

# Reading Love and Friendship at the Abbasid Court

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**Introduction: Love in Tehran** The protagonist of Iraj Pezeshkzad's 1973 novel, *My Uncle Napoleon* (*Daijani Napoleon*) begins, "One hot summer day, to be precise one Friday the thirteenth of August at about a quarter to three in the afternoon, I fell in love (*āshiq shudam*)."<sup>1</sup>

The thirteen-year-old narrator explains, "Layli, my uncle's daughter, and her little brother had been waiting in the main garden for us for half an hour. Our two houses had been built within one big enclosure and there was no wall between them. As on every day, we settled down quietly to our games and conversation in the shade of a big walnut tree. And then I happened to catch Layli's eye. A pair of wide black eyes looked back at me. I couldn't tear my gaze away from hers."<sup>2</sup>

Soon, however, his mother stands over them—with a multi-thonged whip in her hand and the narrator is forced to return to his house. But that night under the mosquito net, he says, "Layli's eyes came after me once more. I hadn't seen her again that evening, but her eyes and her beguiling gaze were there. I don't know how much time passed. Suddenly a weird thought seized my whole brain, "God forbid, I've fallen in love with Layli!"<sup>3</sup>

The narrator then tries to recall all the information that he has about love. He realizes that for his entire 13 years of life, "he had never seen anyone in love."<sup>4</sup>

He states:

The most important lovers I'd heard of were Layli and Majnun. Apart from them, there were Shirin and Farhad, but I didn't know anything special about how they'd fallen in love either. There was a love story published as a newspaper serial that I'd read, but I hadn't

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<sup>1</sup>Iraj Pezeshkzad and Azar Nafisi, *My Uncle Napoleon: A Novel*, trans. Dick Davis, Reprint edition (New York: Modern Library, 2006)

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

read the first few episodes and one of my classmates had described them for me. Consequently I knew nothing of the beginning of the matter.<sup>5</sup>

Consulting the only person that he has available to him, Mash Qasem, his uncle's servant, the narrator realizes that he is truly in love with his cousin Layli such as when he describes his changes in behavior, when "had happily given half of his ice-cream" to her at which point he remembers the lines of Mash Qasem's definition of love, "You want everything in the world all the wealth in the world for her, you think you've become the most generous man on earth." Similarly, the narrator notes how "little by little" I experienced all the signs and signals Mash Qasim had mentioned:

When Layli wasn't there I really did feel as though my heart were frozen over, and when I saw her the heat in my heart spread even to my cheeks and ears. When she was with me, I never gave a thought to the terrible consequences of love. Only when night came and she had gone back to her house and I was alone did I once again think of the terrible whirlpool of love. As further events unfold in Iraj Pezeshkzad's novel, the youthful narrator finds that his beloved Layli is arranged to be married to another young man.

**Reading and the Signs of Love** The connection between feelings of love, desire, and disaster that the unnamed protagonist of *Daijani Napoleon* discovers, and the act of males coming of age and reading has had a long lineage in the premodern past which Pezeshkzad's novel is well aware. Through the first-person narrative of the young boy readers are delighted and amused by his search to understand through a discovery of his own feelings and sensibilities.

Each successive experience of love for the narrator is a new discovery. Yet for most readers of the novel, such discoveries are far from new. The boy's realization that falling in love will lead him to a disaster—like those of the famed lovers of old—is both comic and poignant. As the boy lays awake at night and worries, what were once simply stories about the past have now emerged as fearful models of what might become of him, should he not know how to manage this situation.

Pezeshkzad's narrative, however, is also determined by particularities of time and place. The various tales that the young narrator recounts speak to the dynamic culture of Iran in the 1940s when the novel is set. On the one hand there are the famed tales of Laylī and Majnūn, Khusraw and Shīrīn known through the epic poems of Nizāmī Ganjavī in the 14th century, and on the other Shakespearean *Romeo and Juliet* and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie*. And finally an example from the Iranian popular press. By re-reading these tales' meaning the boy has suddenly seen their applicability to his own life—they are a warning to him that falling in love is dangerous.

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

The story's progression from the experience of the physical feelings of love, the consultation with others, and the reading of stories are familiar to the audience either from experience or reading. Pezeshkzad's achievement in this novel is to revive through the comic figure of a young boy, some very common tropes of thinking about love and desire that were circulating in a 1940s Iran facing the increasing pace of modernization and change. First love is a sign of a previous age's innocence, and a reminder of the passage of time in the life of an individual and the collective.

