

## Emotional Nuances of Distress in al-Tanūkhī's

*Kitāb al-faraj ba 'd al-shidda* (4<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century)

For me, the challenge in writing this paper – apart from being overwhelmed by the numerous works on emotions – has been the task of identifying modes of translation. How have emotions in the respective text been translated for the reader then, and how do we translate them, not back but further, into emotions that are understandable for us today?

I have chosen a certain type of text because it seemed so obvious: stories where the hero is rescued, often at the last minute; where the situation seems desperate but is solved in the end; texts according to the motto: all's well that ends well – this kind of narrative must be a rich source for emotions, feelings, sentiments of all sorts. At first glance the result of my reading was sobering: comparatively few expressions of emotion, very few emotion words, no dwelling on mental states or certain sensitivities; rather sparse use of interior monologue or something alike.

The paper will address the following subjects:

1. Text/Author
2. Translation levels
3. Emotional laconicism (terseness)

## 1. Text/Author

Before giving some examples let me introduce our author and text for those of you who are not familiar with it. Story-collections according to the pattern “Relief after Hardship” or “Deliverance after Distress” (*al-farağ ba’d al-shidda*) are well-known already in the 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century. The most prominent author of such a collection is Abū ‘Alī al-Muḥassin b. ‘Alī al-Tanūkhī (994), born in Basra into a family of judges and working as a *qāḍī* himself for a long time. He studied among others with Abū l-Farağ al-Iṣfahānī und Abū Bakr al-Ṣūlī, and he collected beside court conversations of the high society these tales of deliverance. He could, however, rely on preceding works and colleagues. In his preface he names some of them himself, like Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Madā’inī (842/3) who also lived in Basra and later in Baghdad and who composed a book with the title *Kitāb al-farağ ba’d al-shidda wa-l-ḍīqa*. Likewise a *Kitāb al-farağ ba’d al-shidda* has been transmitted from the Baghdadi scholar and royal tutor Ibn Abī al-Dunyā (894). Al-Tanūhī also mentions the judge Abū l-Ḥusayn ‘Umar b. Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Qāḍī (ca. 940) with a similar title. There are other variations of the same type of stories, like the collection *Kitāb al-mukāfa’a wa-ḥusn al-‘uqbā* by the Egyptian Aḥmad b. Yūsūf, known as Ibn al-Dāya (941). This book is subdivided into three parts, the „Reward of the Good“ (*mukāfa’a ‘alā l-ḥasan*), the „Retaliation of the Bad“ (*mukāfa’a ‘alā l-qabīḥ*), and the „Good Ending“ (*ḥusn al-‘uqbā*).

Al-Tanūhī on the other hand has classified in his collection the various types of hardship (encounter of wild animals, imprisonment, poverty, unhappy love affair etc.) and deliverance (by means of prayer, a striking phrase, escape etc.).

On the whole, all these stories are about a person who is saved (or can escape) from a difficult, often life-threatening situation, or whose miserable living conditions take a turn for the better. The genre-title already suggests intense feeling: *al-shidda* (literally: pressure, intensity, strength) means disaster, hardship, misfortune, harm, calamity, pain – and in these translations we can already see that occurrences mix with sentiments. The

outcome, *al-farağ*, similarly contains something that happens as well as corresponding feelings: a happy ending, absence of sorrow and harm, deliverance, joy, relief, ease.

In another context, I have investigated the endings of these narratives. Interestingly, the texts, although announcing relief and joy prominently in the title, do not elaborate on the happy end or on the respective emotions. Mostly, the ending is condensed, even laconic (I will come back to that later).

Far more extensive is the description of the burdening circumstances the hero has to deal with. Together with the protagonist, the reader (or listener, because we have to assume that these stories have been performed in circles and sessions, too) encounters wild animals, suffers shipwreck, has to beg for his life in front of arbitrary rulers, awaits his execution in prison, gets robbed by bandits, fights a dangerous disease, or loses his beloved.

One should expect, or better: I did expect an extensive description of this experience, of the respective emotional state, especially since the story is almost always given by a first-person narrator. But interestingly enough, particularly when in mortal danger, the ultimate expression of distress is rather brief and shows not a very big variety with regard to vocabulary or imagery. At least, that was my first impression or, in other words, that was how I remembered the stories. However, when I read them again under the premise of this workshop's theme, I discovered more than I expected.

