

## BOOK FIVE

### OTHER DISCIPLINES

(Covering Both the Early and the Later Centuries)

#### Part 1. Language and Literature

##### Chapter L

#### ARABIC LITERATURE: POETIC AND PROSE FORMS

##### A

##### POETRY

Let us imagine an Arab Bedouin riding his camel on frequent long journeys across lonely deserts. While the rhythmic beating of the padded hoofs on soft sand breaks the stillness of the air, the rider is sunk deep in recollections of his own past. As he feels excited to share his mood with his "two companions and fellow-travellers," there is nothing more natural than that he should start chanting in unison with the movement which has the sole possession of his entire perception. This unsophisticated outpouring of one's heart in response to an occasional urge took the form of *rajaz*—the simple iambic alternation of *ḥarakah* (moved or vocalized) and *sukūn* (quiescent consonant) corresponding to the alternation in the lifting and lowering of the camel's feet. (Cf. the *ḫabab* in which the pattern of alternation corresponds to the pace of the horse.) The observation of the effects of the "song" induced a deliberate practice to beguile the man and quicken the animal. As the practice grew and attracted talent, formalities accumulated by common taste and general acceptance, giving rise to the *art of poetry*. The art was not slow to create for itself forms much more varied and complex than the original *rajaz*. About the middle of the second/eighth century when al-*Khalil* scrutinized the structure of Arabic poetry according to the quantitative measure suggested to him by the different tones on the rebound of the smith's hammer (just akin to the camel's tread) he admirably reduced it to a system of prosody consisting of sixteen metrical forms. Some foreign influence is not precluded from the development of some of these standard Arabic forms, all of which, of course, did not, and could not, have an equal measure of antiquity or popularity. What is remarkable is that this system of prosody sufficed to

serve as the hard core of future indigenous development as well as assimilation of foreign models up to the present day.

By the last quarter of the fifth century A.D. when we get our first yet full acquaintance with Arabic poetry, myriads of tribes hailing from different quarters of the country had commingled sufficiently at commercial-cum-literary fairs, e.g., that of 'Ukāz, religious such as at Mecca, and cultural as that at Ḥirah, to evolve a common language and widely appreciated norms and forms of artistic composition, though, naturally enough, they exhibited peculiarities of usage in speech. This common literary medium which developed out of the North Arabic, coinciding with the steady decline of the economic, political and cultural influence of the South, was leavened mainly in Ḥirah with the accompaniments of material and religious civilization as augmented with currents—Judaic, Christian, and Graeco-Roman—from the opposite end of the Northern Desert. Generally speaking, it was precise to finesse so far as Bedouin life and environment were concerned, but lacked the facility for conveying abstract ideas and general concepts. However, it possessed, by the very nature of its being a compromise between various dialects, an immense wealth of synonyms together with ample resources of rhyme and assonance inherent in its schematic morphology. Thus *saj'* (rhyme) came to be the first and natural form of artistic composition prompted by the instinct for symmetry and balance in the structure of short, compact sentences specially designed for intonation and oral transmission without being committed to writing. The *saj'* existed before metre; the evolution of metrical forms only pushed it to the end of a verse under the name of *qāfiyah*. It is sometimes overlooked that the *qāfiyah* constituted an essential element—and not an additional, far less artificial, embellishment in the structure of Arabic poetry. In other words, verse without *qāfiyah* has been unknown in Arabic during its infancy as much as in its youth and old age. As we shall see later, so long as there was healthy development, any tendency on the part of the *qāfiyah* to rigidity and monotony was checked in due time by adequate adaptation to the requirements of the theme (*vide* the evolution of *muzdawij* and *musammaʿ*). In the period of decadence it was not sheer conservatism but a deep realization of its essential worth, which caused artificiality to be preferred to freedom. The positive function of the *qāfiyah* in laying down rails, so to say, for the movement of thought, is demonstrated by the spontaneous rush of the imagination of the audience to the end—almost the entire later half—of a line ahead of actual recitation by the poet.<sup>1</sup> Such a thrilling experience of effective communion between the poet and his audience is in no way rare wherever Arabic poetry (or Persian or Urdu poetry for that matter) is recited even today. This is quite apart from the practical utility of the *qāfiyah* in helping memorization as alluded to before.

<sup>1</sup> Note the definition by ibn Qutaibah of a born poet as "the one who indicates to you the end of a verse in the very beginning of it, and the *qāfiyah* in the *fāṭiḥah* (opening word) itself." *Al-Shi'r w-al-Shu'arā'*, Cairo, 1367/1947, I, p. 36.

In the sociological fabric of the pre-Islamic time the poet occupied a very high and influential position. The popular mind was impressed so deeply with the efficacy of his art that it believed him to be in communion with some supernatural source vaguely identified with a jinnee or a devil. But the conception about his art was the same as about the skill of a horseman; it had to be consecrated entirely to the cause of the solidarity and the ascendancy of the tribe. The poet had a task irrevocably assigned to him, which was to act the spokesman and the counsel on behalf of the tribe. Hence he was expected to specialize in a knowledge of the tribal saga supporting the cause for his clients and against their rivals.<sup>2</sup> In short, poetry was appreciated primarily as a weapon of offence and defence in the struggle of tribes against tribes; its function was to commemorate the glories of the poet's own tribe, exalt its achievements in war and peace, and embolden it against the other tribes by holding them to scorn. There was little room for the personality of the poet to detach itself even for a while from the interests and the fortune of the tribe.

Naturally enough, the motifs of pre-Islamic poetry sprang fundamentally from the spirit of the *jāhiliyyah*—the ignorance of a moral code of conduct characterized by a strong sense of tribal solidarity based on blood kinship, and highly volatile passions cramped within stunted sympathies and primary selfish impulses.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the two oldest kinds of verse were the *hiǰā'* (satire) and the *faḥḥr* (self-glorification) with the keynote of the *ḥamās* or desperate pursuit of unbridled aggression. True, the *nasīb* (erotic verse) also must have had an independent form in the oldest time but all the same it could not have occupied a position other than the subsidiary one which is assigned to it in the scheme of the *qaṣidah*. After all, the theme of love had no bearing on the security of the tribe. The very reason that its interest was human and universal, i.e., not peculiar to the tribe, was enough to render it inconsequential.

Leaving aside the *hiǰā'*, which has throughout maintained its independent form, the *faḥḥr* in its kindred form of *madīḥ* (eulogy) came to assume the pivotal position in the structure of the *qaṣidah*, which was devised specially to rope in the *nasīb* and many other minor forms of occasional verse to subserve it. This "loose-knitting" of the diverse kinds into a rigidly conventional structure seems to have come into vogue not long before our earliest acquaintance with Arabic poetry, i.e., about 125 years before Islam.<sup>4</sup> The

<sup>2</sup> It was perhaps on account of this special knowledge that he was called *sha'ir*, i.e., the "kenner," who *knew* better than others. There is, however, another view which traces the word to its Hebrew counterpart meaning "chanting" and "singing." Anyhow, the poet only *knew* and *sang* whereas the authority for taking decisions and giving judgments rested with another class known as the *ḥukkām*. *Fajr al-Islām*, p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> The schooling of the impulses through *ḥudūd Allah* (limits of the Sacred Law) pinpoints the difference between the *jāhiliyyah* and Islam.

<sup>4</sup> Consistently with the Arab habit of ascribing long, gradual developments to particular persons, the innovation of the *qaṣidah* is said to have originated with

order in the composition of the *qaṣīdah* is invariably as follows. First comes the *nasīb* by way of a prelude; second, the *madīh* as the main part; and, third, the *khātimah* (epilogue) which is mostly didactic. A certain proportion was observed particularly between the first two parts on the principle that the *nasīb* should neither overshadow the *madīh* nor pass without fulfilling its function of catching the ear of the audience for the latter.

*The Nasīb.*—Usually the poet pictures himself as confronting, in the course of his journeys to and from, the remains of the encampment which once had been the scene of his love. This gives him the opportunity to depict with remarkable pathos the scene of separation and recollect in moving terms the charms of the beloved and the pleasures of her company in the past. The physical charms are dwelt upon with much gusto and not a little sensuousness. The discreteness of the Arab mind is amply shown in concentration on individual parts of the body one by one. To take just one typical instance, the Arab poet has a long breath in expatiating on the saliva—its purity, coolness, freshness, and fragrance like that of “early morning rain collected in a clear stony pond”—which nectar he would suck, draught after draught, with the zest of a drunkard in order to convey the meaning of the simple word “kiss.” A life free from hard work is idealized for its effect in promoting feminine delicacy and untarnished complexion. To stay behind the curtains, well protected from the rigours of the weather, and jealously guarded in the manner of “the delicate shell of an egg under the feathers” was the vision which enthralled the heart of a young damsel. Qualities of heart, particularly modesty, gentleness of manners, friendliness towards neighbours, and mirthful coquetry in the company of the lover, are also highly appreciated but only as adjuncts of physical beauty. Having perforce to suffer long spans of solitude due to unsettled life, the Bedouin acquired high sensitivity to any stimulus to his memory.<sup>5</sup> Hence addresses to the natural surroundings associated with the exploits of the past and outbursts of sympathetic response to the cooing of the dove and the like are an ubiquitous feature. Further, it was this relish for musing which earned for the image of the beloved (*khayāl* or *ṭaif*) a special place in Arabic poetry.

The poet's feeling of love for the beloved is expressed only in general terms such as the comparison of his own heartache to that of “a she-camel who has lost her young one.” For the rest, the pursuit of love is only reminiscent of “the hot chase of a game.” The only relieving feature is that the Arab lover insists on a response to his love, and that without any trace of cringing.

Muhalhil b. Rabi'ah (c. 500 A.D.), whose very name bears testimony to his contribution. Al-Jumāhī (*Ṭabaqāt*, Cairo, 1952, p. 24) dates it from the time of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib and Hāshim b. 'Abd Manāf.

