

***I.***

***Emotionen in Glaube und Religion***

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## The Semantics of Love: Conflict, Sublimation and Experience in Arabic Discourse

*A resilient pattern of early Arabic discourse depicts love as a statement of conflict between passion and rules of reasonable and socially approved behaviour. The antagonism is surmounted by sublime love replacing the initial aspiration in the course of a process of refinement. The resulting contradictory stance – emotional attachment becoming even more intense as the beloved is absented by adverse circumstance – inspires intellectual, aesthetic and spiritual experience, as it is valid for profane relationship and for divine love. The work of Dā'ūd al-Anṭākī (d. 1599) is discussed here to demonstrate that Arabic tradition, in contrast to European notions of sensitivity, increasingly concentrated on the expression of aesthetic and spiritual experience to the detriment of depictions of conflict setting the individual against social rules and norms. In his late and widespread compendium, the author, famous physician and practical philosopher, analyses the discourse on love. Displaying a rationalist, non-idealistic, down-to-earth attitude, he pursues a critical interest in the various emotional states and manifestations of love. By correlating profane love to the mystic's love of God, he directs attention towards the sublime expression of longing, fear and ecstasy of fulfilment which is in his view the true signification of love and the justification for its persisting representation in literature.*

Love is indissolubly related to codes which serve to structure both the communication and the experience of the emotion. This is valid for any culture, no less for the Arab world than for Europe. Since ancient times, these codes were embodied in literature, poetry and prose, which depict love as an emotional, intellectual and social phenomenon. Some theories, often closely related to literary testimonies, have also been in use to explain and normalize love from ethical, philosophical, theological and medical points of view. The literary topic of love transports and negotiates behavioural patterns, concepts of matrimonial relationship, gender order, sexuality and moral conduct.

Emotions generally contain judgements about the world and about our place in it. They thus require an intentional engagement with existential and conventional realities.<sup>1</sup> But in individual experience, as well as in discourse, love is generally perceived as an intrinsic, natural state triggered by certain stimuli and accompanied by pleasant or unpleasant, desirable and undesirable effects. These two aspects of emotion, namely, culture and nature, interrelate. As a cultural construct, love can-

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1 Robert C. Solomon: On emotions as judgements, *American Philosophical Quarterly* 25 (1988): 183-192.

not be totally separated from its physiological and psychological dimensions, and as part of human nature, it necessarily relates to social practice and standards.

Arabic literature, since its beginnings, has paid an immense amount of attention to dealing with the emotional states related to love. The Arabic lexicon gives witness to that: there are at least thirty terms – and probably some more – in use for love. They include the aspects of passion and altruistic love – distinguished in Latin tradition by *amor* and *agape* – and address various emotional attitudes related to love.<sup>2</sup> Arabic tradition developed concepts meant to identify, explain and evaluate the various expressions of love. Particular attention was given to passionate love, its phenomenology and the remedies employed to contain it. Over the centuries, roughly from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the discussion, rearrangement and modification of such concepts have established a complex and varied discourse on love. They have served as the referential context of an ever-growing repertoire of literary testimonies gathered in this literature.<sup>3</sup>

Needless to emphasise at this point the extent of difference between these visions of love and the European notion of sensitivity, as it was developed during the 18<sup>th</sup> century in order to negotiate gender order and to readjust patriarchal rule.<sup>4</sup> It may suffice to reaffirm at this point that concepts of family, gender, subjectivity and sexuality need to be recognized in their proper context, past and present.<sup>5</sup> In European societies a shift of emphasis occurred in the way partners were chosen, based upon, roughly speaking, free choice. Shape and role of the family as it emerged in Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century have no direct equivalent in the Arabian environment before massive urbanisation during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

However, there is a common conceptual approach in both Middle Eastern and European cultures which consists in depicting love as a compelling and overwhelming force by elaborating the inherent conflict between the impulse of desire and patterns of reasonable and socially approved behaviour. This often fatal antagonism, however, can be surmounted when sublime love replaces the initial aspiration in the course of a process of refinement. Such is the narrative which relates emotion to a civilizing process and links both entities, Europe and the Middle East, despite their cultural difference and in spite of the obvious divergence of historical path lines. In Arabic tradition, until the wake of modernity, attention has increasingly concentrated on the expression of sublime love both in the context of profane relationship and spiritual love of God. Thus, the intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic

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2 Ḥubb – maḥabba – miqa – ra'fā – wudd – ṣabāba – khulla – kalaf – ṣabwa – ḥanīn – shawq – ishtiyāq – balbāl – jāmi' – hawā – 'ishq – shaghaf – wala' – tatayyum – walah – hiyām – wajd – jawā – karb – ka'āba – shajw – ghamra – jaza' – khilāba – suhd – laḥaj; cf. Anṭākī (as note 17), p. 62-67.

3 Giffen, Lois Anita: *Theory of Profane Love among the Arabs. The Development of the Genre*. New York 1971.

4 Frömmer, Judith: *Vaterfiktionen. Empfindsamkeit und Patriarchat in der Literatur der Aufklärung*. München 2008.

5 Deniz Kandiyoti offers a case study on contemporary cross-cultural instrumentalization of women's rights, *Islam and the Politics of Gender: Reflections on Afghanistan*, Carl Heinrich Becker Lecture der Fritz Thyssen Stiftung 2010.

experience prevails whereas the dimension of conflict setting the individual against norms and rules has lost its initial significance.

Jack Goody, in his later years, advocated the perception of a larger Eurasian cultural connectivity set against Eurocentric interpretations of history. The first part of his book, *Food and Love, A Cultural History of East and West*,<sup>6</sup> deals with the family as a social institution. Examining studies of the historian L. Stone,<sup>7</sup> as well as A. Giddens' *The Transformation of Intimacy: sexuality, love and eroticism in modern societies*,<sup>8</sup> Goody argues against the authors' ideas about the emergence of romantic love as a European particularity leading towards modernity. He refers – rather vaguely – to Chinese and to Arabic testimonies of earlier and similarly complex perceptions of love.

Romantic love was elaborated in Arabic literature long before equivalents in medieval European literature came into existence. The transformation of passionate, ardent and overwhelming love into a sublime ego-transcending consent to the will of the beloved had become a productive topic early on. Interweaving psychological, medical, philosophical, moral and religious teachings, literature contemplates love's potential to escape control. It shows that focusing on its aesthetic and spiritual dimensions may allow a process of sublimation which furthers adaptation to culturally-valid patterns of conduct.

Belle letters, the knowledge oriented *adab* encyclopaedias, popular narratives, such as the 1001 Nights, and the collections of love stories contained in books dedicated to a more theoretical discourse on love, depict a wide spectrum of heterosexual and homosexual relationship patterns carried by mutual or unrequited love. In view of this variety, it seems inappropriate to refer to the Arabic discourse on love as a monolithic teaching. However, there is a binding link. All authors of compendia on love offering an elaborate, systematic approach to the topic, and even those who advocate a rigid moralist stance, have remained fascinated by love as a statement of contradiction and conflict, which, in consequence, had to be refined into a sublime purified state of love.<sup>9</sup>

The perception of love as a statement of contradiction and conflict is particularly present in the widespread 'Udhrī model:<sup>10</sup> Emotional attachment is all the more intense, as the beloved is absent, or absented by adverse circumstances. From the eighth century onwards, stories depict the emotional dynamics and social setups of sublime love experienced and articulated in the most exemplary and accomplished manner by poets. Narration, i.e., the account of encounters, obstacles, ambitions and social constraints, makes love a motive of personal vocation.

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6 London 1998.

7 Mainly *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500 – 1800*. London 1977.

8 Oxford 1992.

9 Leder, Stefan: "The 'Udhrī narrative in Arabic literature", in: Friederike Pannewick (Ed.): *Martyrdom in Literature. Visions of Death and Meaningful Suffering in Europe and the Middle East from Antiquity to Modernity*, Wiesbaden 2004, 162-189.

10 Idem: *Ibn al-Ġauzī und seine Kompilation wider die Leidenschaft – Der Traditionalist in gelehrter Überlieferung und originärer Lehre*. Wiesbaden 1984 (Beiruter Texte und Studien 32).