## 2. Translation levels

Especially for someone who is interested in textual structures and literary theory, it is quite natural to read between the lines, to search for seemingly hidden signs and to investigate the significance of implicit narrative strategies and movements. However, in view of the number of possible approaches when it comes to emotions, emotionality, and emotionology, I started with basic and visible signs. As a first step I started to distinguish the following categories:

- **emotion words** (words that signify a certain emotion)
- **images and metaphors** (that cover a sensation and illustrate an emotion)
- **physical reactions** (that stand for certain emotional conditions, or as a result of a certain emotion)
- **actions** (behavior that symbolizes a certain sensation; a conduct as a consequence of a specific feeling; for example to lose the ability to behave properly, to focus exclusively on the pain and the passion. These actions can be ritualized.)

**1) Emotion Words:** Words that try to match exactly a certain sensation. The distress, here, can have various shades and nuances: it can be grief, sorrow, helplessness, pain. These emotions apparently affect the hero (it is not that he develops them; the feelings overpower him: *lahiqa*)

- fear (*faza* , *jaza* , *khawf*)

- ... now each one of us feared the other.” (*wa-qad istawḥasha al-āna kullun minnā min ṣāhibihi*; III/384<sup>1</sup>)

- “... a great fear seized me...” (*fā-nālanī jaza’un shadīdun* ..; II/294)

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<sup>1</sup> For the Arabic references, see *Kitāb al-faraj ba’d al-shidda*. Vols. I-V, ed. ‘Abbūd al-Shālji. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir 1978.

- "... and I am frightened..." (*wa-anā wajilun*; II/352)

- pain (*alam*)

- hopelessness:

- "We gave up on our lives ..." (*wa-kunnā āyisīna min al-ḥayāt ...*; II/132)

- „We gave up on our lives ... (we despaired)“ (*fa-ayisnā min al-ḥayāt*; II/254)

- "...he imprisoned me, so that I gave up on deliverance..." (...*wa-ḥabasani ḥattā ya'istu min al-faraj ...*; II/266)

- sorrow; anxiety, grief (*qalaq, karb, ghamm, ḥasra*)

- "My heart sank by this." (*shaghala dhālika qalbī*; II/115; here: fear of the vizier)

- "Pain, burning, and sorrow entered my heart; nothing like that had entered my heart before except from passion." (*wa-dakhala ilā qalbī min al-alam, wal-iḥtirāq, wal-qalaq, amrun mā dakhala mithluhu qaṭṭu fī qalbī, faḍlan 'an 'ishq*; IV/310)

- "He was anxious, hurt, confused when we came back from the slave traders." (*kāna qalīqan, muwajja'an, mutaḥayyiran, 'inda rujū'inā min al-nakhkhāsīn*; IV/346)

- "I remained anxious, didn't know what to do..." (*wa-baqītu mutaḥayyiran, lā adrī mā afalu ...*; II/226)

- "I found him in a great anxiety ..." (*wa-wajadtuhu min al-qalaq 'alā amrin 'aẓīmin...*; IV/346)

- "... I cried out of misery about her hand" (... *wa-abkī ḥasratan 'alā yadīhā*; III/384)

- "... I was sad ..." (*fa-ghṭamamtū...*; II/330)

- pain/grief of love:

- “Grief and distress, anxiety and sorrow overtook me, until my mind nearly left ...  
(*fa-laḥiqanī al-karb wal-ghamm, wal-qalaq wal-jaza‘, ḥattā kāda yadhhabu bi-‘aqlī ...*;  
IV/426)

- loneliness:

- “When the night closed in, he felt a bitter loneliness because of the separation from her, and because he was love-stricken and affected by anxiety, madness, and sorrow about her absence, he couldn’t sleep; and because of the weeping and the sleeplessness his soul nearly left (with) him.” (*fa-lammā jā’a al-layl, istawḥasha lahā waḥshatan shadidatan, wa-laḥiqahu min al-haymān, wal-qalaq, wal-junūn, wal-asaf ‘alā firāqihā, mā mana’ahu min al-nawm, wa-laḥiqahu min al-bakā’ wal-saḥar, mā kādat takhruju nafsuhu ma’ahu*; IV/349)

- anger/resentment:

- “... and her anger about me increased...” (*wa-hiya tazdādu ḥanaqan ‘alayya*;  
III/384)

- “The vizier was angry towards Ibn al-Furāt because of you.” (*qad ḥarada al-wazīr ‘alā Ibn al-Furāt bi-sababik*; II/114) mostly, anger is something that is felt by the superior or someone else, not by the protagonist.