In this article, we will look backwards to older ideas of love and friendship, but our location will be the cosmopolitan Abbasid period from the 8th-10th centuries. This was also an age of writers and readers, of youthful exuberance and cultural change. Rapid urbanization over the course of the eighth and ninth centuries witnessed a centralization of power in the person of the Abbasid caliph in the cities of Baghdad and Samarra' and effected numerous changes in the ways that humans perceived the world. A caliphal court with complex manners was at the summit of the largest bureaucratic and military empire the world had yet known.

Readers and writers at the Abbasid court, like Pezeshkzad's narrator, considered the pangs of love, facing the new charms of the current day, and also yearning for a different past, in which love was a sign of an age that had no long passed. Love was surely an important idiom there. The Abbasid court as I have just described it, was a textual

members of the court were literate, literacy was central to the act of participating in the court. The language of discourse there was Classical Arabic. The scale of the court differed from time to time, but it was for most of the period which we will be studying a face-to-face community in which the famed courtiers were well-known to the patrons and the audience.

The Abbasid court was also, as Barbara Rosenwein has termed it an emotional community.<sup>6</sup> A place in which certain kinds of expression of love were articulated. The centrality of love to the Abbasid court has long been noted. As Rina Drory and Gadi Algazi have argued, "love at the Abbasid court" possessed "an essential place that was without equivalent in the previous courtly cultures of the world."<sup>7</sup> alGazi and Drory state that the importance of love at the Abbasid court was such that if we believe the narratives, we must conclude that the caliph and his entourage were by necessity always falling in love.

**Ibn Qayyim's Fifty Words for Love** As Barbara Rosenwein suggests, one powerful starting point in history of emotions research is to consider and prob-

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<sup>6</sup>Barbara H. Rosenwein, "Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions," *Passions in Context* 1, no. 1 (2010): 1–32, [http://www.einsteinforum.de/uploads/media/01\\_Rosenwein.pdf](http://www.einsteinforum.de/uploads/media/01_Rosenwein.pdf)

<sup>7</sup>Gadi Algazi and Rina Drory, "L'amour À La Cour Des Abbasides: Un Code de Compétence Sociale," *Annales HSS* 55, no. 6 (2000): 1255–82.

lematize emotion terminology.<sup>8</sup> And it is to the development of this terminology that we shall now turn. I began research on this vast topic of love at the Abbasid court with the realization that although research into emotions was a new topic for Arabists, I was not the first to ask these questions about love in the Islamic tradition.

Muslim scholars from the beginning of the 9th century situated within courts have been writing books which modern scholarship for lack of a better word, have been calling books of “love theory.” In these works, the scholar’s habit of providing definitions, the essence of love was a central concern.

The work of the fourteenth-century scholar, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Rawdat al-Muhibbin*, the Garden of the Lovers stands toward the middle of the long series of writings love theory.

His work is noteworthy not only for summarizing and preserving the works of many of his courtly forebears many of whom wrote at the Abbasid court, but also asking creative questions of the tradition. He is a later commentator on the very same corpus of writing about love, that we will address in this paper.

For our purposes, it is the way that he begins his survey that is most interesting to us. For at the beginning of this extensive work on love, Ibn Qayyim provides a list of fifty words for love, *asmā’ al-mahabba*.

After reading this list, and thinking about Ibn Qayyim’s discussion, I first felt a bit like Pezeshkzad’s youthful narrator. On the whole, most of the list seemed quite negative. In Ibn Qayyim’s formulation, lovers could expect desire, sleepless nights, depression, yearning, and even madness. Was this just a sign of the disdain of Ibn Qayyim for the love tradition, a bitter scholar’s brief against human pleasure?!

I don’t think this list is so easily dismissed. As I said above, Ibn Qayyim has actually inherited this list from predecessors among whose number were anthologists of love poetry and lovers of amorous verse. And by comparison, it seems all that Ibn Qayyim did to construct his list was merely prune and reorder a slightly larger lists that had came before him. He states, “Others have mentioned other names of love, but these are really just the love’s causes and concomitants, so we didn’t mention them.”<sup>9</sup>

The fact that these terms traveled across four centuries and across wide areas of the Muslim world—traveling from Baghdad to Qayrawān to Cairo, suggests the stability and commonality to this vocabulary. Ibn Qayyim’s was not a new selection or idiosyncratic selection of key words concerning love. Rather it was part of a broad consensus of scholars on the terminology of love.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Lois Anita Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love Among the Arabs: The Development of the Genre*, 1st edition (New York: New York University Press, 1971), 87.

<sup>9</sup>Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Rawdat al-muhibbin wa-nuzhat al-mushtaqīn* ed. A. Shams al-Dīn (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2003), 22.

<sup>10</sup>ibid, 87.

