



I Melted with Passion: Love as Malady in 'Udhri Tradition

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Abstract

This paper will explore the way by which early Arabic love poetry (‘udhri poetry) became a source for discussions of love-sickness in Islamic medical and literary texts. In Arabic, many nouns refer to love. Nonetheless, about half of them link love with sickness or mental diseases. This paper will focus principally on the image of the lover’s body, which is described as being malnourished, sick and constantly suffering from swooning. In ‘udhri tradition the lover is sometimes driven mad by his ardent love. Hence, the vocabulary of sickness, healing, the doctor and magic—all of which affect the body—is frequently repeated in ‘udhri poetry. Ibn Sina, in his famous medical text *al-Qanun*, portrays excessive love as a sort of illness similar to melancholia and describes the characteristics of the illness in a manner that brings to mind many themes of the ‘udhri tradition. This paper will explore how ‘udhri poetry, images and ideas are employed. The changes that occur in the lover’s body as he descends into love sickness become signs of moral values related to the manners of love and to the literary values of criticism.

Keywords: Love, malady, love poetry, udhri, Majnun, Kitab al-Aghani.

داء الهيام: العشق سقمًا في الغزل العذري

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الملخص

تتناقش هذه الدراسة التحولات التي مر بها الشعر العذري حتى أصبح مصدرا مرجعيا لمفهوم "سقم الحب" في الخطابين الأدبي والطبي الإسلاميين. هناك العديد من الأسماء الدالة على الحب في اللغة العربية، ولكن حوالي نصف هذه الأسماء تربط في دلالاتها المعجمية بين الحب والسقم أو المرض العقلي. وهذه الدراسة تحلل أساسا الصورة التي يتجلى عليها "جسد العاشق"، الذي وُصف مرارا في التراث العذري بالسقيم الناحل، بل صُوِّر العاشق في كثير من الأحيان مجنوناً بمس من عشقه المحموم. وبناء على ذلك فالمعجم اللغوي المتكرر في الغزل العذري قائم على مفردات الداء والسقم والتداوي والطبيب والسحر. ابن سينا - في كتابه الطبي الشهير القانون - يصف العشق باعتباره داء قريبا من المالنخوليا، ويُشخص هذا الداء بطريقة تذكرنا بثيمات الغزل العذري. وهذه الدراسة تسبر أغوار هذا التوظيف لأفكار وصور التراث العذري على مستوى القصّ والشعر، مبيّنة كيف أصبحت التغييرات التي تطال جسد العاشق آثار وشواهد اتُخذت فيما بعد قيما دالة على صدق العاطفة في مدونة التراث العربي في الحب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الحب، السقم، شعر الحب، الغزل العذري، المجنون، كتاب الأغاني.



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1. Introduction

In *Lisan al-'Arab* the following definition is provided for the word 'ishq: "Ishq is excessive love. The excessive lover is called 'Ashiq because his intense feelings make him melt like the 'ishqah tree. 'Ishqah is a green tree that becomes yellow when crushed. It is, therefore, claimed that the noun 'Ishq is derived from 'ishqah'.

¹In Arabic, it is noteworthy how many nouns refer to love. More interesting is the fact that perhaps half of them link love with sickness or mental diseases. 'A high proportion of the words express the woes of love—the longing, the pain, the grief, melancholy, confusion, and illness—rather than its pleasures'.² Thus, in a symposium that took place in the ninth century- in the palace of Yah}ya al-Barmaki, love was defined as based on the like-mindedness of the partners and it was a major cause of suffering, capable of subjugating,

intoxicating and humiliating the lover to the point of annihilation.³

Undoubtedly, the representation of the beloved's body is the main concern of the 'udhri tradition.⁴ This does not, however, indicate the absence of the lover-poet's own body; the 'udhri tradition rather puts great emphasis on it, considering it the greatest recipient of the effects of profound emotion. It is his body that is malnourished, sick, suffering from insomnia and prematurely aged. The 'udhri lover sometimes even reaches the point of

3- Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Beauty in Arabic Culture* (Princeton, NJ : Markus Wiener, 1999), p. 66.

4- The term "'udhri tradition" consists not only of 'udhri poets and poetry but also the stories told about them. These poets lived in the 7th and 8th centuries, and about two centuries later, their poetry and love stories were collected and retold. Al-Ghazal al-'udhri is named after the 'Udhrah tribe which supplied this poetical tradition with many of its leading poets. Members of this tribe were generally said to have tender hearts and to seek after a true love that usually led to death. The 'udhri poet Jamil b. 'Abdallah b. Ma'mar, better known as Jamil Buthaynah (d.82\701), who is considered the leading light of this genre, was from the "'Udhrah" tribe . Nevertheless, there were 'udhri poets from other tribes, such as Majnun Layla, who belonged to the Banu 'Amir.

1- Ibn Manz}ur, (ق ش ع), p. 252.

2- Lois Antita Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love among the Arabs: The Development of the Genre* (London: University of London Press Ltd; New York: New York University Press, 1971), p. 93.



madness, but death alone seems to be the ultimate path resulting from excessive passion. Hence, the vocabulary of sickness, healing, the doctor and magic—all of which affect the body—is frequently repeated in al-ghazal al-‘udhri. Some verses even confirm that the lover has become blind, mute and paralysed, simply due to his passion.

2. Love as Malady in Classical Arabic Literature

In the classical Arabic tradition, when dealing with the theme of love, whether from medical or literary perspectives, it has been frequently stated that (‘ishq) passionate love is a kind of sickness. This idea was not new at the time,⁵ as Arab authors were influenced by Greek philosophy in this matter. In the fourth and seventh centuries CE, chapters on love were included in sections on mental illnesses by two Byzantine authors, where they reproduce traditional lists of symptoms and therapeutical suggestions.⁶ Moreover, ‘the difficulty of a medical diagnosis and treatment of an enervated and depressed young man or woman who suffered from lovesickness can even be found in ancient Egyptian literature’.⁷ Arabic medical literature shows similar

tendencies in the discussion of love as a malady. In the classical medical discourse, ‘ishq is included among the traditional mental sicknesses. For example, al-Majusi (d. 372/982) groups love with melancholy and provides a list of medicaments. Apart from Ibn al-Jazzar (d. ca. 395/1004), who characterises lovesickness as a kind of critical intensification of the natural desire of the soul for all beautiful things, love stays within the traditional frame of references.⁸ In his medical book al-Qanun, Ibn Sina (d. 1037) dedicates a chapter to love sickness, in which he portrays ‘ishq as a sort of illness similar to melancholia. He describes the characteristics of the illness as

hollowness of the eyes and their dryness, the lack of moisture except when weeping, continuous movement of the eyelids, and laughing as if he sees something pleasant or hears happy news or jokes. His psyche is full of alienation and withdrawal, so that there is much deep sighing. His condition changes from exhilaration and laughter to sadness and weeping when he hears love poetry, especially when he remembers the separation and distance from his beloved (...) His behaviour is disordered, and his pulse is irregular, like those who are anxious.⁹

The link provided by Ibn Sina between the lover’s sadness and love poetry is noteworthy. By establishing such a link, he suggests a bond between emotions and language. Language, especially in form of poetry, revives

5- Old medical visions linked lovemaking, lust and ecstasy with moderation (or temperance or reasonability) and the old medical diagnoses. For more on this see: Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1990).