<sup>5</sup> There are touching stories of lovers who would intercede with the hunters to have the gazelles set free because of the resemblance of their eyes to the eyes of the beloved; cf. *Raghibat al-'Āmil*, VII, p. 39.

He would start taking pride in his own qualities so as not to leave any doubt about his deserts for the esteem of the beloved, but in the end he would not mind warning bluntly that although he relishes coquetry he cannot brook any affront to his dignity. That is why in describing the union he would take care to mention the yielding, passive and tacit though it may be, on the part of the beloved.

Incidental to the journeying of the poet in quest of love and fortune comes the description of the animals and the natural scene. It has been said that the camel occupies the same place in Arabic poetry as the cow in the *Rg-Veda*. The horse, no less indispensable for the normal pursuits of life including war, comes next. Though the description came soon afterwards to sound jejune even to the townsfolk of Baghdād, one cannot help being moved even today by the tenderly feeling shown to the two animals which equals to, sometimes even exceeds, that reserved for the members of the household. To bring out certain points of comparison in the riding beasts, the poet turns to the wild animals, among whom the pride of place goes to the wild ass, the wild cow, and the ostrich. The subject of wild life is frequently enlivened with fine thrilling scenes of flight and chase. The natural scene is, of course, dominated by clouds, thunder, lightning, rain, and the mirage, not to speak of the desert and the mountain valleys.

*The Madīh.*—The *nasīb* formed only a prelude to catch the ear of the audience, the main theme being the *madīh*. Though in the form of personal eulogy, it is really a concentration of the pride in the tribe. The particular patron to whom the verses are addressed is a mere peg on which to hang the ideal that united the tribe as against other tribes. The so-called virtues constituting this ideal are, in addition to the *ḥamās* already noted, the overpowering passion for vendetta, loyalty to friends and allies (and not to any moral law or civic organization), and hospitality to guests. The pride in valour was so all-engrossing that the dictates of prudence always needed a special, and somewhat diffident, pleading. But, as a rule, the Bedouin considered it below his dignity to try strength with an unequal foe, which is reflected in his acknowledgment of merit on the other side. Those who refused to be restrained by the collective interest and initiative of the tribe in the practice of these same virtues were designated the *ṣa'ālīk*, i.e., disowned outlaws, whose production bears the exceptional feature of defiance of tribal authority and extra hardihood. Hospitality and generosity were characterized by the same excesses as courage and aimed only at achieving prominence over other tribes. With the transition from tribal into some kind of State organization as, for example, at Hīrah, the panegyric tended to be more and more personal and acquired features of flattery.

*The Khātimah.*—The didactic epilogue was devoid of any depth of thought and merely embodied lessons learnt from practical experience in the particular and limited milieu. Religion sat very lightly on the pagan Arab; some occasional references to pre-Islamic ritual only prove that it was treated as part of an

inherited tribal custom<sup>6</sup> without symbolizing any moral ideal. The absence of religious thought and feeling is fully confirmed by the total lack of reasoning of any kind whatsoever. Death is frequently mentioned as a stark fact, but it only stimulated bravery, rather rashness, on the battlefield, on the one hand, and a sort of hectic hedonism in the intervals of peace, on the other. It is in this context that the poetry of the Jewish and Christian poets and such pagan poets as were influenced by their thought (e.g. Zuhair and the Hanifs) assumes a distinctive character. The idea of submission to a Supreme Power controlling man and the universe, a life after death involving moral retribution, and a spirit of peace and respect for the rights of others (the very antithesis of *hamās*) stand out as streaks of early morning light in the surrounding darkness. Such poetry flourished mostly in Hīrah and the oasis towns like Yathrib and al-Ṭā'if, which were also the centres of material civilization. Hence truly religious thought and emotion are found side by side with exhilarating pictures of urban refinement in luxury as in the poetry of 'Adiyy b. Zaid. It is noteworthy that the Romans and Christians were throughout, from the beginning down to the 'Abbāsid period, the purveyors not only of wines but also of the etiquette of wine-drinking.<sup>7</sup> Anyhow, wine-drinking had become a common habit. On the other hand, artistic music and dancing, so far as they are mentioned in pre-Islamic poetry, are mere clichés popularized by individuals who had occasions of frequenting centres of high life under Persian and/or Roman influence. Both these arts were neither indigenous to nor common in the Arabian society of the days before the Islamic conquests.

The *qaṣīdah* presented a series of thoughts moulded in self-contained verses strung together in the most impressive form of a single metre and *qāfiyah*. A thought running into more than one verse was a rarity and regarded somewhat as a weakness of the poet. But one wonders whether the outward unity which was so perfect as to invite the charge of monotony from the uninitiated possessed also a similar unity of thought and ideas. The fact is that there was enough of coherence internally within the two main parts, viz., the *nasīb* and the *madih*, though the appreciation of it depends upon a certain degree of familiarity with the pattern of life and the train of thought and feeling generated by it. It was only the transition from the first to the second part which was rather abrupt, either lacking a link altogether or depending upon one which was clearly artificial and weak. It is, however, untrue to say that the Arabs were not conscious of it; on the other hand, they were throughout applying their ingenuity to *ḥusn al-istiqrār* (grace of digression). Similarly, there is no doubt that the ideas as well as the modes of expression were stereotyped, but the primary reason for it is to be sought in the physical existence of the Arab Bedouin which was characterized, above all, by little variety. The

<sup>6</sup> The stock phrase attributed in the Qur'ān to the pagans in defence of their ways that "they found their forefathers practising them" faithfully exposes their lack of thought and reasoning.

<sup>7</sup> Vide al-Ma'arri, *Risālat al-Ḡhufrān*, ed. Bint al-Shāfi, p. 246.

preoccupation with a hard and meagre subsistence in a monotonous natural scene contributed to averseness to all serious reflection and to poverty of theme. At the same time the totalitarian demands of tribal loyalty left little room for indulgence in personal experience or individual reaction. As soon as thought was quickened by spiritual impulses from Judaism and Christianity and the monotony of life was relieved by the encroachment of Aramaean and Persian material civilizations, the structure of the *qaṣīdah* proved accommodative enough to change.

In addition to *hijā'*, there was one more form of artistic poetry, namely, the *rithā'* (elegy), which maintained its position independently of the *qaṣīdah*. Although this form too had its own clichés and was dominated by the spirit of *hamās* and the passion for vendetta, yet the element of strong personal emotion running through it is often genuine and highly remarkable. It is this reliability of the personal element which brings to the fore the strength of the lament of the sisters as compared with that of the wives, which is again a projection of the all-powerful importance of blood kinship.

The tradition has concerned itself only with the preservation of artistic poetry;<sup>8</sup> unconventional pieces prompted by events of everyday life were allowed to lapse. Yet a number of them noted for wit and humour (*al-mulāḥ*) are available for enjoyment on informal occasions.

*Islam and Poetry.*—Wherever the ideals of the *jāhiliyyah* suffered a decline owing to the growth of a sense of justice and corporate life under some kind of civic and political organization, there was left little scope for self-glorification at the expense of others (i.e., *hijā'*, *faḥr*, and *hamās*). Al-Jumāḥi makes an interesting point when he attributes the paucity of poets and the meagreness of poetry in the tribe of Quraish already before the advent of Islam to a sense of respect for the rights of others as exemplified by the incident arising out of the lampooning by ibn al-Zib'ara.<sup>9</sup> Thus pre-Islamic poetry being so dependent on tribal wars for its impulses and motives, Islam was bound to make the ground slip under the feet of the poets. As soon as the faithful renounced all pride (*al-nakhwah*) and blind partisanship (*al-'asabiyyah*) in favour of a universal egalitarian brotherhood and organized their life under a government by law, which guaranteed mutual rights and obligations, eliminating resort to force, and treated satire as punishable libel, the poets naturally felt that their day was over. Unable or unwilling to appreciate any ideal of morality, they turned their invectives against the person of Muḥammad and aligned themselves actively on the side of his opponents. It was such poets, and not poets or poetry in general, who were denounced in the Qur'ān as incapable of leadership due to lack of moral thinking and purposeful activity.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Al-Jumāḥi, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197; see also p. 217 where the same reason is adduced for the meagreness of poetry in al-Ṭā'if and 'Uman.

<sup>10</sup> Qur'ān, xxvi, 224 *et seq.* There is an exception in favour of those who are devoted to righteous belief and good deeds.

Severe penalties had also to be meted out to a number of them such as abu 'Azza, al-Naḍr b. al-Ḥārith and Ka'b b. al-Ashraf—all of whom had played a part as active competitors while using the art of poetry as an additional weapon directed especially against the person of Muḥammad, whose kindness they were not loth to exploit whenever they found themselves helpless.