Moreover, Ibn Qayyim goes beyond the tradition of lexicographers that came before him, such as the philologist al-Marzubānī from Baghdad, and al-Ḥusrī from Qayrawān in the depth of his explication. Ibn Qayyim examines each of these terms individually for their particular meaning with respect to love. For instance, of the word *shajū* translated by Hans Wehr's dictionary, as, "grief, worry, distress, anxiety, apprehension, sadness; fear; affectedness, emotion; wailing, plaintive, moving strain (of a tune, of a song, of an instrument)."

Ibn Qayyim gives the following definition which evokes the subtle way in which he used this term in the context of love:

As for *shajū* it is love (*hubb*) which is followed by worry (*hamm*) and sadness (*huzn*). In the *ṣihāḥ* (the dictionary of al-Jawharī) it is anxiety, and worry. It is said, the verb *shajū* means that which makes a man sad. This is also the case for that which makes a man choked up. The poet writes:

*Do not forgo battle while we have been taken prisoner In your throats is a bone, while we have already choked*

The root meaning of the term, thus relates to choking. It is applied to love, because of the way it sticks around. Just like a bone sticks in one's throat.

Ibn Qayyim's discussion however goes beyond this, too, into the essential problem as to whether all of these names of love, name the same thing. He writes:

Names indicating the same thing named are of two types. The first of these are the names which name according to the essence of the thing itself. This is what is known as a pure synonym. For example *al-hinṭa wa-l-qamah*, *wa-l-burr* (three synonymous names for wheat in Arabic). And similarly *al-ism*, *al-kunyā*, *wa-l-laqab* are three synonymous names for names. If they have neither praise or blame in them, they are simple a matter of definition (*ta’rif*). The second type of names for one thing are those names which suggest the same essence in light of the difference of its attributes, much like the attributes of God, the names of this word [i.e. the Qu’rān], His Prophet, the Last Day. This type of synonym is one that has a relation to the same essence, but which is different according to the adjectives. Therefore there are the words, "Lord, the Merciful, the All-Powerful, the King, which refer to the same thing with regard to many different names.

Ibn Qayyim was a Hanbali jurist whose ideas of language are strongly influenced by theories about the reality of the divine attributes (*sifat*) relation to God's essence propounded by his teacher the famed Ibn Taymiyya. His list of fifty words was intended to demonstrate how each of these words (and these words

alone) related to love's essence: at once physical, mental states, short lived, and long-lasting. Like the modern day researcher in emotions who struggles to put names to a wide range of changing experiences, Ibn Qayyim, our fourteenth-century theologian was engaged in exploring many of the same mysteries.

**Love's Lexicon in Poetry** Thinking further about Ibn Qayyim's terms for love as well as Rosenwein's notion of an emotional community sent me on a search into the texts of the Abbasid court, to see if I could make some sense of where this lexicon of love had come from. How did the story of madness, death, and despair enter the Arabic tradition of writing about love? And does this relate to the important distinction often made in later love terminology between love (*maḥabbah*; *ḥubb*) versus intense love *‘ishq*. Where did these distinctions come from? When did they start to become meaningful? In short, I wanted to look back at the history of how Ibn Qayyim's view of love came into being.

Arabic poetry was an oral tradition that was committed to writing in the early Umayyad period (from essentially the turn of the eighth century onwards), It contained a rich store of both ideas about the past and thoughts about the present for Abbasid courtiers.

As is well known, Love was the basic theme of opening section of the Pre-Islamic odes or *qaṣīdas*. Thomas Bauer in his fine study of love poetry from the pre-Islamic period points to the fact that there is no polythematic ode *qaṣīda* from the pre-Islamic period that lacks a section on love, yet at the same time there are no free-standing pre-Islamic love poems. This opening section of the Pre-Islamic poem known as the *nasīb*, generally deals with the loss of a beloved, and the poet's coming to this realization while standing by the beloved's former campsite.

The themes of the *nasīb* are thus restricted: 1.) the mourning at the remains of the beloved's campsite which time and the elements have almost erased; 2.) the morning of separation where the tribe of the beloved is to depart in which the poet describes the camels of the beloved leaving in the distance 3.) the *khayāl*: the poet describes the appearance of the image of the former beloved (*tayf*; *tayf al-khayāl*) who visits the melancholy remembrance of past joy.<sup>11</sup>

As many scholars have noted then, the Pre-Islamic poem love poem is not so much love, but rather a quality that would later be termed manly-honor (*muruwwa*). Artifice seems an ever present concern. The beauty of the beloved in this poetry is what James Montgomery has spoken of as a “foil for the poet's own excellence, redounding to his credit.” Negative emotions of loss generated in the opening of the *qaṣīda* are then transferred to the sphere of journey and action whereby the poet might recuperate the lost energies of love. For Mont-

<sup>11</sup>Thomas Bauer, *Liebe Und Liebesdichtung in Der Arabischen Welt Des 9. Und 10. Jahrhunderts: Eine Literatur- Und Mentalitätsgeschichtliche Studie Des Arabischen Ġazal, Diskurse Der Arabistik*, Bd. 2 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998), 28.

gomery, thus, the poem is more a demonstration of poetic and linguistic skill than an evocation of love.