6- Hans Hinrich Biesterfeldt and Dimitri Gutas, “The Malady of Love”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 104, N. 1, (1984), p. 22.

7- Michael Dols, *Majnun: the Madman in Medieval Islamic Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 316.

8- Biesterfeldt and Gutas, p. 23.

9- Ibn Sina, *al-Qanun fi al-T}ibb*, www.alwaraq.net, 15 October 2011, trans. Dols, p. 484.



passionate feeling. Therefore, the role played by poetry in love is significant.

Ibn Sina goes on to give advice to doctors on how to cure the patient. He suggests, for instance, the uniting of the lover with his beloved, saying about one case, 'when he experienced union with his beloved, recovery occurred in a very short time'.¹⁰ He also suggests several different treatments, depending on each individual condition such as: preoccupying the lover's mind so that he forgets what caused him to be seriously ill,¹¹ or joining the lover with someone other than the beloved in order that he forgets the latter, or giving the lover sincere advice or warning, or increasing sexual intercourse with slave-girls. Ibn Sina also states, 'Some people are consoled with entertainment and recitation, while for others it only increases their infatuation; it is possible to discover which is which'.¹² Ibn Sina's commentary on love-sickness shows that 'ishq was a common topic in Islamic medical textbooks, alongside other mental disorders.¹³

In belles-lettres the malady of love was also a subject frequently treated.

10- Ibid.

11- The famous physician al-Razi (d. 313/925) suggests a similar treatments for melancholia, which include active endeavours such as hunting, chess, drinking, singing, competitive sports, travel and other things. See Dols, p. 55.

12- Ibid., p. 485. Interestingly, the practice of pulse-diagnosis, which has been suggested by Ibn Sina to know the identity of the beloved, was employed with considerable effect by the great mystical poet Jalal al-Din Rumi, in one of his allegorical stories. See Dols, p. 317.

13- However, the medical interpretation of 'ishq was especially welcomed by those writers who wished to discourage passionate love. See Giffen, p. 64.

For example, al-Jah}iz} (ca. 776-869) states that:

I propose to describe 'ishq for you, so that you may know how it is defined. It is a sickness that attacks the soul and spreads to the body by direct contagion, the soul being weakened by the violence done to the body and physical exhaustion being followed by moral weakness.¹⁴

In al-Jah}iz}'s statement, cited above, he sharply distinguishes between the soul and the body, though he does observe the mutual effects between them. Love, in his view, attacks the soul first and then spreads to the body, but once the body becomes weak, the soul is also affected by this weakness. Abu Bakr Muh}ammad b. Da'ud (255/868-297/910) devotes a full chapter titled, 'The body's pining is a sign of agony (kamad)', to this question in his book, *Kitab al-zahrah*. He explains the effect of emotion on the body, from a medical perspective: 'the heat that is engendered by grief flows into the heart from all parts of the body and then ascends to the brain'.¹⁵ He also mentions the particular role played by tears in this matter: 'vapours from which tears are produced when they (scil. the vapours) are liquefied by the natural heat they possess'.¹⁶ Abu Bakr al-Khara'it'i (d. 327/938) was also tempted to write on the subject, but rather adopted a more critical point of view; he entitles his

14- Al-Jah}iz} in Charles Pellat, *The Life and Works of Jahiz*, trans. D.M.Hawke (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 263.

15- Abu Bakr Muh}ammad b. Da'ud, *Kitab al-zahrah*, ed. Ibrahim al-Samirra'i ('Amman: Maktabat al-manar, 1985), p. 400.

16-Ibid., p. 401.



treatise *I'tilal al-qulub* (The Malady of Hearts). From the title it is apparent that the author views love as a malady, and a chapter of his treatise is even entitled: 'On the condemnation of hawa (desire) and the following of it'. As Giffen notes, al-Khara'it's influence was significant: 'Four centuries later, Ibn al-Jawzi, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah and al-Mughultai cite him as an authority on love theory'.¹⁷ In *Kitab al-riyad* by Muhammad al-Marzubani (384/993 or 378/987) a definition of 'ishq that again links it with malady is provided; 'Someone said to Zuhayr al-Madini: "What is 'ishq?" He said: "Madness and submissiveness, and it is the malady of refined people".¹⁸ Abu H}ayyan al-Tawh}idi (d. 414/1023) in *al-Muqabasat* suggests that love feeds the soul, but weakens the body.¹⁹

In any case, the literary production on this subject is too abundant to be documented in detail here. However, I will concentrate on one text, anonymously authored, quoting it at length because it provides a comprehensive view on the subject under discussion and has been frequently quoted by many authors:

Love is a desire which is born in the heart and in which elements of avidity gather. Whenever it gains in strength the lover becomes more agitated and persistent, his disquiet intensifies and his insomnia increases. When this happens his blood burns and changes into black bile, and his yellow bile is inflamed

and transformed into black bile. The excess of black bile impairs thinking, and impaired thinking is accompanied by blunted wits, diminished reasoning, hoping for the impossible, and wishing for the unfeasible, to the point that it all leads to madness. Then, the lover sometimes kills himself and sometimes dies of grief, or he goes to his beloved and dies of joy or perishes of distress. Sometimes he moans heavily, causing his spirit to remain concealed for twenty-four hours. He continues [in his state] until he is taken for dead, and he is then buried while still alive... The person who is in such a state can be relieved through the grace of the Lord of the Worlds, not through the ministrations of any human... This is an incurable disease which doctors are unable to treat.²⁰

This text has had a long and influential life in the literary tradition. It appears in different lengths and in several different versions, and is reproduced in many works beginning in the third century AH, such as *Nawadir al-falasifah* by H}unayn b. Ish}aq (d. 260/877), *Kitab al-zahrah* by Abu Bakr Muhammad b. Da'ud al-Is}fahani (d. 297/910), *Muruj al-dhahab* by al-Mas'udi (d. 354/956), *Dhamm al-hawa* by Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 597/1200), 'Uyun al-anba' by Ibn Abi Us}aybi'ah (d. 668/1270). It is said to be copied from the Greek,²¹ though the Greek original is absent.²² In any

17-Giffen, p. 16.

18- Muhammad al-Marzubani cited in Giffen, p. 19.

19- Abu H}ayyan al-Tawh}idi, *al-Muqabasat*, ed. Hasan al-Sandubi (Cairo: al-Mat}ba'ah al-rah}manyiah, 1929), p. 364.

20- Anonymous text cited and translated by Biesterfeldt and Gutas, pp. 40-45.

21-Some of the Arab authors ascribe the text to Hippocrates.