- “... my rage about him...” (*wa-ghayzī ‘alayhi...; al-Ma’mūn is allowed to be angry!*  
II/352)

- „... my rage increased from his words...” (*izdadtū min qawlihi ghayzan*; II/352)

**2) Images and Metaphors:** images that cover the emotional state; the protagonist describes his own distress with different images: for example a broken heart, to lose one’s mind, the firm belief that the sorrow will lead to immediate death.

- Quite often, to illustrate the extent of fear, it is linked to the mind (*‘aql*) or the soul (*rūḥ*; *nafs*)

- “My mind (soul) nearly left out of fear.” (*wa-rūhī fi khilāla dhālika takādu takhruju faza’an*; IV/131)
- “My mind was absent/frozen (i.e. out of function).” (*wa-dhahala ‘aqlī*; II/116)
- “I found him in such a great anxiety, that I doubted his sanity ...” (*wa-wajadtuhu min al-qalaq ‘alā amrin ‘azīmin, ḥattā ankartu ‘aqlahu...*; IV/346)
- “Grief and distress, anxiety and sorrow overtook me, until my mind nearly left ...” (*fa-laḥiqanī al-karb wal-ghamm, wal-qalaq wal-jaza’, ḥattā kāda yadhhabu bi-‘aqlī ...*; IV/426)
- heavy sorrow (something gets heavy or tight); words fail...:
  - “... my chest became tight.” (*fa-dāqa ṣadrī*; II/330)
  - “... a huge sorrow came over me, bigger than anything that I have felt before... (fear for wife and child)” (*fa-warada ‘alayya amrun ‘azīmun, mā warada ‘alayya mithluhu qaṭṭu ...*; II/375)
- “She trembled like a branch out of fear ...” (*fa-htazzat mithlu l-qaḍīb faza’an*; IV/356)
  
- [- The mind can also be seized out of rapture and ecstasy: “when he came to us he resumed his recital (of the Qur’an), and my mind was enchanted/captivated by the beauty of it” (*khalaba/khuliba ‘aqlī bi-ṭībihā*; IV 252)]
- to die out of fear:
  - “I was dying out of fear.” (*anā mayyitun khawfan*; IV/294)
- burning = pain in the heart (*iḥtirāq*; IV/310)
- The lovesickness becomes so intense that it gets an insane, or, depending on the translation, metaphysical quality:

- “The matter intensified until it became a satanic wisper...” (*wa-zāda al-amr ‘alayya, ḥattā intahā bī ilā ḥadd al-wiswās ...*; IV/310)

- a broken heart/soul:

- “... but all the time I was broken-hearted, my vitality dead, my sorrow visible.” (*illā annanī fī khilāla dhālika, munkasir al-nafs, mayyit al-nishāṭ, zāhir al-huzn*; IV/324)

- Sometimes it is not the character that expresses his fear; instead an animal functions as substitute to illustrate the emotional distress:

- “... I saw a lion standing there, and between him and the ass’s hooves there was an arm’s length or less, and when the ass smelled his scent, a violent shiver seized him, and he got rooted to the spot and didn’t move. I didn’t have any doubt about the end...” (... *fā-ra’aytu asadan qā’iman, wa-baynahu wa-bayna qawā’im al-ḥimār naḥwa dhirā’in aw aqall, wa-idha al-ḥimār qad shamma rā’ihatahu fa-aṣābathu ra’datun shadīdatun, wa-rasakhat qawā’imuhu fī al-arḍ, wa-lam yataḥarrak. Fa-lam ashukka fī al-talaf ...*; IV/170)