Still, for all that, love (or at least something that later critics identify as love) is important to the theme of the Pre-Islamic ode. As Bauer points out, this condition of the beloved in the Pre-Islamic ode is quite far from the unlucky lover of the Abbasid age. The poet of the Pre-Islamic age is in fact evoking the inconstancy of this world, and for this reason is melancholic and pessimistic. What can we make of these Liebesschmerzen? As Bauer has put it well:

The love pangs of the pre-Islamic ode is the loss of a pleasant occasion. To overcome it is positive,<sup>12</sup>

Thus the tendency to translate words such as *hubb*, *hawan*, and *wudd* as love is a doubtful process for the modern reader of Pre-Islamic odes. The words do not connote yet in Pre-Islamic poetry what they would later come to mean: the fact that the lover has given himself to the beloved. The pre-Islamic ode exhibited no individual traits. Because of the realities of social structure which favored the group over the individual.

Turning to the terminology of love in the Pre-Islamic ode we can see the following, that there is something striking about the terminology of love words. Words with roots of *hubb* predominate—there is as scant mention of the term that will become a dominant leitmotiv of all discussions of love—the term *'ishq*. When did this notion of passionate love emerge and why? But before we can turn elsewhere—we must first confront the very important place of love in the Qur'an.

**Qur'ān, the Umayyads and the "Udhriī Code of Love** A recent study by Ghazi bin Muhammad has shown that the Qur'ān employs more than thirty-seven distinct words to specify varieties of love.<sup>13</sup><sup>14</sup>

It is striking to see that of the 37 value terms identified by Ghazi, by far the most common is God's mercy (*rahma*) which even when discounting the references to God as the Most Merciful (*al-rahmān al-rahīm*), appears more than twice the amount of times than the root *habb*.

The Qur'ān also manifests an absence of a coherent terminology of love-madness. There is little sense in any of the verses considered that an excessive love might be somehow dangerous. Chastity is surely encouraged, and adultery strongly discouraged, but there is little that feelings of love might in and of themselves be detrimental or lead to any negative consequences for the lover.

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<sup>12</sup>ibid, 31.

<sup>13</sup>M. Arkoun, "Ishk," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition

<sup>14</sup>William Chittick, "Love in Islamic Thought," *Religion Compass* 8, no. 7 (2014): 229–38, doi:10.1111/rec3.12112. H. R. H. Ghazi bin Muhammad, *Love in the Holy Quran*, First edition (Chicago, Ill: Kazi Publications, Inc., 2011). mentions the following thirty seven terms:

The case of poets however provides the most interesting one for our purposes. Qur<sup>2</sup>ān 26: 224 provides what seems to be the first prototype for the mad poetic lover that will become so popular later in the Abbasid period. In these verses, the Qur<sup>2</sup>ān addresses the poets:

And then there are the poets, who are followed by those who go astray. 225. Have you not seen how they wander in every valley 226.  
And [how] they say what they do not do.<sup>15</sup>

The term for wandering in every valley used here, *yahīmūn* is taken in various ways by Qur<sup>2</sup>ānic commentators however mainly in the sense of the poet's willful unfaithfulness to the truth.<sup>16</sup> Yet there are few exegetes who saw in the verses a description of love-madness. Even as the very lexical term *huyām* becomes a poetic term for this very concept.

**The Invention of Love: Umayyad Ghazals** Islam, the Islamic conquests, and the expansions of the Umayyad age surely brought new realities to the conception of love. For Thomas Bauer, the individualism of the Umayyad age brought with it for the first time a discovery of love as a positive emotion.<sup>17</sup> For the first time there the possibility of describing a love that was experienced in the past, and might continue or be realized at a future moment.

The period witnessed the invention of the first odes that concerned love: the *ghazal*. The poetry of this period is typically divided into the so-called Hijāzī and <sup>c</sup>Udhrī schools. The first Hijāzī school of love, portrays the acts of love in positive and realistic terms. The most notable representative of this school is <sup>c</sup>Umar b. Abī Rabī<sup>c</sup> (d. 93 or 102/712-23). In these texts, which appear from the urbanizing milieux of Medina, Mecca and al-Ta<sup>2</sup>if, poets speak of their real amorous exploits. Their poetry became early song texts used in the courtly settings for entertainment.