22- Biesterfeldt and Gutas, p. 45, and see detailed discussion on the origin of the text on pp. 51-53, in which the author tends to believe that it is diverted from a late Alexandrian text.



case, this text presents well-structured aspects and it shows the great awareness of the putative emotional effects of love on one's own body. I would argue that it proves that the lover's body was a theme of interest on a theoretical level according to the popular subject of love in classical Arabic belles-lettres. The text suggests a mutual relationship between the lover's excessive emotions and his body. Once the love 'is born in the heart', it attacks the lover's body; his insomnia increases and 'his blood burns'. At this point the effect will return to 'thinking' that causes 'blunted wits, diminished reasoning and hoping for the impossible', which will eventually lead the lover to madness or death. The concept of death is a crucial aspect of passionate love ('ishq) and it is clearly emphasised here. Death, the text suggests, will undoubtedly reach the lover, either as a result of his grief or of his joy if he suddenly beholds his beloved. Biesterfeldt and Gutas provide the following commentary on the text:

[this text] ascribes to the lover a number of symptoms(...). It has a medical framework. It analyses love by means of humoral etiology; and it makes use of popular and literary commonplaces about love much as the as a genre deals with everyday concerns.²³

If that is the case, it is no wonder that the lover is treated as a patient in some medical texts, such as the aforementioned Treatise on Love by Ibn Sina, in which he provides a discussion of the symptoms and suggested treatments for the lover. Moreover, it

seems that particular practices were employed when dealing with suffering lovers; their love would be treated either as a sickness or as a kind of magic. Therefore, the lover would be taken to both physicians and diviners, as we shall see in 'Urwah and Majnun's stories. In some cases, the lover has to drink 'sulwanah', which is believed to be a cure for 'ishq. Sulwanah is an amulet in a crushed bead whose liquid is drunk by an afflicted lover to cure him of this love.²⁴ Seeing love from this angle explains the motif of dedicating prayers to the lover, as one would pray for a sick man. Interestingly, al-Washsha' considers praying for lovers as a duty of *udaba'*; he provides many narratives about people who offer *du'a* for the lovers while they circumambulate the *ka'bah*.²⁵ He even states that: 'It is claimed that no sins will be inflicted on lovers and that the pains they endure compensate for their sins'.²⁶ Answering a question about lovers, the Judge Shurayk b. 'Abdullah said: 'whoever possesses the most intense feelings of love will receive the biggest share of the rewards'.²⁷

3. The Effect of Love on the Lover's Body in the 'Udhri Tradition

Above, we have sketched the classical Arabic theoretical perspective on the effects of the emotion of love on

23- Ibid., p. 53.

24- Raja' Salamah, *al-'Ishq wa al-kitabah: qira'ah fi al-mawruth* (Colon: Mansurat al-jamal, 2003), p. 456.

25- Muh}ammad b. Ish}aq Washsha', *Kitab al-muwashsha* (Laydan: Matba Bril, 1302 [1884-85]), pp. 106-107.

26- Ibid., p. 107.

27- Ibid., p. 108.



the body.²⁸ Yet the physical presence of the lover's own body can also be traced in poetry. In fact, most of those authors who deal with the theme of love in their writing rely on Arabic poetry as a primary source for their theoretical formulations. 'The best discussion of love turns frequently to verse to illustrate aptly the ideas under discussion, to reinforce the author's statements, or to express his thought more subtly'.²⁹ Several aspects of the effect that love has on the 'udhri lover's own body are depicted in al-ghazal al-'udhri. These aspects are intertwined, but for the sake of this analysis we separate them into several categories each of which is discussed below.

3.1 *Crying*

The theme of weeping is one of the oldest themes in classical Arabic poetry.³⁰

In 'udhri poets' diwans there are

28- It should be borne in mind that the awareness of the bodily effect of love as shown in literature is not unique to the Arabs. In the introduction written by John Jay Parry of the book *The Art of Courtly Love* some of the relevant ideas within the Western culture are presented. The poet Ovid, who lived in Rome in the time of the Emperor Augustus and among his poems are *The Art of Love* and *The Cure of Love*, states that for love of a woman the lover must become pale and thin and sleepless. See Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, trans. John Jay Parry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), p. 5.

29- Giffen, p. 57. Giffen points out that some authors such as; Ibn Da'ud began to collect verses on a subject or idea, comparing different ways of expressing the same idea. This critical activity lent itself to refined awareness of the whole spectrum of emotions, situations, and experiences of love, p. 58.

30- It is considered an essential motif in the opening section of the qasidah; the poet stops at the ruined campsite, which evokes his memories and leads him to weep over his now departed beloved.

numerous allusions to weeping. It seems that shedding tears -- according to 'udhri poets' -- functions in several ways: divulgence, resistance, evidence and healing. Tears are a divulgence and a disclosure of the poet's feelings, and of what his heart is incapable of bearing. His feelings are expressed in the form of tears, revealing a hidden pain and a concealed love. No matter how this lover struggles to conceal his love, tears remain the most vivid traces and indicators of love; Jamil says:

Oh my friends, what I conceal of this love,

tears will soon reveal³¹

Weeping is evidence and proof of the poet's sincere feelings. Majnun explicitly refers to this:

The representation of the passion of youth is made through tears

and these tears are the fairest evidence³²

Kuthayyir not only indulges in tears; he also invites his eyes to drop tears to prove his love and concealed passion:

I ask the water of the eye to continue hoping that it will be a witness to that concealed passion³³

Moreover, according to 'udhri

31- Jamil b. Mu'mar, *Diwān Jamil Buthaynah: Jamīl b. Mu'mar*, ed. Fawzī 'At}awī (Beirut: Dar s}a'b, 1980), p. 25

32- Majnun Layla, *Diwan Majnun Layla*, sharḥ 'Adnan Zaki Darwish, 2nd edition (Beirut: Dar s}adir, 2003), p. 77. Note how he used the word *dalil*, proof, and the link he made between this word and the word tears, p. 170.

33- Kuthayyir 'Azzah, *Diwān Kuthayyir 'Azzah*, sharḥ Majid T}arad (Beirut: Dar al-kitab al-'Arabi, 2004), p. 78.



poetry, weeping is a cure and a comfort. It is a means to healing the acute pains of love:

I was told of her abandonment,
and asked to choose between
patience and weeping

And I chose to weep for its immediate
effect to heal my burns³⁴

However, weeping does not always indicate weakness and disclosure; it sometimes serves as a weapon for the lover, used to resist his society's oppression. Therefore, even if this oppressive society stops Buthaynah from meeting Jamil and Lubna from meeting Qays, it cannot stop them from expressing their emotions and weeping in agony.³⁵ Majnun 'provides us with a poetic image that endows tears with a significant psychological dimension:

What runs down from the eye is not
its water

But a soul which melts and drips³⁶

The 'udhri poem presents tears as the destined and inevitable fate of lovers. Tears represent disclosure, resistance, witness, or a means of healing from the agonies of love; they are present on a permanent basis. The 'udhri poet asserts the continuity of his tears through a range of figural possibilities, as tears are like a river that does not stop flowing and a well that does not dry up.³⁷ The simile between the tears and the clouds

depends on related imagery, of flows.³⁸

In the case of the absence of his beloved, the poet never lacks reminders of her that stimulate his tears and the ardour of his love. These reminders may be natural elements like fire,³⁹ air⁴⁰ and water.⁴¹ These reminders may also be animal creatures like doves⁴² and crows—as Majnun's eyes, for instance, drop tears when hearing the sound of crows.⁴³ The blowing of the breeze, the cooing of the dove, the cawing of crows, the glittering of the thunder; all these are also reminders that stimulate the poet's nostalgia and passionate feelings. It is enough to Majnun to hear the name Layla to make him wet his shawl with tears.⁴⁴

However, the stimulation of tears is not confined to the absence of the beloved; it is also attributed to her presence:

As soon as the eyes behold her,
they drop tears while keeping a still
look towards her⁴⁵

The lover does not see any conflict in this as long as weeping forms a genuine

38- Kuthayyir, p. 180, Jamil, p. 97, Majnun, p. 159

39- Jamil, p. 48.