But the reason for the vehement pique and chagrin of the poets against Islam went much deeper. The ideals of the *jāhiliyyah* were not the only thing involved; their art itself was threatened with dislodgment from the position or supremacy enjoyed theretofore. Was there not the Qur'ān held up as a challenge to artistic composition? It is quite understandable that the Arabs should be completely at a loss to place the Qur'ān in any of the categories of artistic composition known to them. They would call it *al-shi'r* (poetry) when their own poetic production was so palpably different from it both in form and content. Only poetry had been known to exercise such sway over the minds of the people as the Qur'ān did. If it were not poetry it could only be grouped along with the utterances of a soothsayer (*kāhin*) or a person in trance (*maḥnūn*). This equation, however, had an ostensibly disparaging intent inasmuch as such utterances were seldom held in high esteem as a piece of art. The allusion was only to their enigmatic character in which the people deciphered fortune and prophecy. When at last they turned to the content, they gave unmistakable proof of their *jāhiliyyah* outlook on finding the Qur'ān to be merely a bundle of "the stories of the ancient peoples" (*asāḥir al-awwālīn*). Soon they propped up one of them, al-Naḍr b. al-Ḥārith, to draw the people away from the Qur'ān with his skill in reciting the stories of Rustam and Isfandiyār. As a matter of fact, the form of the Qur'ān is derived from a familiar pattern, yet it represents a new class by itself. It is prose composed of short, compact sentences which, when read together, sound as balanced counterparts (*mathānī*), the endings (*fawāṣil*) of them having a distinguishable cadence free from the shackles of a regular *saḥ*. It bewildered and dismayed the Arabs that this form which, in contrast with the familiar pattern of the soothsayers, tending to simplicity rather than artificial encumbrance, should soar to such height of inimitable perfection as to constitute a challenge to poetry. The same is true of the diction employed in the Qur'ān: it is clear and easily intelligible (*mubīn*), yet pure and elegant. But whatever the elegance of form and diction, the uniqueness of the Qur'ān lay particularly in its content: the reflection on the world of nature as distinguished from an aesthetic worship of it, the search for a goal of life and an ideal of morality in human conduct, in short, the awakening of the forces of good in the nature of man to set limits to, and control, the evil in himself. It was this content which made the Qur'ān the prototype of an entirely new class of literary composition. In later times it was an aberration of the pre-Islamic taste which exalted the excellence of the word over and above that of the content.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The example of the Qur'ān illustrates the principle of novelty in literary

It is quite easy for us to realize the dismay of the poets whose production, when judged subsequently by the standards of the Greek philosophers, was found to be nothing but an exhortation to lewdness; only two qualities of character, namely, bravery and generosity, were such as could be said to be harmless to the youth. But the Prophet appreciated their art much more than they realized. He would not taboo poetry; rather, he would listen eagerly to the verse of Umayyah b. abi al-Ṣalt and many others. He was not even indifferent. On the other hand, he adopted the way of active patronage and guidance to make clear the demands for adjustment. As an example, let us take the case of Ka'b b. Zuhair. The ode which brought him the *burdah* (mantle) as a prize is in the traditional style: it opens with erotic verses lamenting separation from the beloved, Su'ād, and recalling her physical charms, not excluding the intoxication of the saliva compared to wine. The *madiḥ* puts on a new aspect in so far as the glorification of the new ideal is concerned.<sup>12</sup> But the poet did not yet know how to restrain his passion for satire; he had to make amends for suppressed expressions on the Anṣār. Thus, the only demand made by orthodox Islam on the poets was to avoid the proud and gleeful recounting of adventures of sinful pleasure such as abound in the verses of the "Vagabond Prince," and to refrain from indulging in tribal pride or exaltation of force regardless of moral rectitude.<sup>13</sup> Within these ordinary limits of decency and peaceful life the old literary traditions were to survive and grow. It has particularly to be noted that erotic interest in woman or even the mention of wine as a symbol of joyful experience was fully legitimate in the context of Islam's recognition of merit only in the lawful pursuit, and not in renunciation, of sensuous pleasure. As the examples of Dābi' b. al-Ḥārith and al-Ḥuṭai'ah would prove, only the satire and the libel were sternly put down.

*Development of the Ghazal.*—The detachment of poetry from the passions and the fury of tribal antagonism as well as the absence under the Orthodox Caliphate of that corruptive patronage which draws talent away from universal human interests to flattery of personages, conducted inevitably to concentration on the theme of love in poetry and song. These arts were cultivated in the Ḥijāz by the sprightly and intelligent youth from among the nobility of the Anṣār and the *Muhājirīn*, who were precluded from playing their part in politics and government and were at the same time pampered with frequent accessions to their already vast hereditary fortune in the form of largesses on behalf of the Umayyads. Thus frustration, leisure,

form. In order to achieve the paramount purpose of communication and effect, novelty must always be embedded in familiarity.

<sup>12</sup> The verses of ibn al-Zib'ara are much more explicit on the subject of renunciation of the old and devotion to the new ideal, *vide* al-Jumāḥi, *op. cit.*, pp. 202–03.

<sup>13</sup> An excellent example of the change of values in this respect is provided by the *hijā'* of al-Najāshī which was taken by 'Umar to be an eulogy, *vide* ibn Qutaibah, *op. cit.*, I, p. 290.

and opulence all combined to turn the creative genius to art and amusement. The peculiarly Islamic institution of rehabilitating the prisoners of war as members of the households of the conquerors, instead of segregating them in penal camps, has always had far-reaching consequences, in the field of cultural interchange but never were such consequences so great as in the case of the conquest of Persia. Suffice it to say that it was the new Persian element in the households of Mecca and Medina which for the first time introduced artistic music and dancing in the very heart of Arabian society.<sup>14</sup> In the special traditions of the people and the time, there was no music and dancing without poetry. Therefore, poetry underwent a highly welcome and profound change both in form as well as content. Whereas in the *jāhiliyyah* period the motif of aggressive self-glorification often made some of the more militant tribes positively to discourage the *ghazal*, it now came to be the main theme catering to the refined aesthetic taste and tenderly feelings of the new society. Naturally enough, the erotic prelude came in handy for development as an independent form, which, by the way, marked the beginning of the breaking-up of the "loose unity of the *qasidah*."

The development of the independent form of the *ghazal* took two distinct and parallel lines. First, the licentious (*al-ibāhiyy*) *ghazal*, best represented by 'Umar b. abi Rabi'ah (d.c. 101/719), flourished in the towns and faithfully reflected the high life obtaining there. As compared with the pre-Islamic *nasib*, this *ghazal* is an end in itself. The poet is no longer a warrior made essentially of hard stuff, who snatches a few moments of respite to devote to the hot pursuit of a woman. Rather he is an amiable and amorous youth entirely devoted to the cultivation of his feeling of love and desire for soft dalliance without being distracted by any thought of tribal security and personal safety. The description of physical charms is no more a mere description; it is rather a fine aesthetic appreciation of beauty. Still more remarkable is the shifting of the focus inwards and the transformation of the union into an exchange of feeling and sentiment.<sup>15</sup> And both the lover and the beloved are endowed with sharp wit, humour, and the mood for sport. In short, the qualities of the mind and the longings of the heart come to the fore and find unimpeded expression. Special delight is taken in the evasion of social restrictions and the celebration of clandestine visits while the congregation at the time of the *hajj* is brought in as the connoisseur's opportunity for the enjoyment of beauty from far and near. The second kind of *ghazal* was born of the ideal of Platonic love cultivated in the desert. The chastening influence of the restraints of Islam on the

<sup>14</sup> Up till the days of 'Umar, Arabian music was nothing but intonation of voice in the manner of a camel-driver reciting his songs (*vide al-Aghāni*, VIII, p. 149, quoted in *Fajr al-Islām*, p. 120). This accounts most plausibly for the absence of reference in the Qur'an to music and dancing while the symbolization of wine is so commonplace.

<sup>15</sup> *Vide* al-Jāhiz quoted in *Duḥā al-Islām*, I, p. 15.

simple-living Bedouins had the remarkable result of originating the conception of love shorn of all tinge of bodily lust—an ideal conception thoroughly unknown to the pre-Islamic Arab. This ideal is enshrined in the highly subjective verse centring around the popular stories of Majnūn-Laila and Jamil-Buthainah. They may or may not have been real historical personages; what really matters is that they do represent a type of idealistic lover who regards any touch of lust as desecration of love, beauty, and art. No wonder that the physical charms are overshadowed by a *tête-à-tête* between two hearts full of deep pathos.

*Vilifying Ghazal*.—It has already been noted that the lover-poets of the towns were really men of frustrated political ambitions. Their impotent rage against the rulers would not be held back even when they sought to beguile it with art. Rather it is highly interesting to note that it should turn the artistic form of the licentious *ghazal* into an instrument for vilification and political vendetta. Taking the typical example of ibn Qais al-Ruqayyāt (d.c. 80/699–700) one finds him mentioning Umm al-Banīn, the wife of al-Walid b. 'Abd al-Malik, as the object of his flirtation. His aim was no other than to leave the Umayyad monarch smarting with anger, even though sometimes he adroitly contrived in the verse itself to absolve the innocent lady of guilt.

Apart from political vendetta, it became a commonplace with the poets to give rebirth to *hijā'* in the form of *ghazal* by mentioning the ladies and the female relations of their enemies in shamefully amorous terms. How unrelated to truth all this was, is illustrated by the incident of Umm Ja'far. When she could not keep patience over al-Aḥwās, a Medinese poet, mentioning her in his verses in order to bring her people into disrepute, she caught hold of him one day in the market-place and demanded of him the money which, she made out, he owed to her. As the poet swore that he did not know her at all, she remarked: Of course, you do not know me, yet you mention many things about me in your verses. It is no surprise that State authority was sometimes invoked against such poets in the same way as it was invoked in the case of the direct *hijā'* of al-Ḥuṭai'ah and others. At the same time there is evidence to show that at least the high-class ladies aspired to have their charms sung by the poets in the same way as in our own days they would feel proud to see their photographs in newspapers. It must, however, be remembered that, on the whole, "licence" was confined to a disregard of social conventions relating to contacts between the two sexes; otherwise obscenity was guarded against in all good taste.

In regard to form, it is enough to remind ourselves that the lover-poets of Mecca and Medina produced for the first time a lyric verse specially designed to be set to music. With this purpose they naturally preferred such metres as were short and characterized by an easy flow, though they continued to rely mainly on the old tradition itself. Consequent upon the development of natural, humanistic interests, all artificiality about the language and

pompousness was shed and simple unaffected expression in familiar words and soft tones came to be aimed at. To some, though very limited, extent, continuous verse also came into use for such purposes as the reproduction of dialogues in love-poetry.