<sup>c</sup>Udhrī love poetry, by contrast, appears to have come from the Bedouin milieu. It features lovers from the Banu <sup>c</sup>Udhra who are driven to sickness, mania, and death. Poets such as <sup>c</sup>Urwa b. Ḥizām and Jamīl and Buthayna offered a model

<sup>15</sup> Alan Jones, *By Alan Jones the Qur'an* (Gibb Memorial Trust, 2007), 343.

<sup>16</sup> Reference to Tafsīr of al-Tabarī, *apud* 26:225 reports the early positions that the verse is a proverb (*mathal*) which relates to the fraudulent nature of poetic artistry (*fann*). A report on the authority of Ibn <sup>c</sup>Abbās states that it is the poets of the unbelievers (• *mushrikīn*) intended by the verse; *al-Zamakhsharī*, *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf\** (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-<sup>c</sup>Ilmiyya, 1995), 3:332-3, understands the terms of wandering as a metaphor for poetic speech, stating, “there is an illustration in these verses of their going in every branch of speech, their straying [from the truth], and their lack of attention to hyperbole in logic and overreaching the boundaries of intention, such that they prefer the weakest of men over the [brave] <sup>c</sup>Antara and the stingiest man over the fabulously generous Ḥātim” (*fīhi tamthīl li-dhīhābīhim fī kull shā'b mīn al-qawl wa-i<sup>c</sup>tisāfihim wa-qillat mubālatihim bil-ghulw fī al-mantiq wa-mujāwazat ḥadd al-qasd fīhi hattā yufaddilū ajban al-nās <sup>c</sup>alā <sup>c</sup>Antara wa-ashahhīhim <sup>c</sup>alā Ḥātim.*)

<sup>17</sup> Bauer, *Liebe Und Liebesdichtung in Der Arabischen Welt Des 9. Und 10. Jahrhunderts*, 42.

of love that was tragic. The poet seems captured in a love relationship the power of which is far stronger than anything the Pre-Islamic poet might have imagined. The lover is absorbed by love.

Stefan Leder has described the general form of the *‘Udhrī* story:

Passionate love is depicted as an unconditional devotion to one's friend in spite of all hindrances. This experience entails severe suffering, which often causes the lover's, sometimes even both lover's death. By nature passionate love prevails over reason and is often shown, in its most simplistic form, as an affliction and misfortune. However, in many stories love develops into a voluntary exercise, relying solely on the lover's deliberate acceptance of paradoxical situation: the lover who suffers from an unquenchable yearning cannot renounce his affective attachment, as long as he knows that union with his friend is unattainable. In this vein, ideal love is sustained by the absence of union, and in its most accomplished form, does not have to be requited. When the lover no longer relies on a positive response from his friend, love becomes a selfless and morally refined stance, based upon the emotional experience of ardor (*wajd*), which may imply the lover's consent to die from love.

Renate Jacobi sought to understand the emergence of this pattern of fatal love in the Umayyad period as a reaction to the waning of traditional tribal ties that came in the wake of the conquests, the feelings of loss of emotional security.<sup>18</sup> Others, such as Tahir Labib Djedidi, points to the particular isolations and dislocations felt by bedouin groups in the wake of the Islamic conquests

Despite the great attention given to the *‘Udhri* poets by both the Abbasid tradition and modern scholars it is striking to note that it is not from the famed *‘Udhrī* poets interestingly that we see the great rise in the terminology of erotic love as *‘ishq*. As one can see here on this chart of the words *Ishq/Hubb/Wudd/Hawā* from the Pre-Islamic to the Middle Abbasid period, it is clear that love terminology seems to have evolved not with the impossible loves of the *‘Udhrī* tradition (as many have often suggested) but first with the realistic courtly poetry of the *Hijāzī* school, represented by *‘Umar b. Abī Rabī* (d. 93 or 102/712-23).

Moreover this trend continues throughout the beginning of the Abbasid period by such important court poets as Bashshar b. Burd and al-*‘Abbās* b. Ahnaf. These poets use the terminological difference of opposing *‘ishq* to *hubb*. Why is this so?