40- Majnun, p. 37.

41- The flowing stream moves Majnun to tears, Majnun, p. 28.

42- Jamil, p. 37, Majnun, p. 39.

43- Majnun, p. 62. For their indication of the black omen of separation, Salamah explains that crows in Arab culture refer to two different indications: 1. the Quranic crow that is seen as a post bird, delegated by God to Qabil to teach him funeral rituals and that delegated to Noah to obtain news of the flood; 2. the literary crow that brings the bad omen of separation and loss when it makes sounds, and that is often signified in Arabic poetry. Salamah, pp. 297-298.

44- Majnun, p. 227.

45- Kuthayyir, p. 64.

34- Kuthayyir, p. 180.

35- Jamil, p. 46, Qays, p. 51.

36- Majnun, p. 96, trans. Asad Khairallah, *Love, Madness, and poetry: An interpretation of the Magnun legend* (Beirut: Orient-institut der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft, 1980), p. 92.

37- Kuthayyir, pp. 112, 114.



element of his overall perception of love and self-expression. Whether his beloved is present or absent, he is always agonised and facing tears and sadness. He cries in fear of her alienation or abandonment.⁴⁶ He cries when she approaches and when she departs as there is no limit to his sadness and no hindrance to his tears. He cries until the tears turn into blood:

My eyes would still drop running
tears or blood –

if my eyes accede to my wishes⁴⁷

We should bear in mind that such poetic images contain violence where passion is linked to blood. Blood bears indications of killing and bloodshed. Love causes blood to drop from the eyes and the body of the lover when targeted by the arrows of lovesickness and deprivation. This idea is also linked to the idea of passion itself as a power that is closer to hatred than to affection in its violence and intensity.⁴⁸ Within the same context Bataille wonders: ‘What does physical eroticism signify if not a violation of the very being of its practitioners?– a violation bordering on

death, bordering on murder?’⁴⁹

It is impossible in this context to avoid thinking of tears as a liquid that extinguishes fires. It means that the connotation of tears contradicts that of fire. Fire used in this poetry as the primary signifier for the power of love. In this poetic imagination, fire has different qualities, such as purifying fire or lustful fire. In Majnun Layla, fires inside the lover reach the extent of being capable of melting iron with the lover’s frenzied breaths.⁵⁰ The trope of passionate fire recalls the trope of thirst and the need for cooling water. Hence, ‘udhri poets describe themselves as thirsty in expression of their yearning for the beloved. Qays explicitly describes himself as thirsty when referring to his yearning for Lubna.⁵¹ Majnun links the image of water with that of fire in a contradictory poetic depiction:

49- Georges Bataille, *Erotism Death and Sensuality*, trans. Nary Dalwood (San Francisco: City lights books, 1986), p. 17. This is understandable even with the passion fulfilled itself as it ‘provokes such violent agitation that the happiness involved, before being the happiness to be enjoyed, it is so great as to be more like its opposite, suffering’. Bataille, p. 19.

50- Majnun, p.30.

51- He says: See the parched birds which circle round
the water night and day,

but for fear being beaten never drink their fill
or come close to the cool ponds

They see the froth of the water and death together
and are attentive to the voices of the water bearers

They are no more afflicted than I am
with the heat of longing and ardour

but the enemy has hindered me

(Qays b. Dhurayh}, *Diwan Qays Lubna* (Qays b. Dhurayh}), ed. ‘Afif Nayif Ḥaṭum (Beirut: Dar s} adir, 1998), p. 155).

46- Majnun, p. 133.

47- Majnun, p. 24. The theme of tears turning into blood became a popular one in love poetry later on. See, for instance, Abu Tammam H}abib b. ‘Aws al-T}a’i, *Diwan Abi Tammam bi sharh} al-Khat}ib al-Tabrizi*, ed. Muh}ammad ‘Abduh ‘Azzam (Cairo: Dar al-ma’arif, n.d).

48- The lover might reach levels of hatred towards his beloved, as described in the ‘udhri poetry: the ‘udhri poet who wished death to his beloved, Abu al-Faraj ‘Ali b. al-H}usayn al-Is{fahani, al-Aghani (Beirut: Dar ih}ya’ al-turath al-‘Arabi, 1997), vol. 1, p. 155.



If my sighs are to reach the sea;
the sea will dry up due to its burning
flame⁵²

Jamil links Buthynah's fire to the
water of his eyes:

Your tears become plentiful

as Buthynah's tent fire loomed up
ahead of you⁵³

It is important to note that the fire attributed to Buthynah refers to two different things: one is that the fire that is lit for warming or guiding-- and that is the apparent meaning-- the second and deeper meaning is the metaphoric fire that inflames the poet's feelings which he tries to confront by plentiful tears. Through the tears of lovers, we can attribute love, passion and thirst to a power generated by fire. Tears are seen not only as expressions of love; they rather represent the overall power of love, for tears are the water that quenches fire. But tears are also the result of this burning power of love.⁵⁴

It is noteworthy that the theme of fire is prominent in some of the anecdotes ascribed to the 'udhri poets. For example, *Kitab al-aghani* presents a scene in which fire and the nudity of the lover's body are connected. Majnun--the anecdote shows--was seeking fire while wrapped in a cloak, Layla brought out the fire in a rag for him and they stood conversing. When the rag burned out, Majnun tore a piece from his cloak and lit it instead. Then he tore another and another until nothing remained of the cloak.⁵⁵ Khan observes that:

The exchange of words (language) between the lovers is made simultaneous with the burning of fire as well as the denuding of the male's lover's body. Burning of fire and baring of body here act as metaphors for linguistic expression (...). Layla is both the spark that ignites his desire and the night that is unveiled by his passion.⁵⁶

The theoretical paradigm enhances the theme of the crying lover; one of the chapters in Ibn Da'ud's book *al-zahrah*, is entitled: 'who could not find the solace, his weeping increases'. In this chapter he explains that the only true tears are those of a genuine lover; an artificial lover could claim love but without any explicit evidence of tears from his eyes.

3.2 *Malady and Wasting Away*

The language that contains references to sickness, wasting away, paleness, malady, (*kabid maqruh* ah) the damaged liver, and physicians is very conventional in Arabic love discourse. *Salamah* refers to two central aspects in the relationship between love and moderation, where love is either linked to other known diseases or is seen in itself as an illness.⁵⁷ The other manifestation of love's link to diseases is in the vocabulary that is commonly used to refer to both love and disease: *shag*af, *jawa*, 'amad, *khabal*, *kalaf* and *wala*'.⁵⁸ The word *huyam*, for example,

56- Ruqayya Yasmine Khan, *Sexuality and Secrecy in the Medieval Arabic Romance of Majnun Layla* (a dissertation in the department of Asian and Middle Eastern studies, The University of Pennsylvania, 1997), p. 159.

