣari l-wardi  
 4. *Wa in šāʿa minhum nāšīʿun madda kaffīhi* ilā kabidīn malsāʿa aw kafalin nahdī  
 5. *Fa-mā kuntumū taqḍawna min ḥaġi ahlīkum* šuhūdan qaḍaynāhā ‘alā l-naʿyi wa l-buʿdi

After reading her letter the man returned home with his horse and his *ġāriya*, and he asked his wife whether she had really done what she said. She answered that she didn’t. The man then left her his *ġāriya* as a present and returned on his mission.

<sup>114</sup> Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi, *Iqd*, VII, p. 114.

<sup>115</sup> Unreadable and difficult to fit to the metre.

<sup>116</sup> Or: “sings to me”.

<sup>117</sup> The first line is taken from the *Kūlāb al-Maḥāsīn wa l-Aḍḍād* (pseudo-Ġāhiz), ed. van Vloten, Leiden, 1898, p. 229.

*All in One*

There is one woman—relatively unknown—from whom we still have a number of love poems and in whose love poems many of the aforementioned themes occur: Umm al-Ḍaḥḥāk al-Muḥāribiyya<sup>118</sup>

*Passion*

## XI.1

1. Oh you rider in the morning towards his aim; hold still that I may tell some of the things I feel

etc. See IV.4

## XI.2

1. The healing from love is kissing and embracing and the rubbing of belly against belly
2. And such heavy moving (in and out), that tears get in the eyes and the groping of shoulders and horns (?)

1. *Šjā'u l-ḥubbi taqbīlun wa ḍammun*
2. *Wa rahzun tahmulu l-'aynāni minhu*

*wa ḡarrun bi-l-buṭūni 'alā l-buṭūni*  
*wa aḥḍun bi-l-manākibi wa l-qurūni*

*Separation and regret*

## XI.3

1. May (for him) after (he left) me any gift by a free woman among mankind be untrustworthy nor a noble neighbour that lives close by
2. With him I was like *Dū* l-Kalb (The Dog Owner) who did not stop to fatten his dog until its eyes became weak and it assaulted him
3. When the only thing he offered was stupidity, I did not find the like of him whose eye would burn my flesh to the point of overcooking

1. *Lā ya'munan ba'di 'aṭṭiyatu ḥurratin*
2. *Wa kuntu wa iyyāhu ka-ḍi l-kalbi lam yazal*
3. *Fa-lammā abā illā l-ḥamāqata lam aḡid*

*mina l-nāsi aw ḡarun karīmun yuḡāwiruh*  
*yusanminuhu ḥattā smadara yusāwiruh*  
*lahu miṭla mā yakwī fa-yundīḡa nāziruh*

*On love as a concept*

## XI.4

1. I see love as indestructable . . .

etc. See I.1

<sup>118</sup> *Mu.*, pp. 299-300.

*To love and to regret . . .*

## XI.5

1. I had found comfort for the love of the Ḍibābī for a while, but all the follies of an ignorant one were to return . . . etc. (See VI.3)

### *Conclusion*

Any conclusion drawn from the small amount of material presented here must be preliminary. But also preliminary conclusions may have a value of their own.

Maybe we should start by assessing what we did not find in these love poems by women: the most prominent phenomenon that is absent are lengthy descriptions in the *wasf* or *madīh*, descriptions of the beloved, of men (or women). Where Bauer is able to extract an extensive catalogue of *wasf* elements from the poetry he discusses, they are scarce here, limited to the following passages:

IV.2: a general reference to beauty: *ḡamāluka . . .*

IV.9: a general reference to the lovers “mental picture”

IV.12 vs. 10 and VII.1 vs. 4: white teeth

VII.3 s. 3: metaphoric use of “star”

VII.4 and VIII.1: elegant walk and remarkable face to emphasize the nobility of the beloved

XI.3 (last verse): the (former) lover’s burning look

Another thing that is missing is what I would call “the broad outlook”, generalisations of emotions, or affections attributed to the *condition humaine*. The nearest these women take us to such a theme or expression is in a few general remarks about the nature of love: I.1, I.2 and I.3. In II.2 the poetess touches lightly on a general outlook, but only in hindsight when evaluating her own love career.

Another instance where a poetess seems to break through to a wider perspective is in III.1: she creates the image of the ideal heroic uncompromising lover whom no obstacle will turn away from his beloved. But then again she says so in a concrete situation, in which she feels turned down by her lover in her request to visit him.

Bauer witnesses enough expressions of this relationship between love and the *condition humaine* to justify the very purpose of his monography: to discuss the Mentalitätsgeschichte of the late Abbasid era. The same cannot possibly be done on the basis of the poems that are being

presented here, neither for the late Abbasid nor for any other era. It might however be necessary to make an exception for love poetry by women in al-Andalus: developments there often turn out to be different from those in the heartlands of Arab/Islamic culture.

To typify the presented poems we might turn to Hempfers *Gattungstheorie*, a classical work on poetic kinds. In its last chapter (“Zusammenfassende Thesen”, pp. 221-8) the author presents some useful clues as to how genres can be defined.

If we follow his lead the first question would be: can we consider the presented texts as a group? Three remarks have to be made:

1. The texts are only homogeneous in a limited sense: there common theme is love and some of its implications, but they are ascribed to women in varying historical and social circumstances.
2. It has already been indicated, that the chosen texts are a corpus for a preliminary survey; they are not the total corpus that can be found.
3. The texts above have never been presented as a collection, as an interconnected group, neither in the Arab Middle Ages nor recently: the juxtaposition is ours and it does not follow unequivocal criteria.

If we would superimpose a “*Sammelbegriff*”, a collective definition, on these poems it would probably be “functional poetry with lyrical inclinations”, because they are almost without exception connected to concrete occasions. In this sense they are occasional poetry.

It is debatable whether these poems would coincide with a historical category that occurred in Medieval Arabic genre definition. After excluding categories like *wasf* and *madīh* as we did, the only category that could be considered is *ġazal/tašbīb* (love) poetry, but one might argue, that with the variety of love’s implications that these poems present, they are thematically not “stable” enough to bring them under this category alone.

It is difficult to typify these poems in terms of communicational situations (“*Sprechsituationen*”), either performative or informative, because as far as they are communicational, most of them are intended as “one-to-one” messages, from one sender (the poetess) to one receiver (the beloved). To subdivide further into primary and secondary *modi* (“*Schreibweisen*”) like narrative, dramatical, comical or satirical is even more complicated, because it would mean that we need to have at least a clear understanding of the sender’s and receiver’s intentions and moods. And decisive to determine these intentions and moods are the

texts themselves (to a lesser extent the context), so that here too we would find ourselves in a vicious circle.

These considerations would lead us to believe that the poems presented here can hardly be considered a genre in the normal sense of the word. Neither can most of the women, whose poems we have been discussing here, be considered poetesses in the sense that they produced a number of poems collected in a *ḍiḥwān*, let alone that poetry made up most of their daily activities as is the case with the laureate poets of medieval Arab culture. Their poems can hardly be understood as anything else than occasional (or maybe: situational) poetry, which leaves us with a tantalising question: why were they collected and transmitted at all? Perhaps their only value was and is, that for a reader (now and then) they are highly recognisable as a reflection of the vicissitudes of love, phenomena that still provide enough material to fill 24 hour schedules of three TV pop stations on my local cable network.