In these repeated stories, passionate love is depicted as an unconditional devotion to the beloved in spite of all hindrances. This experience entails suffering often causing the lover's, sometimes even both lovers', death. This ardent love prevails over reason and is often shown, in its most simplistic form, as an affliction and misfortune. However, in many stories, ardent love develops into a voluntary exercise, relying solely on the lover's deliberate acceptance of a paradoxical situation, as he cannot renounce his affective attachment, knowing that union with his friend is unattainable. When the lover no longer relies on a positive response, this kind of love becomes a selfless and morally refined stance, based upon the emotional experience of ardour (*wajd*).

Both the fate of being afflicted with passionate love, and the willingness to bear the suffering and ecstasy to great extremes are conceptual prerequisites for the functioning of the 'Udhrī model as a symbolic code. This code promotes love, which transcends, and even belittles, pragmatism and interest. Closely connected with this idea is the concept of individual experience, which is opposed to customary rules.<sup>11</sup> Since the lover defends and maintains an emotional relationship with his female friend even in face of his unfulfilled aspirations, these stories may also be seen as a rare model of gender relations, since the woman remains throughout partner in a highly cultivated relationship.<sup>12</sup> The true, passionate lover (*'āshiq*) became an established character also beyond the original Bedouin milieu. Stories depicting the affectionate attachment to slave girls (*jawārī*), to singing-girls (*qiyan*), or to slave boys (*ghulam*), for instance, often apply a similar dramatic scheme, as social barriers inhibit the attainment of an initial desire which may then either turn into a fatal affliction or be sublimated giving way to refined and inspired stance. As this stance generally implies chastity (*'iffa*) – i.e., abstention from illicit sexual contact according to Islamic norms – and cultivates veneration detached from union with the beloved, profane love corresponds with the ascetic exercise of the mystic's love of God. This phenomenological and systematic similarity has led authors of compendia on love to relate both types. Theological implications, such as the questions of possibility and permissibility of a love relationship with God, therefore, have demanded much attention.<sup>13</sup>

The semantics of love as exposed in the 'Udhrī model and its spiritual twin, the mystic's love of God, are main motifs in one of the late compendia on love dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Its author is Dā'ūd b. 'Umar al-Anṭākī (d. 1599), famous physician and practical philosopher. Most of what we know about him comes from the note of a contemporary author, who seems to have received from Dā'ūd himself a short account of his life.<sup>14</sup> Saved by an Iranian physician from a severe handicap

11 Bauer, Thomas: *Liebe und Liebesdichtung in der arabischen Welt des 9. und 10. Jahrhunderts*. Wiesbaden 1998.

12 Jacobi, Renate: „'Udhrī“, in: *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. 10. Leiden 1999, 774-776.

13 Bell, Joseph Norman: *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979.

14 Aṭ-Ṭālawī, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad: *Sāniḥāt dumā 'l-qaṣr fī muṭāraḥāt banī 'l-'aṣr*. Ed. Muḥammad Mursī al-Khūlī. 1-2. Beirut 1983, vol. 2, 35-37.

in his youth, he studied philosophy and medicine and also acquired some knowledge of Greek. Originally from a village near Anṭākya, he later went to Jabal ‘Āmil (today South Lebanon), a centre of Shiite learning at the time, then to Damascus and Cairo, practicing medicine and practical philosophy. He died in Mecca. We are indebted to him for a number of books on medical matters, on cosmology as well as on mantic techniques.<sup>15</sup> Dā’ūd was considered a Shiite, but not of the Imamiya branch.<sup>16</sup> His intellectual outlooks are quite different from mainstream Sunnī religious learning.

The title of his book on love, *Embellishment of the ‘Markets’ through Analysis of the Yearning of Lovers*,<sup>17</sup> reveals itself only to the expert, as it refers to an earlier work from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, namely, al-Biqā’ī’s *Market of Yearning: Dealing with Those Who Were Slain by Love*.<sup>18</sup> That book also refers to an earlier work, this time from the 11<sup>th</sup> century, entitled *Those Who Were Slain by Love*.<sup>19</sup> Anṭākī’s book was erroneously classified as a revised rendering of this last work by modern scholarship, and even contemporary scholars thought it to be an abbreviation of Biqā’ī’s work. As a consequence, Anṭākī’s book was neither considered for its own sake nor was it ever edited critically. What we have are provisional printed editions. A number of manuscripts are extant; some of them, such as the Berlin manuscript, were copied in the 19<sup>th</sup> century only decades before the use of the printing press became widespread; thus his book was also printed.<sup>20</sup> In the absence of a thorough study of this text, which carries many of the literary characteristics of the period between the Islamic middle period and modernity, we can only give a preliminary evaluation of its content.