**The Theoreticians of *‘Ishq\**** If the basic vocabulary for love were set in the Umayyad period, the Abbasid period tried to straighten out in theory what

<sup>18</sup>Colville, Abu Uthman Amir Ibn Bahir al-Jahiz, and Jim Colville, *Sobriety and Mirth* (London ; New York : New York: Routledge, 2002), 193

exactly this non-Qu'ranic term *'ishq* meant with regard the Qur'anic term of love. The first moment we have in the history of love terminology is the work is a long didactic poem on love by Abān b. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Lāhiqī (d. c. 200/815) in 80 rhymed verses.<sup>19</sup>

Al-Lāhiqī's poem, preserved in fragmentary form in an early 4th/10th century historical work, is restricted in scope to the area of profane love of the romantic type—he does not discuss the love of parents, the love of a friend for another friend, or the love of man for God, and God's love for humankind. As David Semah notes, Abān al-Lāhiqī did not distinguish between the terms *ḥubb*, *hawā*, and *'ishq*. For al-Lāhiqī, love is a series of types—there is no progression up the ladder of love. al-Lāhiqī speaks rather of the joy of love union, secrecy in love affairs, the importance of chastity and purity, and the nobility of making do with little, and finally the obedience of the lover before the beloved. Love is also not a disease, nor is it a divine madness. As Semah states, the poem of al-Lāhiqī does not seem to yet have the common stock of love *topoi* that would later be so prominent in the works of the later Abbasid period. He is still operating much like someone familiar with the Hijāzī notion of love terminology—there is *'ishq*, there is *ḥubb* and they seem to relate to the possibility of real courtly love in the world.

At the very time that Abān al-Lāhiqī was proposing one model of love theory at the Abbasid court directly related to the love games of courtiers, another model is being constructed by scholars there. Love songs were a main source entertainment in the Abbasid court, and stories about famed lovers—a great source of entertainment. Regis Blachere contended that the process of forming these stories dated roughly to the beginning of the Abbasid period (i.e. roughly 775-825), whereas Leder argues that the basic form goes back to the Late Umayyad period.

Leder points to the complementarity of verse and poetry in the *'Udhrī* romances:

In this type of story, prose and poetry are closely interdependent. This is obviously due to the fact that the poet, inspired by his love, is often the protagonist and this makes recitation of his poetry an indispensable component of the narrative. Moreover, poetry remains the basic, often the only genuine literary form for giving expression to love.<sup>20</sup>

Do these tales reflect a lexical distinction between *ḥubb* as love and *'ishq* as an extreme emotion? A cursory reading of the story of Qays b. Dhariḥ suggests at this stage that while many of the key terms of love sickness are clearly found in the poetry of the *'Udhrī* type—such as *walah*, *lawa'*, *sababa*, *wajd*, *shawq*—they

<sup>19</sup>D. Semah, "Urjūzat Hamdān al-Lāhiqī fi l-ḥubb" *al-Karmil* 3: (1982): 61-83.

<sup>20</sup>Stefan Leder, "The *'Udhrī* Narrative in Arabic Literature," in Friederike Pannewick, *Martyrdom in Literature: Visions of Death and Meaningful Suffering in Europe and the Middle East from Antiquity to Modernity* (Wiesbaden: Dr Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 2004), 164.

do not seem to equate this terminology with *'ishq* which is entirely absent as a term from both the verses of Qays as well as the stories about him.

One of the most famous proponents of a particular kind of relationship between the terms of these two main terms for love *hubb* and *'ishq* is the famed Baṣrān essayist and theologian al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/869). al-Jāḥiẓ provides two different definitions of love terminology. The first is found in his Book of Love and Women *Kitāb al-'Ishq wa-Nisā'*, *A Treatise on Passionate Love and Women*. There, as Lois Giffen writes, al-Jāḥiẓ limits his discussion of *'ishq* to concern only that “feeling evoked in men by women and nothing else.” For al-Jāḥiẓ it seems that *'ishq* is passionate love:

*'Ishq* is the name for what exceeds that which is called *hubb* and every *hubb* is not called *'ishq*, for *'ishq* is the name for that which exceeds that degree, just as *saraf* [prodigality] is the name for that degree which is more than that which is called *jūd* [liberality] and *bukhl* [stinginess] is the name for what falls short of the level which is called *iqtisād* [economy] and *jubn* is the name for what falls short of the quality which is termed *shajā'a* [courage].[^13b]

What Giffen does not point out is that in this essay, al-Jāḥiẓ also defines the term *hubb* in order to demonstrate that it is a more general term for affection and not restricted to the romantic lover. He states:

I do not intend to dwell upon such varieties of love (*hubb* as kindness (*rahma*) and compassion (*riqqa*), the love (*hubb*) of prestige and precious things, the love (*hubb*) of people for their ruler and of a client for his patron.

al-Jāḥiẓ's use of the monetary analogy is, it appears, central to the type of argument that he is making. For later on in the essay, he equates the intensity of the emotion of the lover for the beloved with the extreme financial gifts that the lover lavishes on the beloved, something unequaled by friends. He states, “compared with what they give women, men only give each other things of little consequence.” And the love of women causes men to spend money on their own appearance:

It is because of women that men bother to use fragrance, hair-dye and antimony, shave their beards, cut their hair and wear clean, smart and well-ironed cloths. High walls, massive doors, heavy curtains, vigilant eunuchs and a retinue of servants are employed to look after women and ensure that their charms are protected. ]

Thus *'ishq* differs from *hubb* in that it encourages or requires an excessive liberality. It is a difference of degree that gives way to a difference in kind. Passion

for al-Jāḥīz leads people (read: males) to do things that their own rationality would otherwise prohibit.