It so happened that the merits of the Umayyad poetry set out above received little appreciation owing to the preoccupation of the scholars with such pre-Islamic poetry as might be helpful in the study and preservation of the idiom of the Qur'ān. With regard to its appreciation, the time factor alone was of the prime importance; hence the prejudice in favour of the pre-Islamic verse became stereotyped, and all-pervading. It was ibn Khaldūn who first realized that, linguistic research apart, the intrinsic artistic merits of the Umayyad poetry were definitely far superior to those of the pre-Islamic poetry. And the reason for it was that those who lived under Islam benefited from the model of high-class speech provided by the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth; hence their literary taste improved a great deal beyond that of the pre-Islamic people. That this improvement should have taken a generation to manifest itself fully in poetry (and also in prose), was quite natural and should not stand in the way of tracing it to its origins in Islam. The depth of thought, the richness of imagination, the paramountcy of content, the search within for the feelings of the heart, and the consciousness of the restraint of reason, no matter if it is disobeyed, are all traceable direct to the influence of Islam and its Holy Book, and these general qualities are perceptible in the post-Islamic production even where the themes are un-Islamic. It was perhaps this un-Islamic element such as the "licence" in *ghazal* and the lampooning in the *naqā'id* which, in addition to the necessities of linguistic research, turned the attention away from the contribution of Islam to the literary production of the Umayyad period. Ibn Khaldūn further tells us that some of the learned scholars of his time had to acknowledge their dormant impression of the superior merits of the post-Islamic production, as if it were to their own surprise, but were unable to give any reason for it.<sup>16</sup> No wonder that the view of ibn Khaldūn should remain unattended until it found an echo in Ṭaha Ḥusain, although the latter's judgment seems to have been the result of the application of the modern standards of literary criticism in the West.

If one were to look for the dominating motif of poetry in Islam itself, it will be found in the verses of the Khārijites. Their production represents a characteristic regimentation of the pre-Islamic qualities of hardihood, courage, and sacrifice in the service of the ideology of Islam. Just because it is as true to life as the poetry of the pre-Islamic age, the new spirit, ideals, and sentiments are clearly discernible. Yet it symbolizes, according to the cultural milieu of the Khārijites, the purely ancient Arab tradition as mellowed by Islamic puritanism. Most interesting is the survival without any loss of attraction of the erotic theme in a society where even the "talk" of wine or a mere

<sup>16</sup> Ibn Khaldūn, *Maqaddimah*, Chap. VI (49).

hint of laxity in relationship between the two sexes was an unpardonable offence. Equally notable is the spirit of martyrdom which would not allow virility to be impaired by a relish of tragedy and pathos for their own sake.

While under the Islamic influence poetry was set on its course of development along natural, humanistic lines, the corruptive patronage of the Court stepped in to revive the old tribal antagonism and buy off unscrupulous, though talented, poets to act as its propagandists. Thus the trio—Farazdaq, Jarir, and al-Akḥṭal—attained high fame in the field of panegyric and lampoon. They couched praise for the Umayyads as well as invectives against their opponents in the true form of the *qaṣīdah* with its carefully chosen diction and high-flown style. The Christian al-Akḥṭal, who, by the way, was considered to be free to revel in wine without offending Muslim piety, was also remarkable for his willingness to step in where a Muslim, irrespective of his alignment, feared to tread, namely, the satire against the Anṣār. The counter offensive from the other side showed a much more genuine feeling of devotion not only to the House of the Prophet but also to the ideal of justice and public weal popularly associated with it.

The contrast between the settled life in the towns and the Bedouin ways of the desert has throughout been a powerful factor in Arab thought and history. Islam, with its marked predilection for congregational activity, accelerated as never before the process of drawing emigrants from the desert, who flocked into the towns to enlist in military service, State organizations, and economic activity. This created a nostalgia in the mind of some poets who introduced a new theme, viz., the comparison of the new life, including the charms and manners of the damsels of the towns, with the old ways of the desert. Even in regard to the *qaṣīdah*, though its conventional form remained intact, the new pattern of society changed the modes of thought and the manners of expression sufficiently to render the purely Bedouin tradition a mere curiosity. This curiosity had its last protagonist in Dhū al-Rummah (d. 117/755). It was somewhat in the same spirit that the oldest and the simplest form of *rajaz* was employed in long *qaṣīdahs* pedantically overloaded with rare vocabulary.

*The 'Abbāsīd Era.*—With the advent of the 'Abbāsids the corruptive patronage of the Court, which siphoned poetic talent into the *madih*, expanded to such an extent that only a few could keep themselves free from it just because they were consciously determined to do so. Curiously enough, as the Caliphate declined it only led to a multiplicity of such centres of patronage and thus the servility of the poets went on increasing further and further. At any rate, the growth of luxury and the enrichment of culture from foreign sources was bound to seek an outlet in new forms and modes of poetry. Fortunately the traditional *qaṣīdah* did comprise within its orbit a large number of themes concerned with peaceful enjoyment or warlike activity, which, in their developed form under the Empire, now claimed separate treatment. All that was required was to salvage the various themes from

regimentation by the all-engrossing passion of tribal solidarity as signified by the supremacy of the *madih*. This process, which started with the development of the *ghazal* under the Umayyads, took its full course in the following era until all the topics treated incidentally in the old tradition branched off into independent kinds.

*Further Development of the Ghazal.*—It will be remembered that Islam, not being a monastic religion, regards woman not as a taboo but as one of the three things dearest to the Prophet. Thus the theme in itself, far from offending the moral sense, was particularly compatible with Islam's bold affirmation of nature. Significant is the use in the Qur'an of this very imagery of woman and wine for the conveyance of an idea of the highest bliss in the heavens. It must, however, be admitted that a certain degree of licentiousness has actually attended upon the development of the *ghazal* from the very beginning. Towards this element of licentiousness the early Islamic society adopted an attitude of practical toleration as apart from official recognition; it was only the personal scandal which was generally condemned by the people and sternly curbed by the State. This tolerant attitude is best embodied in an incident at the Court of Sulaimān b. 'Abd al-Malik. Once when al-Farazdaq recited to the monarch such verses of his as amounted to a confession of adultery, the monarch perhaps could think of no better way of expressing his appreciation than to embarrass the poet with a threat of legal cognizance and penalty. But calmly the poet asked him: "The sanction behind the penalty?" "Of course, the Qur'an," replied the monarch, whereupon the poet retorted: "All right, the Qur'an itself assumes my innocence when it says of the poets that they 'celebrate in speech what they do not practise!'"<sup>17</sup> Truly, there is much more than wit in the argument of the poet; it gives pointed cognizance to the fact that a poet relies mainly on his mental experience. Practical experience has no essential bearing on art; rather it is a matter of personal character.<sup>18</sup> In the words of abu Nuwās, one can safely and effectively "talk of fire without burning one's mouth." Thus cultivation of the erotic verse, including the licentious *ghazal*, originated and flourished vigorously under Islam in public circles. But as soon as it was transferred to the royal palace it suffered from the same servility to the over-indulged baser instinct of the patrons as the *madih* in relation to their inflated sense of vainglory. At the palace the poet was promoted to the position of a boor companion who shared the privacy and the intimacy of the patron, and enlightened, diverted, and amused him with appropriate citations,

<sup>17</sup> Ibn Qutaibah, *op. cit.*, I, p. 451.

<sup>18</sup> In all Islamic literature some of the best wine songs have been produced by those who never tasted it. After all, does an actor actually experience death before he successfully acts the scene on the stage? Even the poets who waxed eloquent on the properties of the saliva safeguarded the chastity of the lady-love by saying at the end that they knew of it just as one knew of the water in the cloud by the flash of lightning.

impromptu compositions, and ready wit. It is legitimate to link this institution with the life of the pre-Islamic poet, al-Nābighah, at the Court of Hīrah, but one has to take note of the steadily increasing dissoluteness and sexual exhibitionism which began with al-Walid II and reached its climax in abu Nuwās.<sup>19</sup> This exhibitionism was designated separately as *al-khalā'ah al-mujūn* and was relished only in the company of intimate friends as a source of enjoyment. From the palaces it percolated down to public circles and was preserved only for the sake of witticism and elegance of language—undeniably a saving grace about it. When devoid of wit and shorn of all obliquity it was condemned outright as obscene and in sheer bad taste.

*Bohemianism.*—In public circles the joys of life were idealized in terms overtly disdainful of moral restraint under the pressure of another set of circumstances in which national and political rivalries played a significant part. It has been noted above that in the initial stage licence in poetry was treated apart from the personal character of the poet. But gradually the poet's own guilty conscience and the general social approbation caused him to introduce in poetry itself some sort of defence of his own promiscuous way of life. This involved an active propagation of the disregard of social and moral values, scorn for the religious preceptor, an invidious lack of faith in after-life and at the same time a somewhat philosophical justification for the excesses from God's quality of "forgiveness." Even this development left the larger section of society unalarmed; it was taken merely as an exercise of wit and humour. Soon, however, there was a further development in the peculiar atmosphere of Baghdad which was torn by Persian-Arab rivalry—a rivalry fanned by the alignment of the Persian element with the 'Abbāsids. In Baghdad certain types of literary Bohemians, mostly Persians, organized themselves into cells or clubs where wine, women (those of a low status, of course), and poetry full of sarcasm for the orthodox way of life were zealously enjoyed. From apologetics it now passed into the phase of active glorification of practical libertinism. And all this was done in a spirit of arrogant demonstration of the intellectual refinement and cultural superiority of the Persians so much so that *zarf* (quickness of wit) came to be proverbially associated with this class of proud libertines—*zindiqs* as they were called.<sup>20</sup> Although it is very doubtful that many of these Bohemians were genuinely devoted to Zoroastrianism or Manichaeism as against Islam, it is a fact that some of them were bold enough to mention the names of Zoroaster and Māni as the Bacchus-like patrons of libertinism as against the restrictions on pleasure symbolized by Islam. Anyway, there is little doubt that this cultural arrogance

<sup>19</sup> It is only an exuberance of popular fancy which has foisted the *mujūn* on abu Nuwās on the company of Hārūn al-Rashīd. Ibn Khaldūn has noted the incongruity of it with the restraint and dignity of the bearing of the great monarch.