- “We were in the dark, seven of us, and we didn’t see him (the lion) except when he breathed, and we heard his breathing. The ass defecated from fear and filled the mosque with dung; the night fell and our situation hadn’t changed, we nearly died from fear.” (... *wa-ḥaṣalnā fī al-ẓulma, wal-sab’u ma’anā, fa-mā kāna ‘indanā min ḥālihi shay’un illā idhā tanaffasa, fa-innā kunnā nasma’u nafasahu. Wa-rātha al-ḥimāru min faza’ihi, fa-mala’a al-masjida rawthan, wa-maḍā al-layl wa-naḥnu ‘alā ḥālinā, wa qad kidnā natlafu faza’an*; IV/187)

### 3) Physical reactions that symbolize a certain sensation:

- weeping (*bakā*): The most prominent non-verbal expressions of distress are weeping and sobbing; Linda G. Jones in her essay on Weeping in Islamic sermons argues that

crying in the Islamic religious context was seen mostly as a sign of pietistic authenticity, but that there also can be found a discussion about whether tears can be deceptive, too.<sup>2</sup> In our stories the protagonists cry quite often; this is mostly a simple statement and marks one of the peaks of the narration. Tears can be a sign of hopelessness as well as sympathy with an unhappy person; sometimes they are an instrument to arouse sympathy in others.

- “He (al-Muttaqī) asked me about the reason for my disturbance, and I confided in him and cried in front of him; I begged him to ask his father to sell the girl to me, or to give her back to me.” (*fā-sa’alanī ‘an sabab ikhtilālī, fa-ṣadaqtuhu, wa-bakaytu bayna yadayhi, wa-sa’altuhu an ya’ala abāhu bay’ al-jāriyya ‘alayya, aw hibatahā lī;* IV/311)

- “I regretted (the selling of the slave girl) and burst into tears without restraint...” (*nadamtu, wa-ndafa’tu fī bakā’ ‘azīm...;* IV/317)

- “the amount of tears and slaps/blows had made me dizzy/frantic/dazed/confused.” (*wa-warada ‘alayya min al-laṭm wal-bakā’ mā hawwasanī;* IV/317)

- “He wept out of pity for me...” (*fā-bakā riqqatan lī;* IV/318)

- “I told him my story and wept, and the sob of the girl rose from behind the curtain, then he and his brothers wept hard, out of pity for us.” (*fā-ṣadaqtuhu ‘an amrī, wa-bakaytu, wa-‘alā nahibu l-jāriyya min khalf al-sitāra, wa-bakā huwa wa-ikhwatuhu bakā’an shadīdan, riqqatan lanā;* IV/322)

- “... my weeping happens out of compassion for myself because of where I got to ...” (... *bakā’ī raḥmatun li-nafsī mim mā dafa’tu ilayhi;* II/375; Ch. 7)

- after reciting some verses: “then weeping overwhelmed her...” (*thumma ghalabahā al-bakā’;* IV/320)

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<sup>2</sup> Linda G. Jones: “‘He Cried and Made Others Cry’: Crying as a Sign of Pietistic Authenticity or Deception in Medieval Islamic Preaching.” In: *Crying in the Middle Ages. Tears of History*, ed. Elina Gertsman. New York: Routledge 2012.

- "...she became anxious and weeped and went away quickly, and al-Ashtur began to weep while I told him my story, then we departed." (...*fa-jaza'at, wa-bakat, wa-maḍat musri'atan, wa-ja'ala al-Ashtur yabkī, wa-anā uḥaddithuhu bi-qiṣṣatī, wa-rtaḥalnā*; IV/357) Laconicism!

- "... he started to shed burning tears and to cry bitterly." (*fa-ja'ala yabkī aḥarra bakā'an, wa-yantaḥibu*; IV/395)

- "I cried and weeped ..." (*abkī wa-antahibu ...*; IV/426)

- sobbing

- "She sobbed and nearly died, and loud weeping rose from her ..." (*thumma shahiqat fa-kādat tatlafu, wa-rtafa'a lahā bakā 'un 'azīmun*; IV/321)

"She heaved a sigh and nearly died ..." (*fa-shahiqat shahqatan kādat tatlafu*; IV/321)

- "They took me with them, and when I entered and saw her in this state, and when she saw me, she sighed heavily, and I had no doubt she would die ..." (... *shahiqat shahqatan 'azīmatan, fa-mā shakaktu fī talafihā ...*; IV/326) (The same words, but this time for the relief/positive surprise!)