57- *Ibid.*, p. 130.

58- See *Salamah's* diagram for these terms and their links to other diseases, pp.133-134.

52- Majnun, p. 30.

53- Jamil, p. 48.

54- *Salamah*, p. 58.

55- *Al-Is*}fahani, vol. 2, p. 348



means passion but is also used to refer to a type of fever that affects camels and causes them to experience a burning thirst. 'Urwah begins by describing his huyam as a disease:

I am attacked by either despair or the disease of passion (huyam)

So you ought to refrain from approaching me lest the disease affects you⁵⁹

Love seems to be linked to tuberculosis, Muh}ammad b. al-Zubayr said: 'while with 'Urwah b. al-Zubayr, I heard him saying to a fellow from 'Udhrah's tribe: You people have the most tender hearts. The fellow replied: Yes, I have left over thirty there with tuberculosis and they have no disease but love'.⁶⁰

The 'udhri poet 'Urwah's story is typical in this manner. He was promised his beloved cousin 'Afra' if he became wealthy; so he went away to seek wealth, but during his absence 'Afra' was married off to another man who took her to Syria. Her father went to an old grave, restored it and put it in order and asked the tribe to keep the matter secret. When 'Urwah arrived, 'Afra's father told him that she had died and took him to the grave. 'Urwah remained there for several days, wasting away and slowly perishing, until a girl from the tribe came to him and told him

what had happened.⁶¹ There are several accounts of what followed, but it is significant that all the accounts insist on 'Urwah's sickness and death. In these verses, addressing his friends, he reveals the desperate physical condition of his body:

If you would take off my shirt from me you would clearly see

how much I have suffered on account of 'Afrā', my friends!

Then you would see little flesh, decaying bones,

and a heart perpetually palpitating⁶²

His relatives tried to cure him as they would any sick person. In one version of his story in al-Aghani it is stated that

he left 'Afrā' and returned to his people, wasted and thin. He had sisters, a maternal aunt and a grandmother, who began to admonish him, but it did not have any effect. They took him to Abū Kuh}aylah Rabāh} b. Shaddād, the client of the Banū Thu'aylah, who was the diviner of H}ajr, so that he could treat him. But his treatment did not have any effect on him.⁶³

In another account, he would go to the water cisterns where the camels of 'Afrā' would come to drink, and then would press his breast against them. People would say to him, "Take it easy, for you'll kill yourself! Fear God!" But he would not accept their advice, until finally he was nearly done for and felt

59- 'Urwah b. H}azam, Diwan 'Urwah b. H}azam, ed. Ant}wan Muh}sin al-Qawwal (Beirut: Dar al-jil, 1995), p. 53. This verse is also ascribed to Majnun, p. 229. Note his use of the adjective Ha'im (passionate) in association with the noun 'at}ab (wreck) that tatters his body, p. 25.

60- Da'ud al-Ant}aki, Tazyin al-aswaq (Beirut: Dar al-bih}ar, 2003), p. 19.

61- See the full story in al-Is}fahani, vol. 24, pp. 283-298.

62- 'Urwah, p. 36. trans. Van Gelder, Unpublished translation, given in a private communication from Prof. Van Gelder.

63- Al-Is}fahani, vol. 24, p. 293, trans. Van Gelder.



death approaching. Then he said,

I despair: I have been given to drink
the sickness of passionate love.

Be warned by me, lest you will have
what I suffer.⁶⁴

Of 'Urwah, it has often been said that 'nothing but his shadow (ghost, phantom) was left'. The attention that the narrator (rawi) focused on 'Urwah's bad health as a result of passionate love is significant in these accounts. In the last account quoted above, his relatives seek the medical advice of an expert, but the latter is useless in curing such a great sickness. We might recall here what Ibn Da'ud said about those who are love-sick: 'This is an incurable disease which doctors are unable to treat'.⁶⁵ 'Urwah puts his story, detailing the attempt to cure him, in a poetic form:

I left it to the diviner of al-Yamāmah
to name his fee,

and the diviner of H}ajr, if only they
could cure me.

They have left no trick they knew
untried,

no potion but they gave it me to
drink.

They sprinkled water on my face for
a while

and were quick to visit me, with
those who visit the sick.

They said: May God cure you! By
God, we have no power

over what your ribs contain⁶⁶

64- Ibid.

65- Ibn Da'ud, cited and translation by Biesterfeldt and Gutas, p. 45.

66- 'Urwah, pp. 39-40. trans. Van Gelder.

Furthermore, the word (marad}) illness is frequently associated with the word physician (t}abib) in al-ghazal al-'udhri. Apparently, as 'Urwah declared in the verses above, the suffering lover is seeking the cure from the physicians or the diviners. But the lover-poet then states that both physicians and diviners are hopeless in his case. On one hand, he has no choice but death or patience; Majnun says:

Two physicians!

Were you to treat me I would reward
you both,

so why do you forgo the fee?

They said sadly:

'Nothing can help you so either die
of grief,

or strengthen yourself with patienc.⁶⁷

On the other hand, the lover-poet implies that he knows his cure; it is not medical treatment but his beloved:

Layla's family have made me long
for her

and today I have no cure except in
Layla⁶⁸

Jamil also declares:

O Buthayna, show some generosity

and requite your suffering lover and
salve his maladies and pains!⁶⁹

If the beloved blessed the lover just once with a visit while he was sick, because of his love for her, then there would be nothing left for him to desire in this life and would therefore be happy to die.

67- Majnun, 123, and see also Qays, p. 23.

68- Majnun, p. 29.

69- Jamil, p. 53.



According to ‘udhri poetry all the malady’s symptoms are obvious in the lover: paleness, thinness, feverous and thirst. As for paleness and wasting away, Qays illustrates this point:

Love has signs that are patent in a youth

He becomes pale and his knuckles stick out from his hands⁷⁰

His usage of the word ‘signs’ is noteworthy in this context; it gives evidence to the claim that the idea of proving love by using bodily symptoms was already circulating in Arabic culture in Qays’s time. One should bear in mind that this idea became very conventional in Arabic love theory. Both Ibn Da’ud and al-Washsha’, for instance, consider the emaciated body to be evidence of true love: in his book, *Kitab al-zahrah*, Ibn Da’ud devotes a whole chapter to this, entitled: ‘The body’s pining is a sign of agony (kamad)’. He explains the effect of emotion on the body utilizing medical concepts: ‘the heat that is engendered by grief flows into the heart from all parts of the body and then ascends to the brain’.⁷¹

There are many tales in Mas}ari‘ al-‘ushshaq that enhance the theme of the sick-lover. In one account, al-Sarraj narrates that a slave girl who is loved by a pious youth sends him a red rose, which he straps to his upper arm as he

lies on his death-bed.⁷² Considering the ‘udhri tradition, there are frequent references to the theme of wasting away in Majnun’s story and his poetry alike. For example, he claims:

I have had so much hardship with her
that I melted with passion and my
bones turned to dust⁷³

Here he ascribes extraordinary effects to love. Love is like death in which the bones become feeble. Sura 36 in the Quran reads: ‘And he makes comparisons for Us, and forgets his own (origin and) Creation: He says, “Who can give life to (dry) bones and decomposed ones (at that)?”. Say, “He will give them life Who created them for the first time! for He is Well-versed in every kind of creation”’.⁷⁴ Majnun’s use of religious lexicon is also evident when he enquires about whether it is lawful for Layla to hurt his body or not⁷⁵. Jamil, likewise, pleads Buthaynah to fear God and not to kill her lover.⁷⁶

In any case, it is significant how the theme of emaciation of the lover becomes essential in classical Arabic ghazal poetry. There are endless

70- Qays, p. 66. Kuthayyir also says: ‘That D}umri’s daughter is asking me: why you are pale’. Kuthayyir, p. 223.