<sup>20</sup> An exact parallel is to be observed in our own day: Is it not that wine-drinking, ball-room dancing, and cabaret shows are associated with the superiority of the cultural taste and the intellectual refinement of Western provenance?



was linked with the aspiration to greater and greater political control, which made the 'Abbāsids closely watch and suspect their own supporters. While the public were left speculating as to the cause of the sudden downfall of the Barmakids, a methodical *zindiq*-hunt was set afoot, the verses of the poets were incriminatingly dissected at ceremonial trials and the guillotine applied to the partners in the widespread net of conspiracy.<sup>21</sup> Thus the poetry of Bashshār (d. 168/784) came to be typical of that pursuit of refinement and culture which is associated with the enjoyment of woman and wine and their celebration in arts and song enlivened by wit, humour, and sarcasm on social and moral restrictions.

Before we pass on it has to be added in regard to these libertines that their fund of humour and sarcasm was not exhausted in their engagements with the opponents; their unprincipled levity often caused them to exercise the same resources against one another. Hence most of them have the reputation as satirists as well.

*New Features of the Ghazal.*—A few special features of the new *ghazal* under the 'Abbāsids have to be noted. First, there was the addition, almost substitution, of the male for the female object of love. It must be admitted that it almost amounted to a common social vice attributable to Persian influence. Secondly, a refined taste in similes and metaphors and the subtlety of imagination in general are also traceable to the same source. Thirdly, though gleeful descriptions of wine were quite old in Arabic poetry, the subject came now to be cultivated as an independent art. As with the theme of beauty so with that of wine; it is no longer a mere description of the transparency of the glass, the colour of the wine, the various stages of brewing, and the haggling of the wine-seller over its price, nor is wine-drinking a mere appurtenance of nobility. The emphasis now is on the inner sensation of abandonment and revelry experienced by the drunkard. Lastly, one has to take account of the special characteristic of Islamic society which causes even renegades of the type of abu Nuwās to be overtaken by remorse and pious reflection in old age. Hence, *al-shaib w-al-shabāb* (old age and youth) developed into a recurring and semi-independent theme closely associated with the *nasīb*. It is characterized by recollections of the pleasures which are no more within reach or capacity—a feature inherited from pagan poetry. Under the influence of Islam it was complemented with a desire to make amends for the erroneous ways of the past.

<sup>21</sup> It is not merely a sentimental reaction but a perfectly reasonable attitude that the liberties taken by Iqbāl's "love" in the presence of God be denied to one who talks of God from the atheistic viewpoint. A verse of Hāfiẓ ridiculing formalism in religion will be appreciated by the Muslims, who would legitimately resent the same being quoted in the context of an anti-God movement. Also significant are the words in which al-Mahdi interceded with his father, al-Manṣūr, on behalf of Muṭi' b. Iyās. He pleaded that Muṭi' was only a *fāsiq* (libertine) and not a *zindiq*, i.e., not committed to overthrowing the existing order.

*Moral, Philosophical, and Mystic Poetry.*—It would be a very lopsided view indeed if we imagined the 'Abbāsīd society to be merely that which is pictured by the boon companions of the *élite* and the Bohemians of the metropolis. Religion and morality had their own devotees and champions in no way negligible either in numbers or in importance. In the very nature of things, however, religion, as apart from religious sentiment, could not be cultivated in poetry. Morals formed a fit theme for poetical art. They also had a precedent in the so-called wise sayings of the pre-Islamic poets, though these latter were entirely devoid of any element of reasoning in them. Abu al-'Atāhiyah (d. 213/828) introduced moralizing verse characterized by thought and reflection but it was because of this very new basis that it came in for reserve and suspicion. Also it inevitably involved criticism of the prevalent modes of society. Abu al-'Atāhiyah sometimes appears as the spokesman of the downtrodden masses bringing to the notice of the Caliph their economic plight and difficulties. Most unfortunate of all, the entire theme was permeated with a mood of pessimism which persisted and was steadily augmented by the influx of philosophical ideas and monastic tendencies. Philosophical poetry reached its highest achievement with abu al-'Alā' al-Ma'arri (d. 449/1057), who made a frontal attack on all religions as such and exalted reason in opposition to revelation. Yet he remained the pessimist *par excellence*. His eclecticism also centred around the austere as exemplified by the particular features of Indian philosophy adopted by him. Still more important is to remember that pure philosophy proved no more delectable in verse than religion. Even though abu al-'Alā' was a master of literary arts, his philosophical poetry remained a simple statement of judgment and argument unclothed in poetic imagery; hence it provided enough justification for denouncing it as "no poetry at all" (ibn Khaldūn). His resort to jugglery with words is also a further proof, if proof were needed, of his woeful failure to devise a truly poetic form for the presentation of his philosophical thought.<sup>22</sup> That is why his poetry seldom achieved any high degree of popularity, though he was, and has throughout been, highly respected as a scholar. It is wrong to attribute this to the prejudice against the anti-Islamic ideas contained in it. Had it been so, the production of the libertine poets would not have fared any better. The true reason is that abu al-'Alā's poetry was bare of essential poetic appurtenances. In the words of an Arab critic, the art of poetry consists in making a thing appear beautiful: the intrinsic beauty of the thing or the idea would not make up for any crudity of presentation. The libertine poets were accomplished masters of this art of presentation; hence, unlike abu al-'Alā', they were widely enjoyed but seldom respected.

<sup>22</sup> In our own time Iqbāl succeeded eminently where abu al-'Alā' failed miserably. Iqbāl's employment of the traditional language of the mystics, which sometimes misleads even great scholars to take him for a mystic, is a device to make his ideas appear beautiful. Such a popular and familiar literary medium is all the more essential when the ideas are novel and unfamiliar.

In contrast with philosophy, mystic ideas belong essentially to the theme of love and naturally command for their expression all the paraphernalia of love poetry. The high sentimentalism of the mystic poets was enough to ensure for them a strong popular appeal, in consequence of which they came in for persecution while abu al-'Alā', a lone voice, was left comfortably alone. Again, we have to note that, significantly enough, the popularity of mystic poetry survived all questioning of the orthodoxy of its contents and even the attacks on the person of the mystics. But the excessive sentimentalism of the mystic poetry centring around the beatific vision is such as to have a lamentably adverse effect on the search for clear, practical ideal of life and the urge to realize it through activity. The passivity of an intoxicated visionary, as opposed to the ardent activity of a devoted missionary, formed the keynote of it.

*Formal Panegyric.*—Apart from the lighter side of the life in the privacy of the palace, which was shared and recorded by the *naḍīm*-poet, there were many formal occasions and official assemblies at the Court when the emphasis was on decorum and dignity. On such occasions it was the strictly conventional form of the *madīḥ*, the *qaṣīdah*, which was in vogue. In view of the rigidity of its forms already noted, it is no surprise that it required the highest skill to handle it with success. In any case, the monotony of the stereotype could only be made up with hyperbole and rhetorical tropes of all kinds. Some pedantic display of logic and philosophy was also introduced as a novelty.

As these formal panegyrics were designed in the manner of the party press of our own day to exalt the powers that be in the eyes of the public, naturally enough they were replete with references to the political ideology—often bound up with specific religious belief and dogma—of the ruling dynasty as, for example, the claims of the 'Abbāsids *vis-à-vis* the 'Alids. But, while there were scores of those who for sordid gain served as mere trumpeters, there was no dearth of those who spoke from conviction. And in fairness it must be said that the conscientious objectors on the side of the opposition were given a long rope only if they had the courage to forgo the patronage of the Court.

It was also in this traditional form fit for themes of grandeur and no levity that the incidents of the wars were pictured. They came to be particularly relished by the Bedouin spirit of the Ḥamdānids under the shadow of the Crusades. Another theme cognate with it was that of the prison-poems (*al-ḥabsiyyāt*) best represented by abu Firās (d. 357/968). They are an impressive blend of nostalgia for home, pathos of suffering, and indomitable courage.

*Complaint against Time* (*Shakwah al-Zamān*).—Perhaps the most depressing aspect of the poetry of these times is the common expression of dissatisfaction with one's lot and a feeling of insecurity in respect of life, property, and position. As undeserving people enjoy wealth and power and real merit is neglected, nay persecuted, consolation is sought in the acceptance of this state of affairs as the "way of the world"—the decree of fate beyond

the control of man. There was no such dominant note of despondency and helplessness when the pre-Islamic poet occasionally bemoaned the inscrutability of fate (*jadd*) and the failure of his hard struggle (*jidd*) to bring him the coveted reward. Even in the early days of Islam fate did not appear to be so arbitrary: when there was dissatisfaction it was directed against *persons*—tyrants and their dynasties. It is only in the late 'Abbāsīd period that the complaint against "Time"<sup>23</sup> became almost a fashion so much so that the poets simulated it in the same way as they simulated love.

*Personal and Occasional Verse.*—It was characteristic of the progress of culture that poetry be sought after as the medium for the communication of thought and feeling occasioned by the vicissitudes of personal relations and small incidents in everyday life. The pre-Islamic poet also had frequent occasions to address his "*ibn al-'amm*" (cousin) in reprobatory terms, but his utterances were deep-rooted in the actual matter-of-fact struggle for existence. The *ikhwānīyyāt* of the period under review constitute a branch of cultivation of elegance. The difference is the same as between an actual fighter and an amateur sportsman. The topics range over estrangement, effort at reconciliation, and tickling and teasing through wit and humour. These categories, however, appear to be sham when compared with the impressive genuineness of the pieces relating to incidents in everyday life as, for example, the one attributed to a *literatus* who was compelled to part with his collection of books in a time of adversity. This kind of poetry concerning the unaffected, natural gushing forth of some poignant feeling or passion aroused by the actual facts of life reached its full development in Spain in general and in the verses of al-Mu'tamid in particular. A strong element of genuine enthusiasm and personal acrimony is also evoked by the rivalry among the diverse national groups: the Arabs, the Persians, the Turks, the Romans, and the Negroes. Pride-cum-satire was the popular form of championing one nationality against the other on the basis of ethnology, history, mental qualities, and cultural achievements. This must be distinguished from the aspect noted above which concerned the exaltation of a particular kind of social and cultural life.