- Another physical reaction is losing consciousness:

- "I fainted..." (*wa-ṣu'iqtu anā ...*; IV/321) literally: I was thunderstruck

- "I sang it (the melody) for him, and he lost consciousness, so that I thought him dead. [...] I said: I am afraid you could die. He said: Alas, alas, I couldn't be more wretched... (...*thumma ghannaytuhu iyyāhu, fa-ughmiya 'alayhi, ḥattā zanantuhu qad māta... qultu: akhshī an tamūta. Fa-qāla: hayhāt, hayhāt, anā aqshā min dhālika...*; IV/395)

- "... then he fainted harder than the first time, until I thought his soul had just died ..." (*fa-ṣa'aqa ṣa'qatan ashadda min al-ūlā, ḥattā zanantu nafsahu qad fāzat*; IV/395)

- losing appetite:

- "...without eating and drinking..." (*lā ākulu, wa-lā ashraḥu*; IV/311)

- sleeplessness:

- "Sleep refused to come to me ..." (*qad imtana'a 'alayya al-nawm*; IV/346)

- "I returned to my bed, but sleep wouldn't come to me; I didn't stop going to the footman, but he refused me (refused to get up), until I had done this several times, and still the decision had not been made." (*fā-rajā'tu ilā faraāshī, fā-idhan al-nawm mumtani'un 'alayya, fā-lam azal aqūmu ilā al-ghulām, wa-huwa yaruddunī, ḥattā fā'altu dhālika marrāt, wa-anā lā ya'khdhunī al-qarār*; II/226)

**4) actions/rituals** that symbolize a certain sensation or are a consequence of a specific feeling; for example to lose the ability to behave properly, to focus exclusively on the pain and the passion.

- screaming/shouting/beating one's chest and face

- "I cried and hit my face, and I was exhausted by the intensity of the first ..." (*fā-bakaytu wa-laṭamtu, wa-nālanī amrun shadīdun min al-awwal...*; IV/317)

- "I began to hit my face, to cry and to wail ..." (*wa-aqbaltu alṭimu, wa-abkī, wa-aṣīḥu ...*; II/375)

- tearing clothes/smashing objects:

- "...the girl teared her clothes and broke the lute; she cut her poetry recital, wept and slapped her face, and we couldn't stop her." (*fā-kharraqat al-jāriyya thiyābahā, wa-kassarat al-'ūd, wa-jazzat shi'rahā, wa-bakat, wa-laṭamat, fā-mā mana'nāhā min shay'in min hādhā*; IV/325)

- praying:

- “I was certain that I would be executed, and I turned to pray, to seek God’s help, and to crying.” (*fa-ayqantu bil-qatl, wa-aqbaltu ‘alā al-ṣalāt, wal-du‘ā’, wal-bakā’*; II/133)

- deviation from “normal” behavior:

- “I ceased to care for my affairs and was engaged in crying, and there was no way for me to find consolation.” (*fa-mtana‘tu ‘an al-nazar fī amr dārī, wa-tashāghaltu bil-bakā’, wa-lam yakun lī sabīlun ilā al-ghazā’*; IV/310)

- “I didn’t know where to go...” (*wa-anā lā adrī ilā ayna adhhabu...*; VI/317)

- “I went to him and sat next to him without greeting him or asking him about his affairs, because I was in such a state of fear and confusion.” (*fa-qaṣadtuhu, fa-jalastu ilayhi min ghayri an usallima ‘alayhi, aw as’alahu ‘an shay’in min amrihi, limā anā fīhi min al-jaza’ wal-ḥayra*; II/116)