71- Ibn Da’ud, vol. 2, p. 400.

72- Ja’far b. Ah}mad al-Sarraj, *Mas}ari‘ al-‘ushshaq* (Beirut : Dar s}adir, 1958), vol. 1, p. 16.

73- Majnun, p. 201.

74- Ya Sin (36: 77-78).

75- Majnun, p. 137.

76- Jamil, p. 52.



examples that confirm the importance of this theme.⁷⁷

3.3 *Fainting*

In 'Urwah's story, as illustrated in al-Aghani, there is a scene where the lover suffered from fainting and only the smell of 'Afra's veil could awake him:

When he departed from them his condition deteriorated, after having been healthy and on the way to recovery. He suffered from fainting fits and palpitations. Whenever he lost consciousness they would throw on his face a veil that had belonged to 'Afra' and which she had given to him; then he would come to his senses.⁷⁸

Fainting represents a desire not to communicate with the outside world or even feel it. However, when the outside world is represented by the beloved, or anything that relates to her, the lover is revived as if fainting were a death in miniature and the smell of the beloved alone would enable one to gain life after death. The Quranic scene of the prophet Jacob who regains his sight after his son's shirt is thrown over his face⁷⁹ is clearly present in the narrators' imagination when it comes to the stories of udhri lovers.

Thus, fainting is another example of the physical effects of love⁸⁰ and it is particularly common in Majnun's story. There are several scenes in his romance where he faints-- for example, after Layla recites these verses to him:

Both of us appear in front of people
To hate each other

And yet each is entrenched with his friend

The secrets of the glancer are not hidden

If the eyes disclose what he conceals

Hearing this, he falls into a swoon and rose having lost his senses.⁸¹ The frequency of the scenes of fainting in Majnun's romance led Taha Husayn to treat Majnun's character somewhat sarcastically:

It was not enough that you would talk to him about Layla, for him to faint and fall on his face (...) He spent all his life either falling on his face, or wandering at large. He never, or almost never, knew a calm, reasonable life; all his life was full of anxiety, divided between fainting and madness.⁸²

77- Al-'Abbas b. al-Ah}naf, for instance, declares: All that love for her has left of me is a last gasp in a gaunt body. (Al-'Abbas b. al-Ah}naf, p. 130, trans. Hamori, p. 213). al-Mutanabbi is not only wasting away, because of love, but he is also proud of this thinness and indeed of anyone who is thin:

For love of you I truly love my emaciation, and every emaciated man. (Abu al-T}ayyib al-Mutanabi, Diwan, sharh{ Abu al-Baq} al-'Uk}buri, ed. Kamal T}alib (Beirut, Dar al-kutub al-'ilmyyah, 1997), vol. 3, p. 24).

78- Al-Is}fahani, vol. 24, p. 289, trans. Van Gelder.

79- See Yusuf (12:96).

80- Fainting lovers is a well-established theme in the tales of The Arabian Nights. See, for instance, Manzalaoui's discussion of the tale of 'Ali b. Bakkar and Shams, in which the two lovers embraced each other and fell down fainting at the door. Mahmoud Manzalaoui, "Swooning Lovers: a Theme in Arab and European Romance", in *Comparative Criticism*, 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 74-76.

81- Al-Is}fahani, vol. 2, p. 338, trans. Khan, p. 167. See more examples in Al-Is}fahani, vol. 2, pp. 341, 370.

82- T}ah}ah H}usayn, H}adith al-arbi'a', 12th edn (Cairo: Dar al-ma'arif, 1976), p. 198, trans. Khairallah, p. 93.



H}usayn's criticism is based on his disdain for what he sees as the irrational details of 'udhri narratives, as he fails to see the literary complexity of these stories as well as their rich symbolic aspects. In Majnun's romance, there is always 'a connection between a fainting spell and the sight or mention of Layla, and between the fainting spell and the poetry uttered immediately before or after these spells'.⁸³ Majnun's poetry often dwells upon this point:

The wind from her has brought a cool breath,

of her perfume upon my heart

I swooned, for my patience was long gone

and I had had neither answer nor reply⁸⁴

In these verses, Majnun is not only completely besotted by the presence or the vision of his beloved, he also faints merely as a result of the moving wind, which acts as a signifier of his beloved.⁸⁵ In one account, Majnun faints out of rage and jealousy when he meets Layla's husband and asks him if he has ever touched Layla. Her husband replies: 'By God, if you put me under oath, yes'. Majnun then grasps onto two handfuls of hot embers and holds them until he falls unconscious while the embers and the burnt flesh of his

palms scatter on the ground.⁸⁶ Here, an extreme bodily reaction is attributed to the lover, where he burnt his hands and fainted. The reaction of fainting is not just associated to 'udhri poets, their beloved as well are associated with it at some points, often amusingly. Ibn Qutaybah narrates an anecdote about a man from the Murrah tribe who went on business passing close to Najd, where he was taken care of by a woman. She asked him about Majnun and he replied to her saying that Majnun was wandering in the desert with the wild animals, possessing neither sense nor understanding except when Layla was mentioned to him; then he would weep and recite poetry for her. The man from Murrah then said: 'She wailed and wept until, by God, I thought that her heart would break'. Then she recited some verses and she cried until she fainted, and when she regained consciousness she told him that she was Layla.⁸⁷

In his comparative study, Manzalaoui shows that the phenomenon of the tearful and fainting lover is also common in Chaucer; the hero of Troilus and Criseyde is of this nature and Troilus's fainting does successfully win him Criseyde. Moreover, the trope of the fainting lover is not confined to Chaucer; swoons are attributed to the two manliest of all heroes Tristan and Lancelot.⁸⁸ Manzalaoui declares that 'the weeping and fainting lover

83- Khairallah, p. 93.

84- Majnun, p. 67.

85- Khairallah points out that the motif of fainting is popular with the sufis, who pass from perplexity to fainting on the way to the vision of, and unity with, the beloved. The highest degree of this experience is expressed by the term s}ar' (epileptic fit, or death). Khairallah, p. 94.

86- Cited in Khairallah, p. 87.

87- 'Abdullah b. Muslim b. Qutaybah, *al-Shi'r wa al-shu'ara'*, ed. Ahmad Muhammad Shakir (Cairo: Dar al-ma'arif, 1958), pp. 566-567, trans. Khairallah, p. 138.