Al-Jāḥīz's emphasis on the love relationship between men and women, however, is yet still an oversimplification of sorts. For in what context is al-Jāḥīz discussing passionate love? For whom is it dangerous and why?

For this topic we must turn to another of the Baṣrān's writings, his famed *al-Risāla fī l-Qiyān* *The Epistle on the Singing Girls*. In this essay, it is clear that the basic thrust of all of al-Jāḥīz's writing about *'ishq* is that it is clearly something that is for adult males.

But who were the objects of these adult males' love? 'Abdallāh Cheikh-Moussa has argued persuasively that al-Jāḥīz in numerous works that the notion of *'ishq* comes from a courtly context in the third/ninth century that saw a retreat of free women from the public sphere and the rise of professional singing girls.<sup>21</sup> This was an environment that increasingly thought of *'ishq* as the (illicit) passion of men for the population of "slave women" that inhabit the caliphal palaces. *'Ishq* is excessive love and linked to prodigality because it is precisely the arena of the court where the lavish spending on the singing girls went on.

As al-Jāḥīz states in his letter on the singing girls:

The overriding reason why singing girls command such high prices is, quite simply, desire. If they were ordinary slaves, they would fetch no more than the going rate per head. Most of the men who pay the exorbitant price for slave-girls do so because they are infatuated.

He later states:

*'Ishq* is a sickness that can never be wholly controlled. It is similar to certain diseases whose symptoms can only be controlled by following a strict diet that has little nutritional benefit.<sup>22</sup>

For al-Jāḥīz the power of *'ishq* ought to be harnessed to the procreative ends of life. To al-Jāḥīz, a thinker greatly concerned with the natural order and God's plan, this was the proper place for love. Women ought to be passive partners, led by men. In short, it seems that al-Jāḥīz was elaborating for the Abbasid court, a kind of relationship between men and women that was similar in effects from that designed by the jurists beyond it. Grounded in logic, rather than revelation al-Jāḥīz's notion of the relation of *'ishq* and *hubb* were intended to restore or correct what he (and perhaps many others) at the Abbasid court, saw was the corrupting effects of desire on rationality and order. The perils of excess of love were damaging both to the individual and the state.

<sup>21</sup>Cheikh-Moussa, Abdallah. "La Négation d'Éros Ou Le 'Iṣq D'après Deux Épîtres D'al-Gāḥīz." *Studia Islamica*, no. 72 (January 1, 1990): 71–119. doi:10.2307/1595776.

<sup>22</sup>Colville, al-Jahiz, and Colville, *Sobriety and Mirth*, 193

**Abbasid Inflation: The Rising Price of Love at Court** If men at court in al-Jahiz's time were spending large sums on the singing girls, the costs of erotic love were also increasing at court in the ninth and tenth centuries. Later theorists of love at the Abbasid court, even as they extolled the power and beauty of love, increasingly began to place love closer to the bounds of death and disaster. The first and most important of these treatises of love theory, is the *Kitāb al-Zahra*, *The Book of the Flower* of Muḥammad b. Dāwūd al-Isfahānī (d. 297/910).

Ibn Dāwūd is quite clear about the fact that love is a powerful and dangerous thing. In a chapter entitled, “The mind faced with passion becomes a prisoner and desire is master of both heart and head” Ibn Dāwūd describes the lover’s conditions in according to an ascending scale, which would become typical of later expositions of love.