*Descriptive Poetry.*—Beauty no longer remained confined to nature: there were high mansions, fortified castles, exquisite mosques, and public buildings, and, above all, public and private gardens, aqueducts and boat-houses—all claiming attention from the artist and the poet. Even the starlit sky and the cloudy horizon were endowed with a new charm: to the Bedouin they gave only a simple impression of awe and induced a mood of little good cheer; to the Baghdādian who went out for a stroll in the evening they catered to his desire for the enjoyment of beauty. Thus, the descriptive poetry of this

<sup>23</sup> This is the "abuse of time" which is expressly prohibited by the Prophet. Only he would curse the stars who believes himself to be a passive object under their blind inexorable influence. Islam, on the other hand, stands for man's active and dominant role in setting the pattern of life through the instrumentality of the process of time as ordained by God; cf. Iqbāl, *Asrār-i Khudi*.

period, which often monopolizes the larger part of long *qaṣīdahs*, is almost something new. It is exhilarating indeed to find roses being compared to cheeks and tall cypress to the slim stature of damsels rather than *vice versa* as of yore. Flowers in particular were the craze of the tasteful and the elegant, who even used them as symbols of moods and sentiments in their exchanges of love.<sup>24</sup> No surprise that the description of flowers (*al-zahrīyyāt*) should grow into a semi-independent branch of poetry in which al-Ṣanūbari (d. 334/945) distinguished himself in the East. Yet there is nothing comparable to the poetry of Spain so far as high sensitivity to nature is concerned. There the poet not only describes and enjoys nature but also shows himself to be in communion with it. Another branch of descriptive poetry which attained semi-independent form was *al-ṭardīyyāt* (venery poems). It also reflected in ample measure the trappings of luxury and civilization around an old traditional interest.

*Panegyrics on the Prophet* (al-Madā'ih al-Nabawīyyah).—As we have seen earlier there was no time lost in celebrating the achievements of the Prophet and composing panegyrics on him in the traditional form and style of the *qaṣīdah*. When the Umayyads fanned political partisanship by employing the poets to denounce their rivals, it evoked a new spirit of selfless devotion to the cause of the 'Alids, which found its most forceful exponent in al-Kumait. It soon became a panegyric on the family of the Prophet which was characterized, apart from legal arguments in favour of the 'Alid claims, by a good deal of symbolism of pathos and suffering drawn from the incidents of history. A concomitant theme of high general interest was the condemnation of tyranny, oppression, and misrule coupled with the fervent hope of return to ideal conditions at the hands of the virtuous Imāms. The two sides carried on the old bout right through the 'Abbāsid period during which the 'Alids continued to be in the wilderness of opposition. In later times when the political controversy lost a good deal of realism and turned into mere sectarian ritual, this kind of poetry was taken over into the circles of the Sufis, who concerned themselves particularly with its content of loyal sentiment and tragic pathos. These Sufi composers, it will be remembered, were seldom men of high literary attainments nor did they care to examine facts and rely on them alone. Rather they would introduce all sorts of superstition which would feed sentimentalism. A famous example of this kind is the pseudo-*Burdah* of al-Būṣīri (died 694/1294–95) which, though not devoid of literary elegance, is typical of superstitious belief and is esteemed primarily for its supposed magical properties.

The framework of these panegyrics being that of the traditional *qaṣīdah*, the essential prelude of erotic verses was there. It was, however, observed as a convention that in this particular context "love" should be characterized by restraint and dignity rather than "licence." For example, it was speci-

fically disallowed to mention a male object of love or to refer to the hips or the charm of the naked shin among the physical attractions. It will be seen that this only confirms the thesis advanced earlier that erotic interest in woman (without licence) was no offence to Muslim piety.

Still later when originality became rarer the form and the theme of the panegyric on the Prophet were used for the demonstration of one's skill in rhetorical tropes; such *qaṣīdahs* were designated the *badī'īyyāt*. That kind of play with words is, of course, beyond the purview of poetry proper.

*Adaptation of Metre and Diction*.—It was indicated at the very beginning that the metrical forms handed down by the pre-Islamic poets continued to hold their own throughout the classical period. We have only to review the adaptation of these forms to the demands of new developments in theme and style. First, there was the preference of short, flexible metres and then, with the dethronement of the *madīh*, the tendency to short pieces devoted to single or closely allied themes. However, the only departure from the tradition with regard to the *qāfiyah* was the adoption from the Persian of the *muzdawaj*, i.e., tenzon with each verse having a separate rhyme for its two hemistiches (instead of the whole poem having a single rhyme for the endings of each verse). This was the form attributed to the Zoroastrian scriptural psalms which the *zindīq* poets were charged with reciting in secret. And obviously this was the form best suited for the epic which, because of its length, made it well-nigh impossible to sustain one single rhyme-ending. But though the form of the epic narrative (*al-shi'r al-qaṣaṣīyy*) was found, the Arabic poets failed to achieve anything remarkable in the field from an aesthetic viewpoint. The early pioneers, ibn al-Mu'tazz and al-Khuraimi, were tolerably good in picturing national calamities but unfortunately it was now reduced to a mere mnemonic versification of the chronicles of kings and dynasties without anything of genuine poetry about it.

No sooner did the need to please the vanity of the patron disappear than the diction tended to be unaffected, soft, sweet, and naturally fit for the theme and the content. Abu al-'Atāhiyah, himself a pitcher-seller, succeeded particularly well in employing the simple language of the common people without any loss of standards. On the other hand, this trend towards the natural and the unaffected suffered some degeneration at the hands of the libertine poets like Bashshār, who did not mind effeminacy and the verbatim reproduction of the idiom of the sporting women in the private company of lovers.

*Strophic Verse*.—It is quite understandable that the need for strophic verse should arise as soon as music and dancing were introduced in Arabia consequent upon the Islamic conquest of Persia. Al-Khalil has left behind a few verses which are like a formula for the rhythmic beating of the feet.<sup>25</sup> Further, the attempt to evolve an artistic form for the special purposes of

<sup>24</sup> See the interesting treatise on elegant manners by al-Washshā' (Leiden, 1887).

<sup>25</sup> Vide *Risālat al-Ghufrān*, p. 183.

music and dance took the direction of adaptation of the old tradition rather than a complete innovation. The full length of a poem was divided into parts consisting of two or more verses, each part having a different single rhyme for its several hemistiches but all the parts followed by the repetition of a particular verse with a rhyme of its own and thus held together as if by a string (Ar. *simt*; hence the device called *al-tasmī*). This evolution must have taken place at a very early period since it is ascribed without certainty to Imru' al-Qais. It was the same device which was employed to take greater liberties with rhyme (and also metre) in Spain under the name of *al-muwash-shah* (from *wishāh* meaning girdle). Later when the colloquial dialect was fully admitted to this form it came to be known as the *zajal*. Thus it came to be an artistic form just free enough to be within the easy comprehension and unsophisticated taste of all, yet devoid of none of the essentials of traditional art. From Spain it was brought to Egypt and the East and achieved a high degree of popularity. There were still more spontaneous forms of strophic verse in which the street vendors and the like moulded their cries but in all cases the *qāfiyah* was fully relished and the variety of it in different strophes was compensated with the uniformity of the refrain in between them.

## B

## PROSE

The earliest specimens of Arabic prose coming down to us from the pre-Islamic times fall into the following categories: —

1. Proverbs,
2. Oracular sayings,
3. Orations, and
4. Accounts of battles and stories of love, adventure, and entertainment.

Except for the last category the form in vogue was unmistakably epigrammatic and highly condensed, consisting of short, cadenced and loosely rhymed sentences. This form was quite in conformity with the morphology of the language and the peculiar temperament of the Arab, particularly in view of his reliance on memory alone for preservation and transmission. No surprise that whatever did not conform to this requirement of form was simply allowed to go by the board.

The oracular sayings were almost lacking in any content whatsoever: if the oracle excelled in anything it was mere adroitness in ambiguity. The most remarkable from the viewpoint of the content were, of course, the proverbs, of which the few highly suggestive words often symbolized a whole story deep-rooted in the simple Bedouin life. Hence they were early recognized as a source, second only to poetry, for the knowledge of the history, manners, customs, and superstitions of the pre-Islamic Arabs. In subsequent periods also, there was a remarkable curiosity to pick up pithy and suggestive lines

and phrases from poetry and prose and to pass them round in speech and writing. Thus, the stock of proverbs, which in Arabic include idioms and phrases in common use, never ceased increasing and receiving variety from the changes in the pattern of life. Often they mirrored the experiences, complimentary and otherwise, of contacts between the various nationalities.

The orations were designed for actual needs arising out of war-like tribal activity or communal social relationships. Though prose, however exquisite, was always rated as a lesser form of art, there is no doubt that oration had sufficiently developed into a recognized literary medium. It would also be justified to assume that sermonizing for its own sake, as, for example, on wise conduct and good behaviour, had come into vogue.

The evening get-together in the courtyard, generally under the auspices of some generous dignitary, is the age-old manifestation of the Arab instinct for communal social life. The importance of this feature in the hard, matter-of-fact life in the inhospitable desert cannot be over-emphasized. It is also quite understandable that the main diversion on this occasion should be a round of talks on events and anecdotes bound up either with historical curiosity or common interest in love and adventure. The contents of this *samar* can be easily distinguished as (a) the narratives of the battles of the Arabs, (b) stories of love and adventure of Arabian provenance, and (c) stories borrowed from foreign sources. Some traces of the beast-fable have also been found scattered here and there. Nevertheless, pure fables were seldom a flair of the Arab mind even in subsequent times. Naturally enough, this evening talk was couched in simple informal language with emphasis on content rather than on elegance of word, and the way in which it has been recorded by the scholars of early Islam can at best be described as quotation from the speech of the narrator.