88 Mahmoud Manzalaoui, "Swooning Lovers: a Theme in Arab and European Romance", p. 71.



represents, for the figure of the hero in medieval romance, the furthest development from resolute warrior and voyager-hero of epic'.⁸⁹ In any case, among the striking similarities between Arabic tales of *The Arabian Nights* and Chaucer's *Troilus*, as Manzalaoui points out, are: the similarity in tone and attitude, love at first sight, the topos of the bow and arrow of love that inflicts a wound upon the lover's heart, the sense that love is a fated disaster and the double faint of the lovers.⁹⁰

3.4 Madness

Among the synonyms of love in the Arabic language, about twenty relate love, in varying degrees, to insanity. This list contains words such as, *huyam*, *tabul*, *taym*, *Khabal*, *lamam*, and *mass*.⁹¹ Madness also has its various forms, and one of them is expressed as '*ishq*',⁹² as noted by the early philologist and lexicographer *al-As}ma'i* who travelled among the Bedouin Arabs. In this light, one can understand the significant emphasis placed on madness

in classical Arabic love stories.⁹³ This may explain why Ibn al-Jawzi and Ibn Qayyim suggested that the first line of defence against falling into *hawa* is to let oneself be guided by reason '*aql*, or by the rational soul. And so they stand in these respects in direct conflict with the central thrust of the *adab* tradition.⁹⁴

In comparison with Western literature, Manzalaoui notes that '*madness is frequently the terminal fate in Arabic tales, while in the occidental ones it occurs (whether in a true or feigned form) as an episode in the life of a lover, rather than as his end*'.⁹⁵ This idea is reiterated in the following lines by Shakespeare:

Lovers and madmen have such
seething brains,

Such shaping fantasies that
apprehend

More than cool reason ever
comprehends⁹⁶

In *Majnun's* romance, after *Layla* marries another man, *Majnun* completely loses his reason despite all

89- *Ibid.*, p. 73.

90- *Ibid.*, pp. 76-82.

91- The last word *mass* has multiple meanings including madness, intercourse and passionate love. The link between the jinn and madness is also implicated in the word *mass*. For a detailed discussion of the words that link love with madness see *Salamah*, pp. 163-178. And for the motif of *Majnun* being touched by jinn, see *Khairallah*, p. 89.

92- Cited in *Giffen*, p. 64.

93- For example, in *The Thousand and One Nights* the tale of *Qamar al-Zaman* and *Budur* is a tale of mutual love-madness. *Qamar* suffers from madness and pines for his beloved, while *Budur* is afflicted by violent madness and has to be physically restrained; finally the reunion of the two lovers was the ideal cure for both of them. See: *The Book of The Thousand and One Nights*, trans. Burton, Vol. 3 (New York: Heritage Press, 1962), pp. 1062-251.

94- *Giffen*, "Love Poetry and Love Theory in Medieval Arabic Literature", in *Arabic Poetry Theory and Development*, ed. G.E. von Grunebaum (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1973), p. 114.

95- *Manzalaoui*, p. 44.

96- *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Act V, scene I, 4-22).



attempts to cure him. This is the basis of the legend and, of course, also explains the legendarily appellation attributed to him of Majnun, the madman. Ibn Qutaybah, in one of the early Arabic accounts about Majnun, states that: 'He was nicknamed al-Majnun (the madman), since his reason had left him because of the intensity of his passion'.⁹⁷ In this account, Ibn Qutaybah offers a detailed description of Majnun's madness:

[Layla] would shun him and converse with others, to the point where he was hurt. When she realized that, she turned to him and said:

In front of other people, we both display hatred,

While each of us is entrenched in the other's heart

Things worsened for him so much that his reason left him, and he wandered aimlessly with the wild beasts. He would not put on any garment without tearing it to pieces, nor he would understand anything unless Layla was mentioned to him. Once she was mentioned, he would recover his reason and talk about her without dropping a letter.⁹⁸

Dols observes that 'the freedom of the harmless madman and familial care are conspicuous features in the early Arabic accounts'.⁹⁹ However, al-Aghani's version of this particular account includes some additional details. For example, when Majnun failed to perform the ritual prayer and his father asked him for an explanation, he

would not respond with [even] a word. His father, the narrator, continues: 'we used to confine and chain him, and then he [resorted to] biting his tongue and lips until fearing for him, we let him go his way. And so, he madly wanders'.¹⁰⁰ Listening to Layla's verses led Majnun to wander in the desert. Khan notes that, in this account, Majnun is portrayed as being unerringly voluble in language that is highly erring (poetry) and his fluency in poetic speech is compared to his muteness when asked to utter prayers.¹⁰¹

In any case, Majnun's madness, as expressed in several accounts, appears to be a 'break with the commonly accepted norms of behaviour, whether on a personal or on a social level'.¹⁰² He wandered in the desert and made friends with beasts, speaking to no one and completely neglecting his physical appearance.¹⁰³ So, 'however Majnun's madness is interpreted, it cannot completely conceal the discernible stigma that has commonly been attached to insanity in Arab society'.¹⁰⁴ The narrators of Majnun's story bring to our attention his physical appearance in particular, though they also provide some stereotyped elements of mad

100- Al-Is} fahani, vol. 2, p. 338. trans. Khan, p. 176.

101- Khan, p. 180.

102- Khairallah, p. 82.

103- In his attempt to define Majnun's legend within a mystical framework, Khairallah claims that these manifestations have the further significance of being parallel to some mystical states (ah}wal) and stations (maqamat). Nevertheless, he admits that the mystical interpretation of these manifestations of madness, and the relating of them to the presence of a possessing spirit, is only one way of understanding the legend. Khirallah, p. 94.

104- Dols, p. 332.

97- Ibn Qutaybah, p. 563, trans. Khairallah, p. 135.

98- Ibn Qutaybah, p. 565, trans. Khairallah, p. 136.

99- Dols, p. 313.



behaviour in general. His physical condition 'becomes his distinguishing mark as an incarnation of the love-mad poet, and in contrast to other heroes of the same type of romance'.¹⁰⁵ One might recall, for instance, the images used to describe Jamil; the narratives portray him as a handsome, noble, knight, who wears fine clothes and acts appropriately.¹⁰⁶ However Jamil says:

When I said: give me back my reason
(caught by you)

I want to live like other people
(without passion)

She said: you are asking an
impossible thing¹⁰⁷

Majnun, on the other hand, is portrayed as having become childlike and as the archetypal madman. Although Dols claims that 'Majnun's withdrawal was an expression of his rejection of society and his own humanity',¹⁰⁸ it could also be argued that pity was aroused by his act. For example, after tying him up, his family freed him fearing that he would hurt himself when biting his lips and tearing his garments; furthermore, all those who visited him in the desert seemed to show him compassion. Nevertheless, Majnun's madness appears to be in conflict with the society, as Khairallah points out:

Majnun seems to be the farthest

expression of the glamorized rebellion against social, religious, and intellectual conventions. These alienating conventions seem to have generated a counter-alienation, an outcry for total freedom, and a desire to return to unity with nature, where life is imagined to be beyond good and evil (...). Totally naked, Majnun lets his hair grow all over his body. He grazes with animals and run with them, mainly with gazelles, who resemble his God: Layla. This behaviour marks his irremediable madness. Thus, several anecdotes identify his appearance with that of the jinn themselves. The insistence on this characteristic of Majnun's appearance, could be interpreted both as an expression of the popular imagination behind the legend, and as a crystallization of Majnun's identification with the irrational forces of nature.¹⁰⁹

Majnun's unkempt physical appearance: his long nails, his long and unkempt hair, his nudity and the growth of his body hair, all portray an image that is unacceptable for Muslim men. Many critics such as- Andre Miquel, Khairallah, Michael Dols and Ruqayya Khan have noted the anti-Islamic tendencies illustrated in Majnun's characterisation as a wild man. Dols declares that: 'the savage would appear as the negator of Muslim social values'.¹¹⁰ Alternately, Khan demonstrates that 'Majnun is both negated against and the negator: he is both the sinful wild man and the romanticized, rebellious wild man'.¹¹¹ She sees his bestiality

105- Khairallah, p. 83.

106- Al-Is}fahani, vol. 8, p. 290. See also al-'Aqqad's discussion on Jamil's fine appearance, pp. 25-26.

107- Jamil, p. 25, trans. Ahmad Khaldun Kinany, *The Development of Gazal in Arabic Literature (Pre-Islamic and Early Islamic Periods)* (Damascus: Syrian University Press, 1951), p. 288.

108- Dols, p. 333.

109- Khairallah, p. 85.

110- Dols, p. 335.

111 Khan, p. 93.



and nudity as bodily signs of a moral decay caused by his disregard for familial and religious conventions.¹¹² However, both Khan and Khairallah see in Majnun a romanticized picture of the poet who returns to natural perfection, living outside of society's boundaries, and instead lives in harmony with the animals who have become accustomed to him.¹¹³ The use of the image of the 'Bedouin wild man as a means of rebellion against established society itself' is, Khan argues, tragic:

Majnun represents the image of the wild man—the madman in the desert, without a name, a genealogy, a home or a history—employed as an icon of rebellion against the 'civilizing mission of Islam'. His geographical errancy or mad wanderings in search of the Najd are sentimentalized as a nostalgic gravitation toward the pristine Bedouin homeland.¹¹⁴

However, the emphasis Khan puts on Majnun being Bedouin, and thus a representation of Bedouin rebellion against the civilizing mission of Islam, is a questionable one. I would rather see Majnun's depiction as an individual whose behaviour contrasts with both Islamic and Bedouin norms, establishing his own conduct as an outcast of society.

In his poetry, Majnun tries to deny his madness, linking his ability to compose

poetry to his obsession with Layla:

They speak of a madman crazed with her memory

By God, I have no madness, nor am I bewitched

If I try to compose poetry not in her remembrance

I swear by your fathers, my verse will not obey¹¹⁵

It is worth noting that while condemning Majnun for being a madman out of his love, the "wise" men also chase after him in order to hear his poetry.¹¹⁶ If he is bewitched by magic, Layla is his magic, and for her sake he composes his poetry that those "wise" men are longing to hear. In short, Majnun's mad outpourings are received, to some extent, as a source of knowledge.¹¹⁷

4. Conclusion

The changes that occur in the lover's body as he descends into love sickness become signs of moral values related to the manners of love and to the literary values of criticism. Thus, some of the

115- Majnun, p. 118, trans. Khairallah, p. 95.

116- See, for example, al-Is}fahani, vol. 2, pp. 371,386.

117- From the title of Abu al-Qasim al-H}asan al-Naysaburi's book: 'Uqala' al-majanin', [The Wise Fool], one could observe the ambiguity surrounding the reception of madman in Arabic culture. The narratives ascribed in this book to mad people imply a great sense of wisdom, and show how "normal" people seek that kind of wisdom. Moreover, many people who have been associated with madness are depicted as lovers, whether of human beloveds or for God and they always seem to be aware of their condition, and sometimes even happy about it. See: Abu al-Qasim al-H}asan al-Naysaburi, 'Uqala' al-majanin, ed. 'Abd al-Amir Muhanna (Beirut: Dar al-fikr al-lubnani, 1990).

112- Ibid., pp. 99-100.

113- Khairallah, p. 87, Khan, p.93. However, Khan emphasises the symbol of gazelles in Majnun's wilderness, but she neglected the other animals, which are not peace-loving animals, like (wah}sh) beasts, which are associated with Majnun as well as gazelles in the narratives.

114- Khan, p. 99.



changes are seen in the emanations of love and consequently become qualities that are much sought after, as they distinguish between true lovers and those who only claim to be so. Al-Washsha' states that:

Signs of love that primarily denote the lover include emaciation, constant illness, shortage of sleep, pale face, addiction to isolation, continuing tears, meditating status, moans, nostalgia and consecutive sighs. No matter how the lover tries to conceal and endure his love sooner or later it will be revealed.¹¹⁸

To enhance his point, al-Washsha' quoted a poet who said:

No-one but those who have loved know sorrow,

and not all those who say 'I love' speak the truth

The true lovers are known by their gauntness

from their long pact with sorrows and sleeplessness¹¹⁹

The ghazal poetry of the Abbasid poet, al-'Abbas b. Al-Ah}naf is full of similar themes, such as the tearful, wasting away and sleepless lover. He, for instance, says:

Separation has not healed the wound of the heart

and my head has become white before its time

The burning heat of separation from my love has wasted away my body

and my heart, from the fires of its love,

118- Al-Washsha', p. 76.

119- Ibid., pp. 76-77.

has a terrible sickness for which there is no physician¹²⁰

On the basis of the discussions in this article, one may conclude that the values attached to this sort of excessive love contradict all moral, social and religious values, values which are firmly based on moderation. I have discussed the tragic outcomes lovers face, through examining the physical symptoms ascribed to love-madness as they appear in 'udhri tradition. The extreme reactions of the lover's body reflect his excessive passion; which, on the one hand, proves to be his true emotion, and on the other hand, gains him a place in literary collections and anthologies on love in classical Arabic literature. These extreme bodily responses to love opened the door to a wide the discourse of (ah{wal al-'ashiq) the lover's circumstances and what caused them and to what extent he accepted responsibility for his acts. This discourse involved medical, religious, philosophical and literary perspectives, though the theory of love among Arabs was not formulated by philosophers or physicians, it was rather formulated by religious men fuqaha and literary men 'udaba'. Hence, the use of the poetry of love as a resource for articulating broader theories of love became a well established tradition in Arabic literature. In fact, most of the writing on this subject was done by literary men, who were well-versed in Arabic poetry, both old and new, and so were

120- Al-'Abbas b. al-Ah}naf, p. 33. Similar themes in his Diwan occur frequently. See, for instance, his verses in pp. 45, 62, 137, 232, 251, 269.



positively disposed toward it.¹²¹ The 'udhri poets afterwards became the models of the true lovers who suffered tremendously, so much so that the signs of their suffering became evident in their bodies.

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