

AL-ZAMAKHSHARİ'S LOVE POETRY (GHAZAL)

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Introduction :

The term **ghazal** is virtually synonymous with the other two terms **nasīb** and **tashbīb**, which are all used in Arabic literature to express love poetry in general. Arab lexicographers did not really differentiate between these three terms since they usually explained one with another.

As for the critics, most of them also did not draw any important distinction between **ghazal**, **nasīb** and **tashbīb**, and freely interchanged them in use (1). Qudamah b. Ja'far, however, was the only one who tried to define **ghazal** and **nasīb** and to show the difference between them. According to him **nasīb** was the art of mentioning the physical constitution of women and their natural disposition, and the different affects of being in love on the poet himself. On the other hand **ghazal**, in Qudama's opinion, was the art of wooing a woman and being infatuated with love for her. **Ghazal** thus the feeling itself, which when described in poetry, became **nasīb**. So Qudama did not regard **ghazal** as a separate poetical genre (2).

Love has aroused keen interest among the critics although they only seemed to be interested in the amatory prelude, at the beginning

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(1) Abū 'Alī al-Hasan b.Rashīq al-Qayravānī, al-'Umdah fi sinā'at al-shi'r wa naqdih, Cairo 1344/1925 (2 Vols. in 1) Vol. 11, pp. 93-102, al-'Askarī Abū Hilāl, Kitāb al-Sinā'atayn al-kitābah wa al-shi'r, ed. 'Alī Muhammad al-Bijāwī and Abū Fadl İbrāhīm, Cairo, 1371/1952, p. 129.

(2) Qudāmah b. Ja'far, Naqd al-shi'r, ed. Mikhāil Sābā, Beirut 1958, p. 88.

of the *qasidah*, which by its grace and smoothness, must have drawn the attention of the audience and made the panegyric or satiric theme which followed more accessible. On the other hand, no study can be found concerning love poetry as an independent theme, although a great number of poets were devoted to this theme for the first century of Islam onwards.

According to critics, love poetry must content itself with expressing in a gentle and harmonious vocabulary, themes which are plain, obvious, easy and touching (3). Above all it must not overstep its limits and encroach on those of the principal theme. A small number of verses of love were sufficient at the head of a *gasidah*. Love poetry must express profound passion, sadness, submission and humility. Themes of force, pride and thoughtlessness would be out of place here (4). The man disarmed in front of his beloved, is a theme which pleased Qudamah.

Among the numerous traditional themes of love poetry, the critics mention nostalgia and memories aroused by the winds, the lightening, the songs of birds, the floating of images and the signs of abandoned camps (5). Most of these themes are, as can be seen, of the desert. But that did not prevent the town-dwellers of all the Islamic centuries from deriving their ideas from them. It was natural that a love poem, imposed at the beginning of every *qasidah*, was reduced to a collection of clichés where, very often, sincerity was lacking. But sincerity was of little importance to the critic.

The Jāhili poets, in their amatory preludes, described both the moral and the physical attributes of their beloved ones, but on the whole the poets stressed the physical charm rather than the moral qualities of women. Their ideal lady had coal-black hair, a clear and bright face, smooth cheeks, black eyes, dark lips and white and well-set teeth. She had a long, white neck, her breasts were full and round, her waist was slender but her lips were thick and swelling. The poets often compared her hair with bunches of dates, its blackness with charcoal. Her face was compared with the brightness of sunlight and moonlight. Her teeth were like musk or like a fresh,

(3) al-'Umdah, Vol. 11, p. 93.

(4) *Ṣinā'atayn*, p. 129, al-'Umdah, Vol. 11, p. 99, *Naqd al-shi'r*, p. 88.

(5) *Naqd al-shi'r*, p. 88.

unrodden garden. Her figure was always tall and supple like green twigs (6).

The forgoing description of the beloved of the ancient poets became very fashionable in the traditional Arab poetry throughout the ages. Although this image of the ideal lady was later refined and elaborated upon, the basic elements have remained the same for many centuries.