1. Preference (*istihṣān*) The first state of the lover comes after seeing or hearing the beloved (*al-naẓar wa-l-samā’*) this state is called preference (*istihṣān*).
2. Desire (*mawadda*) When this increases, the lover then experiences *mawadda* and the *mawadda* is the reason for the desire (*irāda*). For he who likes a person (*wadda insānan*) desires to be his bosom friend (*khillan*). For liking someone (*wadd*) has an aim, he wishes to possess the other. Then the liking, becomes stronger and it becomes love (*maḥabba*), and (*maḥabba*) is a cause of obedience (*ta‘ā*).
3. Intimacy (*khulla*) Then love (*maḥabba*) increases and becomes intimacy (*khulla*). For intimacy is such a state between people that one person attains such power over his intimate (*sāhibuhu*) that there are no longer secrets that pass between them and the innermost secrets of their hearts pass between one another. The one who penetrates (*mutakhallilan*) the secrets of the other, and able to read the other’s innermost thoughts (*mutalli‘an alā dāmā’irīhi*).
4. Passion (*hawā*) Then intimacy increases and it necessitates (*tujib*) passion (*hawā*). Passion (*hawā*) is the name for the lover falling into love with his beloved and attaining union with him, without any restraint or order (*bi-ghayr tamāluk wa-lā tartīb*).
5. Erotic Love (*‘ishq*) Then the situation gets stronger and it becomes erotic love (*‘ishq*). On account of the swiftness of the lover’s fall into passion for his beloved, the lover is prevented having any pity for his beloved or any consideration for him/her, such that his persistence in the matter causes the other to turn away from him and the beloved’s ceasing to welcome him. There are >some who believe that for this reason passion is more complete than erotic love, but that is not correct.

6. Enthrallment (*tatayyum*) Then erotic love (*'ishq*) increases and it becomes “enslavement, enthrallment” *tatayyum*. It is a state in which the condition of beloved completely consumes the lover. He has no other concern than this. And there is nothing comparable to the beloved, but rather finds everything located in the beloved.
7. Loss of control; Derangement (*walah*)

Later theoreticians of love largely followed this schema of the ascending place of love in the hierarchy of emotions.

**Conclusion: The Power of Love at the Abbasid Court** We began this talk with a tale of love and disaster, and so it is fitting to end with one. It is reported that al-Jāhīz once told the following tale in the book of Ibn Dāwūd al-Īṣfahānī and the *Kitāb al-Muwashsha* two of the earliest Abbasid books of love theory.

Al-Jāhīz reports that once the caliph Mutawakkil summoned him to task, so he sent him away with a small gift of 10,000 dirhams to soften the blow. When al-Jahiz was returning to Baghdad, he happened to meet up with the courtier Muḥammad b. Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī and the two hired a fancy boat and traveled in style.

The river was swelled with water. But al-Mawṣilī insisted on having a good time.

Then he invited me to eat. When this was concluded, he ordered the drink and singers to begin. I implored him not to do it, but he insisted. So a curtain was spread between us and his slave girls. One of the girls, a lutist sang in a way that I had never heard before in my life:

Each day is separation and blame, our  
time is ending and we are irate (*ghidāb*)

Would that I knew why this happens to  
me rather than some one else. Or is this  
what it is to be lovers?

Then she fell silent. So he commanded a young woman who was skilled in the ḥambūr to play:

Have mercy for lovers! For I do not see a  
support for them.

How often they are separated, driven apart and forced into exile. Yet they are patient.

You see them, despite their predicament the most subservient of God's creatures.

And they are tortured by the lovers by estrangement, yet they still act.

The lutist said, "You hussy, what do you mean by 'still act'?"

So the *tambūr* player said, "They do this!"

And she tore the curtain with her hand rending it, and she appeared to our eyes like a moon. Then she threw herself into the water.

There was behind Muḥammad a young male slave (*ghulām*) who was of Byzantine origin, who rivaled the young woman in beauty. He held a fly swatter in his hand which he had been using.

When he saw what the slave girl had done, he cast down his fly swatter and went to the spot where the girl had cast herself and he looked, and saw her floating between the waves.

He said:

You are the one who drowned me After the judgment, were you to know.

There is no goodness left after you in remaining, For death is the cover of those who love.

Then he cast himself after her. The boatman turned the craft, and the two were embracing one another in the water and then sank and were no longer visible. Muḥammad saw this and thought it was significant and the affair frightened him. He became very sad, his face became disturbed (*arbadda wajhahu*) and not a one of us could speak a word to him. Then we feared for the great sadness that he expressed that he would die. So we all were patient with him and tried to console him. Then he told me, "Tell me another story so that I might forget it. I've never seen anything more astounding."

As we have seen in this talk, the grave power of erotic love *'ishq* stood ever so close to the realities of the Abbasid court and threatened to overturn its momentary joys to scenes of tragedy that were difficult to forget. The highly visible displays of court poetry were shielded by a veil of language. When the reality behind the artifice is exposed the lovers have no choice but to plunge to their deaths.

The fact that Abbasids constructed this idea of love at court in this way is part of a complex historical process. Was the reason for the emergence of a particularly potent notion of love related to the economics and morality of the court? Was it possibly related to other fears and anxieties about the unraveling of marriage ties and lineage at court? How much did the increasing use of erotic love (*'ishq*) in pietist circles also continue to up the ante of the meaning of this word?

These questions and others will doubtless occupy scholars for many years to come.

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