- “I was, then, the scribe of the mother of al-Muttaqī lillāh ... and I delayed my work for them for days, I didn’t fulfil my duties for them; instead in those days I strayed in the desert without eating, drinking or doing anything beyond weeping and thinking about my passion.” (*wa-kuntu aktubu - ḥīna’idhin – li-umm al-Muttaqī lillāh, [wa-huwa ḥadathun], fa-ta’akhhartu ‘anhum ayyāman, wa-akhlaltu bi-amrihā, wa-anā mutawaffirun tilka al-ayyām ‘alā al-ṭawāfi fī aṣ-ṣaḥrā, lā ākulu, wa-lā ashraḥu, wa-lā atashāghalu bi-akthara min al-bakā’ wal-haymān*; IV/311)

- “I didn’t meet any of the officials, like the vizier, or the entourage of the caliph without turning to them, crying in front of them, telling them my story, and asking them to put in word for me with the caliph to let the girl come back to me.” (*wa-kuntu lā ulqī aḥadan min al-ru’asā’ fī al-dawla, kal-wazīr, wa-ḥāshiyyat al-khalīfa, illā wa-aqṣiduhum, wa-abkī bayna aydīhim, wa-uḥaddithuhum ḥadīthī, wa-as’aluhum mas’alat al-khalīfa fī taslīm al-jāriyya ilayya, imma bi-bay’in, aw hibatin*. IV/311)

- “... but all the time I was broken-hearted, my vitality dead, my sorrow visible... I stayed in this condition for more than two years.” (*illā annanī fī khilāla dhālika,*

*munkasir al-nafs, mayyit al-nishāt, zāhir al-huzn... wa-stamarrat bī al-ḥāl ‘alā hādhā sanatayn wa-akthar; IV/324)*

- attempted suicide:

- “I went to the Tigris and covered my face with my headgear; I wasn’t good at swimming, and so I threw myself into the water to drown.” (*fā-ji’tu ilā Dijla, wa-lafaftu wajhī bi-ridā’in kāna ‘alā ra’sī, wa-lam akun uḥsinu asbaḥu, wa-ramaytu bi-nafsī fī l-mā’ li-aghraqa; IV/317)*

- “I nearly killed myself because the house seemed so deserted to me, then I recalled hellfire and the afterlife, so I left my house, fleeing ...” (*wa-kidtu an aqtula nafsī li-waḥshat manzilī ‘alayya, thumma dhakartu al-nār wal-ākhirā, fā-kharajtu min baytī hāriban; IV/318)*

- “I cried and grieved and I went my way and came to drown myself in the Tigris, but I recalled the sweetness of the soul, and the fear of the punishment in the afterlife, and so I refrained.” (*fā-bakaytu, wa-ḥazantu, wa-kharajtu ‘alā wajhī, wa-ji’tu li-aghruqa nafsī fī Dijla, fā-dhakartu ḥalāwat al-nafs, wa-khawf al-‘uqāb fī al-ākhirā, fā-mtana’tu; III/315)*

- “... I wanted to die.” (*tamannaytu an amūt; II/268)*

**1) introversive** narration (i.e. emotions linked to the characters): The emotions of the involved individuals could be described or made visible and understandable, either a) by describing their feelings, b) by describing their actions (and thus expressing their feelings non-verbally), or c) by letting the person in question comment on his/her feelings.

### 3. Emotional laconicism

In al-Tanūkhī’s arrangement of the stories, the narratives with a reference to Qur’an and ḥadīth are placed first, and the love stories at the very end of his collection. The first impression is that of a hierarchical order where religious subjects are placed above the

profane sensitivities that run, not only a poor second, but last. When we take into account other organizing principles, like for example the *‘Iqd al-farīd* (The Unique Necklace) by Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih (d. 960), and perceive this classification more as a circle, the last chapter could be seen not as an unwelcome appendix with worldly sorrows but with as much importance as the first.

If we look at the collection again with the emotional catalogue in mind, the differences regarding the “emotional intensity” are remarkable. Even without a detailed quantitative analysis it is not difficult to see that emotional reactions are much more often part of the narrative where a **basic emotion** itself is the subject of the narrative, in our case: love, attraction, affection for another individual. Here, we have verbal and physical expressions that go beyond a few words and try to convey the intensity of the feeling.