Besides the continuation of the traditional amatory prelude, during the Umayyad period, two independent forms of love poetry came into being. The first one was 'Udhrite love poetry, created by the famous poet Jamil (d. 701) from whose tribe of 'Udhrah this variety of ghazal was named. 'Udhrite poetry which could be said to be a compromise between religion and love, was characterised by its sincerity, purity and languishing grief. Its influence grew not only in Arabic poetry, but later in Persian and Turkish poetry as well (7).

The second type of love poetry was the 'Umarite, whose prominent representative was 'Umar b. Rabī'ah (d. 92/710-1). His *dīwān* contained over 400 love poems. Umarite love poetry was in stark contrast to 'Udhrite love poetry, being realistic, gay, spontaneous and melodious. It was an upsurge against the growing wave of puritanism. 'Umarite love poetry also continued its development during the Abbasid age. It was cultivated and new ideas and images were gradually introduced. On the other hand it became more obscene and cynical and lost its spontaneity and sincerity. It was used not only in praise of the beauty of girls but also of boys (8).

Al-Zamakhshari's Love Poetry

As for al-Zamakhshari's love poetry, it consists of the amatory preludes with which he opened most of his panegyric odes and

(6) Kinany, A. Kh., *The Development of Ghazal in Arabic Literature* (Pre-Islamic and Early Islamic Periods), Damascus 1951, pp. 103-107. Salah al-Din al-Munajjid, *Jamāl al-Mar'ah 'ind al-'Arab*, 2nd ed., Beirut 1969, pp. 25-30.

(7) Gibb, H.A.R., *Arabic Literature*, Oxford University Press, 1970, p. 45.

(8) Kinany, *op. cit.*, p. 370, Dayf Shawqī, *al-Fann wa madhāhibih fi as-shi'r al-'Arabi*, 8th ed., Cairo 1976, pp. 63-70.

five independant short poems (9) one of which is a fragment (qit'ah) of only three verses.

al-Zamakhsharî, like many other poets, pretended to be in love and consequently suffered pain and grief thereby. However there is no evidence to show that he experienced true love or indeed that he was sincere in the expression of his feelings. It was quite common for poets to exaggerate their feelings of love and passion even when such feelings were in reality non-existent. al-Zamakhsharî did not talk about any specific lady with whom he was in love, and he remained unmarried throughout his life. Indeed, al-Zamakhsharî had a low opinion of women in general (10).

Although al-Zamakhsharî seems to have believed in the conventional structure of the qasidah, and appreciated the beauty of the amatory prelude at the defining of an otherwise insipid ode, nevertheless he personally found difficulty in writing love poetry. The reason he gave for this was the hardship he had suffered during his life (11).

However, whatever the sincerity of love poetry it was generally based on personal experience, and it may have been the lack of such experience which inhibited al-Zamakhsharî. In any case the amatory prelude was much appreciated by people in general, as well as the high officials who looked for it in the eulogies devoted to them, with the result that this kind of love poetry became merely conventional also. It may have been al-Zamakhsharî's desire to comply with this convention and so please his patrons, as well as the fact that he wanted his poetry to be considered of worth and complete.

al-Zamakhsharî's amatory preludes and independent love poems are very traditional in both theme and style. Like ancient poets, he sometimes mediated over the ruins of the beloved's dwellings and deserted encampments. He invariably used traditional ideas, images,

(9) See poems numbered 11, 94, 111, 115, 283 in the Arabic text of my Ph. D. thesis entitled «Al-Zamakhsharî's Life and a Critical Edition of his *Diwan*» submitted to the Faculty of Arts in the University of Durham, January 1979. Hence forth in this article all page numbers of the Arabic quotations refer to the pages of the Arabic section of my thesis unless otherwise stated.

(10) See pp. 14-18 of my thesis.