*Influence of the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth.*—The unique position of the Qur'ān as the first book in Arabic has already been noted. It for the first time made the Arabs fully aware of the potentialities of prose as an artistic form. Still more important in another way was the normative influence of the Ḥadīth. It is certainly wrong to assume that the influence of the Qur'ān was in any way circumscribed by its claim to inimitability because even an unattainable ideal is always potent enough to set the direction of effort in the future. But, of course, there was an air of formality about the Qur'ān. On the other hand, the Ḥadīth represented the model of effortless, everyday speech—simple, terse, to the point, efficacious of purpose, and interspersed with flashes of vivacity and humour. The most important general contribution of both the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth was to drive home the primordial need for setting an aim and a purpose in speech and composition and making both the content and the word fit and conform to the same. The new outlook on literary beauty as related to a definite purpose represented a radical change from the old tradition of aimless talk—"the wandering into every valley" (Qur'ān)—and gave birth to a mental discipline which is the hallmark of

the orations and the epistolary compositions of early Islam. The official correspondence of the early Caliphs and their addresses on different occasions of war, legislation, and administration are all marked by a simple and direct style flowing naturally from high concentration on purpose and thus surpassing all art. Yet they show all the dignity of authority. It will be remembered that orations and epistles were the two branches of literary composition which were specially favoured in early Islam by the needs of administration as well as congregational activity and social life. They only underwent a portentous change at the hands of the Persian secretaries, who introduced in the Arab chanceries all the fanfare of the Sāsānian Court by way of pompous language and grandiose style.

*Early Works on Adab* (Belles-lettres).—The early literary activity (apart from poetry) concerned itself mainly with compilation and narration rather than personal creation. The scholars and the students were content with collections of texts and explanations of important pieces of poetry, proverbs, orations, sayings of prophets and wise men, historical narratives, and witticism—all considered to be the necessary equipment of polite education and moral instruction. These collections were like packets in which the knowledge of their compilers was lumped together without any systematic arrangement or classification, the compilers themselves contributing only a few comments here and there. Only ibn Qutaibah (d. 276/889–90) introduced some order into the invaluable chaos.

The beginning of original production was closely bound up with an interest in man and his natural surroundings. Curiously enough, this interest was roused by the rivalry among the various nationalities within the ‘Abbāsid Empire. The political and social conditions of the time promoted interesting, even though acrimonious, discourses on the characteristics—physical, temperamental, and cultural—of the peoples of different lands as exhibited in their current behaviour and past history. Al-Jāhiz (d. 255/868–69), one of the first Mu‘tazilites to study the Greek naturalists, endowed these discourses with the superb literary form of *causerie* or short tract characterized by a combination of erudition and artistic skill with the spirit of reliance on facts of observation and history rather than on speculative deductions. Thus, highly scientific data, worthy of a Darwin, relating to the processes of adaptation between man and nature, came to form the theme of high literature and art. Al-Jāhiz’s “Book on Animals” (*Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*), a fine specimen of the wedlock between art and science, is a definite gain to literature and a high compliment to the general culture of the time. Only one is left wondering whether science would not have prospered better by an early separation from its charming companion.

*Popular Anecdote*.—Beyond the circle of scholars and students the interest of the common people lay in the anecdote couched in simple, unsophisticated language. They sought light entertainment by listening to stories of love or adventure or a blend of both. Apart from the pre-Islamic lore, the

wars of Islamic conquest lay handy for the purpose and were specially suited to satisfy at the same time religious fervour, national pride, and the instinctive love of adventure. There is ample evidence to show that the conquests were actually the subject of a saga which, however, could enter the books only surreptitiously. Two other streams contributed to the fund of anecdotes in the early Islamic period: first, the South Arabian lore in which the Umayyads took particular interest as part of the glorification of the Arabs, and, secondly, the Jewish religious lore which was widely and indiscriminately drawn upon by the *qaṣṣāṣ* (religious sermonizers). None of these stories, however, could find artistic presentation because the regard for historical truth prevented their incorporation in book form: the dangers which were guarded against are illustrated by the corruptions that evaded detection and are found today here and there. Even when they were collected in book form at a very late period they continued to be regarded below the dignity of a scholar. Of course, the stories of love which were not liable to be mixed up with religion and history were given freer admittance to the literary circles, but even these (e.g., the story of the ideal love of Majnūn or the profane love of Waḍḍāh al-Yaman) were recalled only with reference to poetry and seldom took any definite artistic form in prose. Whatever form these popular stories possess has only been achieved effortlessly through common repetition.

*Story Cycles*.—The indigenous stories of love alluded to above were simple incidents which could not keep the attention of the *samar-hungry* audience for any considerable time. As town life grew, the need was felt for cycles of stories or stories within a story, separate yet interconnected with a string plot which would keep the curiosity on its edge for as long as “Thousand and One Nights.” This need was met, in the first instance, by import from Persia, which had long been known to be the storehouse for such stories. The Persian *afṣānah*, the prototype of the Arabic story cycles, had passion, wonder, and surprise as the keynotes of its content; it is the quest for the wonderful and the surprising which brings in supernatural elements and magic to heighten the effects of adventure, and treachery and moral depravity to enhance love. This element of wilful selection and exaggeration of the unusual in actual life should not be overlooked in making any sweeping generalizations in regard to the state of society. The overtone is particularly deceptive in regard to historical personalities as, for example, Hārūn al-Rashīd, who, though he indulged in luxury and sensuous pleasure in private life, would never allow any lapse from dignity and moral propriety in public. It was perhaps in the original core of *Hazār Afṣānah* itself that popularly idealized historical personalities were woven into the texture with a view to imparting a touch of reality to the fiction. Yet it is remarkable that this particular branch, as contrasted with that of *Kalīlah wa Dimnah*, was successfully cultivated at Baghdād and Cairo. The anonymous *maddāḥs* went on dressing up the borrowed material and augmenting it with their own creation until the whole stock was moulded into a more or less fixed but sufficiently polished

form. The professionals, whose job was gradually reduced to vocal performance, often to the accompaniment of simple instrumental music, circulated and transmitted the stock by oral tradition among themselves until it was redacted in book form in about the ninth/fifteenth century. The form and the content of these story cycles would be better appreciated if it is constantly kept in view that they were never meant to be read; they were recited to an audience seeking mental relaxation rather than intellectual satisfaction. They were designed simply to amuse and not to popularize or criticize any particular view of society. Rather the surmise is that they were secretly helped into circulation by the powers that were interested in turning the attention of the masses away from political and social problems. Hence all the emphasis is on the tempo of action to the subservience of everything else. Further, in the very nature of circumstances, the style and the diction could only be such as were regarded elegant and interesting by the standards and taste of the common people. It really reflects very well on the common culture of those days when people could learn how to appreciate and enjoy elegance of language in their ordinary social surroundings without necessarily studying at school. But after all the story cycles were never regarded as a piece of literature (*adab*) and were never read and taught by scholars as such. It was only in the West that the scholars thought it worthwhile to devote time to the *Alf Lailah wa Lailah*.

The *Siratu 'Antar*, another notable work of the same class, bears the impress of conscious art, its texture being loose-rhymed prose embroidered with some ten thousand verses. In point of content, a hero of the pre-Islamic times is made to live through five hundred years of Islam down to the Crusades, personifying in himself all the chivalry of the famous knights of Islamic history as well as the legends of the Persian epic. It sprang into popularity in the tense atmosphere of the Crusades and represents fully the peculiar temperament of the time.

*High-class Fiction.*—It will be seen from the preceding two paragraphs that the imagination of the Muslim masses, like that of the masses of any other people, was strongly tempted to dramatize history and to develop the hard core of facts into fabulous stories. But such a pursuit was totally barred to a Muslim scholar by his high sense of intellectual honesty and academic responsibility cognate with the sanctimonious regard for religious purity. As fiction was disdained and frowned upon by the cultured, it was condemned and relegated to the circles of the common people. Pure fiction, which posed no danger of distortion to valuable fact, was quite welcome in literary circles. But, again, the *literati* were earnest people who would relish a fable only if it had some moral import in the manner of the stories of the Qur'ān. It will, however, be observed that the reliance of the Qur'ān on the known incidents of history, rather than fables, to point a moral is highly significant as being in full accord with the peculiar temperament of the Arab. Not that the Arab was weak in imagination; he only considered it somewhat

childish to invent fictitious tales, which is best evidenced by the clear absence of a mythology even in the pre-Islamic days. He was indeed very fond of moralizing but would do so only through direct, pithy, and pointed proverbial sayings supported by illustrations from real life. The style of the Qur'ān in this respect stands in sharp contrast with that of the sacred books of India, which seek to convey the truth mainly through fables. Thus, it was only when highly cultured Persians consecrated themselves to the service of Arabic that the treasures of the Indo-Persian tradition were transferred into this language. As these were mere translations, their contents do not belong to Arabic: only the use of the artistic form of Arabic for this kind of composition was a notable innovation. The rendering of the *Kalilah wa Dimnah* by ibn al-Muqaffa' was designed to be read by the educated class who relished it for its moralizing on the conduct of private and public affairs. It was warmly appreciated as a novelty and versified more than once, but the attempts at imitation of the model failed to achieve any considerable measure of success. Thus, pure fiction too, like the fanciful encrustment of history and religion, fell to the lot of the common people who indulged in it for sheer amusement.

The unproductivity of the Arab-Islamic milieu, so far as high-class fiction is concerned, has only to be viewed by the side of unparalleled success in the preservation of the religious texts, the scrupulous eschewing of the subjective element in historical annals, and the evolution of a full-fledged science for establishing the authenticity of a text with reference to the character of the narrator. In short, the learned and the scholarly devoted themselves to checking the rampancy of the imagination of the unlettered rather than giving free reins to their own fancy. Further, the authority of the *Shari'ah* left no need for any emotional pleading or intellectual canvassing by dramatization of social problems; hence the absence of the story or the novel except for literary and philosophical themes.