Although quite often the protagonist seems to be near death (because he or she faints or loses his/her mind), and sometimes even has suicidal thoughts, we could cautiously assume that lovesickness is something that can be overcome. Perhaps this is the reason why the protagonist is allowed to dwell in his emotions and to illustrate them vividly, in comparison to the other stories. Another explanation for this accumulation could be that the first-person narrator here is in direct interaction with another human being, beyond institutions, power, and social hierarchy.

When it comes to life-threatening situations that are caused by other human beings (be it robbers or rulers) or wild animals, the hero very often has not much time to think (and to interact with the other being on a personal level). Action follows action, and the focus of the narrator seems to be to describe in detail the various measures and steps that in the end lead to the good outcome. It is not as if there are no feelings involved; but the (male) characters are occupied with running, fighting, arguing, searching for help, waiting quietly, praying. They probably are scared, fear for their lives, or feel desperation and hopelessness. But the plot drives them forward. Their focus is much more external than internal. The emotions expressed in the text, are therefore scarce. (It would be worthwhile

to stay longer with these apparently ‘emotion-free’ actions, because I think one could find an undercurrent of sentiments navigating the story in disguise)

A premature conclusion could be that the emotional density decreases proportionally to the importance of the subject. Emotion itself, thus, becomes a human mode (a weakness?) that one has to be able to afford. The implication, then, would be that if the situation gets really serious/out of hand, there is no room for emotions, because action is required.

On the other hand, love-sickness is treated as a serious illness that can befall the strongest man. Weeping over the separation of the beloved doesn’t seem to be a sign of weakness. The good ending almost always is that the man in question gets his girl back, after he had been desperate and forlorn in his sorrow, and sometimes has used his emotional emergency to impress a person that could help him (a superior), even taking the risk to fall into disgrace.

But then, we also have to take into consideration the receiving side of the narration. The expression and translation of feelings is one thing; what the narrative prompts on the reader’s/listener’s side, is something different. Several stories are so dramatic and gruesome that we can assume that they had their effect on the contemporary auditory (perhaps a sort of pleasant horror effect). As al-Tawḥīdī himself writes in his preface: the aims of these stories are sympathy and consolation, both conditions that are located without doubt on an emotional level:

ووجدت أقوى ما يَفزع إليه من أناخ الدهرُ بمكروه عليه ، قراءة الأخبار التي تنبئ عن  
تفضل الله عزَّ وجلَّ ، على من حصل قبله في محصله ، ونزل به مثل بلائه ومعضله ...

To me, the strongest possible thing to which can turn whom fate burdens with misfortune, is to read stories that are in conflict with God’s good will, about

someone to whom has happened before him something similar, and who has encountered similar problems and difficulties...

If I call the observed brevity “emotional laconicism”, I do not mean to label the presented emotional world as ‘underdeveloped’ or ‘inferior’, as has happened in **earlier research** regarding the emotional range of the pre-modern individual. Rather, the laconic mode of narration that can be found elsewhere in medieval Arabic texts, too, shows a certain practical and earthy (lifeward?) approach, especially when it comes to hopeless situations. Since *adab* texts have a strong didactic impetus, the message seems to be the following: Feelings can be shown, they are not belittled, but one must overcome them and move on, or, as Ibn al-Dāya writes:

لأنّ النفس إذا لم تُعَنَّ عند الشدائد بما يجدد قواها ، توّلى عليها اليأس فأهلكها.

Because, if the soul in times of sorrow does not try to regain its powers, despair will become dominant, and ultimately it will destroy the soul [...]

If the soul is not treated with medicines, the illness will grow worse and the trials harder. Reflection upon the tales in this chapter will encourage the soul and put it into continuous steadfastness.

We know today that emotion, especially in its historical perspective, is inseparably linked to language (**reference**). While we are warned to be cautious when it comes to evaluate a historical emotional setting, this notion of the mentioned interdependence could also lead to the conclusion that emotion is only detectable where the wording for it exists. I am not so sure about that. Not because I would go back to the pre-verbal, basic emotion

discourse, but because to understand the emphasis and weighing of a bygone time can be tricky.

The last but not least insight could, therefore, also be that what we perceive as laconic is by no means evidence for a lack of emotionality; rather we could learn to read yet more carefully and, at the same time, do not believe that to make many words about something automatically means to intensify a sentiment.