(11) See poem., 11.

similes and metaphors. The names of fictitious beloved ones were Su'dâ, Sulaymâ, Su'âd, Salmâ, Su'd, Asmâ and Hind, which were among the conventional names used by most of the predecessors as well as his contemporaries in their love poetry (12). But the name which appeared most frequently and which al-Zamakhsharî obviously preferred was Su'dâ.

He also followed the traditional Arab poets in mentioning the famous sites and places, which were the scenario for his love adventures. These places included Mina, Najd, Tihâmah, Wâdî al-Himâ, Liwâ, Zarûd and other places in the Hijâz. While many poets mentioned these places merely to imitate the old, traditional poetry and had not in fact, actually visited them (13). al-Zamakhsharî however was most probably well acquainted with these sites and places. He had travelled from his home town Khârazm to Mecca even as far as Yemen, on at least three separate occasions.

Most of his amatory preludes used purely conventional imagery and phraseology. His beloved ones always appeared like a gazelle or an oryx. Their slim and tall figures used to sway like the branch of a willow tree or a bamboo shoot. Their faces were clear and bright, and compared with the brightness of the moon, or sometimes the sun. When she veiled her face, the darkness fell and when she unveiled, she disclosed the shining moon. On one occasion the brightness of her face was likened to the light of a lamp and her veil acted as a lampshade.

14 وَكُنْفَلِ الصَّبَاحِ غُرَّةٌ وَجْهَهَا
وَنَقَابُهَا مُشْكَاةٌ وَزُجَاةٌ

As for their eyes, they were sometimes likened to the large eyes of the wild cow, but more often al-Zamakhsharî preferred to describe them as narrow eyes which were capable of inflicting wide wounds in his heart.

15 تَضَافَعَتِ الْعَيْنَانِ مِنْهُ وَإِنَّهُ
يُوسِعُ فِي الْقَلْبِ الْجِرَاحَ إِذَا نَظَرَ

(12) al-Tâhir 'Alî Javâd, *al-Shi'r al-'arabî fi al-'Iraq wa bilâd al-'ajam fi al-'asr al-Saljûqî*, Baghdad 1958-1961, Vol. 11, p. 99, Dayf Shawkî, op. cit., p. 369.

(13) Al-Tâhir 'Alî Javâd, op. cit., Vol. 11, p. 98.

(14) Text, p. 38.

(15) Ibid, p. 108.

Their glances were compered with arrows or sword-blades, sending forth fatal shots. The smile of his beloved was compared with lightening which dispersed the darkness, and revealed rows of pearly teeth, like hailstones. Her lips were intoxicating with their saliva, which was likened to wine. The beloved always had smooth cheeks which were like red roses that never fade, a long white neck, full and round breasts likened to pomegranates. She was slender-waisted, with thick and full hips like sand hills, and her skin was white and smoother than silk. Her smell was fragrant like musk, so that as she walked her skirt scattered the perfume over the ground.

We can see from al-Zamakhshari's description of his beloved that he followed the traditional image of women in Arabic poetry. Even when he described Turkish girls, they did not appear any different (16). Most of his description was physical and sensual, rather than aesthetic, and the only moral quality he singled out was his beloved's bashfulness and timidity (17). He did not make lewd sexual remarks or obscenities, although he mentioned kissing and embracing his beloved (18).

Apart from the description of the physical beauty of the various beloveds, which remained generalized and did not give any particular details of individual charms, there were several other concertional recurrent aspects of al-Zamakhshari's love poetry. He described himself a captive of passion, longed for the past and his youth, complained of seperation from his beloved, which was like death for him, and longed for their reunion. None of his beloveds were faithfull to him, and he described their hearts as being as hard as rock, whilst his own heart which he unusually likened to glass (19) was fragile and easily hurt.

His love poetry is almost devoid of obsolete and difficult words making it easy to understand, but nevertheless his verses are full of clichés and repetition. His poetry can not be said to be melodious nor spontaneous, and it lacks originality and depth of feeling. His description is in most cases, weak and unconvincing, as can be seen in the following extract.

(16) See poem., 207.

(17) See poems, 217/2, 104/3, 195/8.