*Literary Epistle (Risalah) and Rhetorical Maqamah.*—The extraordinary interest in linguistic studies provided a scholar in early Islam with a vast fund of vocabulary and usage as well as a sense of elegance and beauty in expression. He, however, waited for events and occasions in actual life to put his knowledge and skill to use; hence the absence of any prose form other than the oration and the epistle. The disputations on the merits of the various nationalities and different classes of people brought into vogue for a while the short topical essay. But the natural, forthright style soon started soaring high at the hands of the Persian scribes until it became thoroughly inflated and encumbered. To this encumbrance the Christian scribes further added the embellishment of *saj'*, and the over-played art degenerated into tiresome gymnastics. There was, however, some expansion in the range of the epistlecum-essay writing, which opened up a welcome outlet for literary skill. Tracts on the rules of good conduct were very popular, some of which on Persian model were meant specially for kings, while others were addressed to all

classes. Similarly, there was a plethora of manuals of instruction through which all men of consequence were eager to communicate their wisdom. But the most important branch conducted merely for the sake of pleasure was "letters" addressed to fellow-scholars and patrons touching upon purely academic and literary problems. Pride and rivalry helped to impart zest to such a pursuit. The style was high-flown and ornate with the obtrusive aim of pedantry. A further development of this tradition of the literary epistle (*al-risālah*) was the *maqāmah*, which represents perhaps the first attempt to invent a loose framework of picaresque romance for the display of one's literary knowledge and skill. The idea must have been suggested by the presence of a real character in the Arabized Persian society of the time—a witty and somewhat unscrupulous prodigy of letters, devoid of patronage from high-ups and loth to engage himself in any lucrative work, thus compelled to shift for himself by roving from town to town and "begging" by the public display of feats of improvisation on the interesting and instructive situations of life. The emphasis is, no doubt, on an exhibition of linguistic virtuosity but there is throughout a vein of witticism which is sometimes employed for parodying society, manners, and peoples. As this form came to be the dominant one in Arabic prose, a large variety of it depicting incidents and situations concerning particular classes such as the 'ulamā' and the lovers, was successfully attempted in every age. It has throughout remained a typically indigenous product, specially suited to the equipment and training of the Arabic scholar as alluded to above.

*Development of the Story for Literary Theme.*—The significance of the *maqāmah* lay in the Arabic scholar at last condescending to create out of imagination the framework of a story, however short and undeveloped, with a view to displaying his profuse but pent-up literary skill. For the newly released fancy abu al-'Alā' al-Ma'arri borrowed the wings of the popular traditions relating to the Prophet's Ascension (*al-mi'rāj*) to the heavens. His *Risālah al-Ghufrān* is really a *maqāmah* cycle under the overall covering of a *risālah*. The story is no more than a frail show-case to display the author's store of knowledge, just a device to string together a series of expositions of problems and judgments relating to poetry, literature, and grammar. As the author was also a philosopher and a critical observer of beliefs and practices, he brought out the witticism characteristic of the *maqāmah* for an audacious burlesque of contemporary state of learning and society, which imparted a unique quality to the work. The style excelled only in pedantry and artificial beauty. Yet the review of the entire field of literature, beliefs, morals, and manners in the course of an imaginary flight remained the high-watermark of the traditional Arabic scholarship.

*Story for the Philosophical Theme.*—The philosophical romance of ibn Tufail (d. 580/1184) entitled *Ḥayy Bin Yaqẓān* is a complete surprise in Arabic literature in more than one way. Here for the first time we have the plot as the main concern of the author. Sufficient attention is also paid to

characterization and setting. The style is subordinated to the theme. It will be recalled that the general body of Muslim philosophers had been confronted with a two-fold problem: the capability of reason to attain to reality unaided by revelation, and the identity of reality notwithstanding the difference in the source and the categories of knowledge imparted by religion. Soon intuition, the *tertius gaudens*, achieved a lasting victory over both. On the one hand, it established its claim to be the essence of religion and, on the other, it was recognized as the higher form of philosophy. The importance of the latter development, which was by far the greater victory, has not often been fully appreciated. It was a momentous step indeed to accept intuition as part of a man's natural equipment, cognate with reason, for the "realization" of truth. Anyway, it was for the purpose of explaining all these points together that the philosophers conjured up the vision of a Solitary Man, cut off from all knowledge of religion yet attaining to a vision of God through the proper use and development of his faculties alone.

*Historical Writing.*—The Arabic historian was solely concerned with the preservation of authentic records. He would not digest the facts and attempt at their reconstruction and interpretation for the reader. The merit of a historian like al-Ṭabari (d. 310/922–23) lay only in the extent and variety of his information; his own personality could be discerned only in the indication here and there of a preference for one of the several versions of a particular event. This self-imposed restraint on the part of the historian, like the similar scruples of the *adab* producer, betokened only high devotion to truth nurtured by the traditions of religious sciences. As a matter of fact, it proved to be a valuable asset in eliminating, so to say, the middlemen, and enabling all posterity to get a purely objective view of the past. Even when the annalistic framework was not strictly adhered to and the method of topical historiography was initiated by al-Mas'ūdi (d. 345/956–57) the style continued to be dominated by reporting. However, this deliberate suppression of the personal element contributed to the lack of any prose form for historical writing. Such development had to wait till the beginning of the eighth/fourteenth century when ibn al-Ṭiṭṭaqa produced his book *al-Fakhri*. Keeping in view the fact of its being an innovation, the success achieved was remarkable. A lucid and fluent yet brilliant style is applied to carefully selected facts combined with appropriate comments. But again this admirable example was not sufficiently followed up. Rather the main development, from which ibn al-Ṭiṭṭaqa revolted consciously, had already proceeded far on the lines of the transference and application of the epistolary style—grand and verbose, as already noted—to historiography. It was fortunate indeed that this style was carried to palpable absurdity quite early by al-'Utbi (d. 427/1035–36). It was decisively rejected by the Arab taste only to find favourable development in Persian. Court patronage of the historians also brought in the need for flattery and exaggeration, but it must be said in fairness that the historian did not absolve himself totally of regard for truth in the manner of poets.



On the whole, the style of the official amanuenses and the Court historians of the late 'Abbāsid period belongs to the same *genre*.

The best examples of Arabic historical prose, both in regard to form and content, are the private memoirs of personal experiences of war and peace like the *Kitāb al-I'tibār* of 'Uthmān ibn Munqidh (d. 584/1188-89), and the accounts of travels. In the latter class of works one finds not only observation and effective narration but also the author's own appraisal of personalities and events in the light of history and contemporary society. Generally, the style is simple and natural and even where art is displayed, as in the case of ibn Jubair (d. 614/1217-18), it is not overplayed at the expense of the content. Al-Ghazālī's *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl* forms a class by itself—an autobiographical account of mental conflict and spiritual quest written with such simplicity and naturalness as defy all art.

*Influence on the West.*—Looking in retrospect over the entire field of Arabic prose and poetry, the general reader will not fail to be struck particularly with a few features which stand out prominently. First, there is the perfect symmetry, so characteristic of all Muslim art, the unfaltering rhythm, and the regular rhyme which at once give the general impression of order, system, and exquisiteness in the construction of the verse. Secondly, there is the entire scheme of romantic love as embodied in the tradition of the *ghazal*. It is not fully appreciated, especially among the Muslims who take it as a matter of course, how much the Islamic outlook on woman and sex relationship has to do with the sentimental romantic love. Love as an art can only flourish in a society where the company of woman is sublimated into a virtue. A further condition for the growth of romanticism is the recognition of certain ethical rules for courtship, a certain idealization of restraint. Such restraint is only symbolic of awe for the independent will of a separate individuality (best exemplified in the economic rights of women in Islam) coupled with a tenderly appreciation—so different from lustful exploitation—of the frailty and delicacy of the feminine constitutional and sentimental make-up. In the blind fervour of the extremist revolt against the denial of human rights to women in the West, this last basis of all chivalry and romance is much liable to be forgotten. Anyway, it was these two features—the exquisite form and the romantic content—of the Andalusian poetry which impressed the troubadours of Provence so deeply. Needless to say that lyrical poetry of romantic love had a special development in Spain so as to become unique even in Arabic. In the same way the strophic verse blossomed in Spain as nowhere else. The tradition, however, goes back to the Umayyad *ghazal* with Islam intervenning between it and the frank hedonism of the *jāhiliyyah*.

Turning to prose, one finds Arabic offering, at its best, aphorisms, apologues, popular fables characterized by the spirit of adventure, and picaresque romance (*maqāmah*). Actually, these were the very curiosities which achieved a ready success in medieval Europe through oral transmission and book

translation. It was not very appropriate indeed that works like the *Arabian Nights*, which were meant only for recital in the market-place, were read in book form in Europe. This was bound to produce a certain revulsion at a later period when they were found to be devoid of the finer elements of literary art. Anyhow, "orientalism"—a touch of the fabulous, the wonderful, and the exotic—entered the thought-processes of the European writers and poets. Still more important is the percolation of some of the higher devices resting on characteristically Islamic traditions like the *mi'rāj* into the *Divina Commedia* and the Solitary Man into *Robinson Crusoe*.

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## Chapter LI

## ARABIC LITERATURE: GRAMMAR AND LEXICOGRAPHY

## A

## GRAMMAR

The intellectual activity of the early Muslims stemmed directly from their devotion to religion. The Arabs had throughout been sensitively proud of their language; contacts with foreigners were regarded by them as derogatory to pure Arabism. However, before Islam any corruption of the dialect was but a social drawback; after Islam any lapse from the norm inevitably led to distortion of the sacred text with dire consequences both in this as well as in the next world. Curiously enough, it was Islam itself which brought about the commingling of the Arabs with the non-Arabs on a vast and unprecedented scale. In the very second decade of the Hijrah the Arabs were carried on the crest of a wave of military conquests across the bounds of their homeland to settle down in the neighbouring countries of Iraq, Persia, Syria, and Egypt. At the same time there was a large influx of aliens, mostly prisoners of war, into the principal towns—Makkah and Madīnah—of Arabia itself. Before long there appeared for the first time in history a considerable and growing number of neophytes seeking initiation into Arab society with a conscious effort to learn, imbibe, and serve that new religious culture which was only couched in Arabic and had its prototype in Arab milieu. Naturally enough, the inaptitude