(18) See poems, 124/19, 174/16-17, 283.

(19) See poems, 111/9, 115/5.

«For me there is one spring, for others another,
 The rose of your cheeks is a blossoming spring for me.
 The rose of your cheeks never fades, whereas with
 the end of spring, every rose dies.
 To me, you are a luxuriant garden; when I am asked
 to sell it for a verdant meadow, I say it is not for sale.
 Command whatever you desire, and I will obey you;
 I am an obedient servant to my beloved.
 In spite of my weak body, if you call me,
 I am as swift as an echo in my reply.
 People call Muslim «Sari' al-Ghawâni» (20),
 But than I am indeed crazy about your eyes.
 I cannot bear the separation from you;
 Ask the one who is passionately in love, and
 he cannot.
 The tears of my eyes are sufficient intercession
 for me;
 Do you accept or have I no intercessor?
 I am chaste and pious but I am cunning and
 wanton in longing for beautiful girls.» (21).

The following two lines, where he used the verb «'arada» in six different derivatives, are not poetical and sound irksome and repetitive although they form homonyms (jinas).

22 ما عَرَضْتَنِي بِشَيْءٍ يَوْمَ مَقْدِمِهَا بَلَى قُوَادِي لَأَلَّا شَجَانِي، عَرَضْتِ
 إِعْرَاضَ سَعْدِي شَجَانِي بَعْدَ مَا عَرَضْتَ مَا بَالَهَا عَرَضْتَ لِي ثُمَّ أَعَرَضْتَ

al-Zamakhsharî sometimes employed a conversational style where he talked to his beloved, which reminds us of the famous poet 'Umar b. Abî Rabî'ah.

(20) Muslim b. al-Walîd al-Ansârî who was nicknamed «Sari' al-Ghawâni» was an Arab poet of early Abbasid Period. He died in 208/823 (cf. al-Zuruklî Khayr al-dîn, al-A'lâm, 2nd. ed. (10 vols. in 5) Beirut 1954-57, Vol. VIII, pp. 120-121.

(21) See poem, 167/1-9.

(22) Text, p. 26.

«Never shall I forget the time when I courted her near the meadow, on the bank of the lake which received the waterfall; «Bring me a rose», said I, meaning the rose of her cheeks; but she understood me not and answered: «wait for me», in the twinkling of an eye I will bring it.» — «Nay», I replied, «I cannot wait,» — «There is no rose here», said she; «except these cheeks» — «Tis well,» said I, «What you have there will do» (23).

An important aspect of al-Zamakhsharî's style is that in a considerable number of his love poems the pronouns and adjectives which referred to the beloved were in masculine gender. De Slane, when translating the forgoing lines, commented on this point and said «throughout Islamism from India to Spain, an extreme corruption of morals prevailed among the higher classes, the doctors of law and the poets. al-Zamakhsharî himself appears to have followed the current.» Although this far reaching statement expresses a strong point of view, there may have been some truth in it.

Finally, perhaps the best of his independent love poems is the one numbered 94 in the edition. It is a fine flowing poem of only 16 verses. al-Zamakhsharî most probably composed it either during the performance of the pilgrimage or immediately after. It concerns a lady whom the poet saw performing one of the rituals of the pilgrimage at Muhassab, a place in Mina where the stoning of the devils takes place. al-Zamakhsharî described quite successfully how she not only attracted the attention of the pilgrims including himself, and pre-occupied their thoughts, but even distracted them from their devotions by her beauty and charm. He ends the poem by begging her not to perform pilgrimage again because of her distracting influence on those around her. It is the only love poem where the unity of the theme is maintained, and where al-Zamakhsharî obviously pictured the girl and circumstances in his imagination. One has the impression that this happened to al-Zamakhsharî during the performance of pilgrimage. His style is fluent and not laboured as are most of his other poems.

(23) Poem, 124/15-18, The translation is by De Slane, *Ibn Khallikan's Biographical Dictionary*, Vol. 111, p. 325.