As the title indicates, and as the author explains in his introduction,<sup>21</sup> the work is the revised rendering of the works alluded to in the title of his book, and the author boasts about his systematic arrangement of the material and the deeper insight he gives into it. This cannot be affirmed at this point. In any case, the book also is an encyclopaedic compendium, using and quoting many earlier writings on the topic.

Anṭākī’s treatise mainly summarizes the established depictions and explications of love. It presents itself as the concluding masterpiece of the literary genre<sup>22</sup> and thus seals a discourse which had developed over centuries. More significantly, An-

15 Carl Brockelmann: *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*. vol. 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Leiden 1949, 478; Supplement II, Leiden 1938, 491.

16 Al-Muḥibbī: *Khulāṣat al-athar fī a’yān al-qarn al-ḥādī ‘ashr*. 1-4. Kairo 1284 h. (1867), vol. 2, 144f.

17 *Tazyīn al-aswāq bi-tafṣīl ashwāq al-‘ushshāq*. Ed. Aiman ‘Abd al-Jabbār al-Buḥairī. 1-2. Cairo 2002.

18 Al-Biqā’ī, Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm (d. 1480): *Aswāq al-ashwāq fī Maṣāri’ al-‘ushshāq*. Not edited.

19 Al-Sarrāj, Ja’far b. Aḥmad (d. 1106): *Maṣāri’ al-‘ushshāq*. 1-2. Beirut 1958.

20 Ahlwardt, Wilhelm: *Verzeichnis der arabischen Handschriften der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin*. 1-10. Berlin 1887-1899, see ms no. 8421.

21 *Tazyīn*, vol. 1, 25f.

22 *Fa-allaṣtu ḥādḥā l-kitāb alladhī huwa fī qilādati ḥādḥā l-fann durratan baydā’ wa-fī jubhatu jawādihi ghurratun gharrā’*, *akmaltu fīhi fawā’idahu wa-radadtu shawāridahu*, *Tazyīn*, vol. 1, 226.

taki's treatise has an interesting undercurrent which opens up the topic anew by giving emphasis to an analytical and realistic approach beyond moralizing or apologetic attitudes. Paying attention to the entire spectrum of emotional attitudes associated with love as they were encoded in literature, the author considers their factuality rather than their symbolic significance. Although much of his work is dedicated to testimonies of the 'Udhrī model, Anṭaki shows little sympathy and no predilection for this kind of romantic love. The author's two approaches, namely, rearrangement of the literary tradition and exposure of his own more analytical stance, are also noticeable in its stylistic qualities. The author employs a literary style adorned with rhymed prose and the use of many synonyms in many instances, which is then contrasted and complemented at times with the succinct, in fact abbreviated, language of a philosophical treatise.

Practical attitudes, such as good advice given to men and women for a successful marital relationship, are not entirely new to the discourse on love. "Be superior to her in terms of age, wealth and rank, let her be superior in patience, beauty and education", for instance, is a piece of advice that reproduces established wisdom and gender distinctions.<sup>23</sup> Anṭākī displays a practical attitude throughout his work. Love is an emotional state which may have striking effects and, just like a disease, may be cured by remedies related neither to the object of desire nor to moral conduct: His report from Damascus of the year 965/1573 gives evidence of what we may call an emotion managing employment of magical means. A man, showing suicidal desperation from love for a lady who always left him in doubt as to her intentions although he had spent all that he had to give, was saved by a friend who wrote a number of letters from the Arabic alphabet on his palm. Repeating this exercise for several days, the man was cured.<sup>24</sup>

The ambivalence of love, its constructive and destructive aspects, voluntary and involuntary character, as well as its active and passive nature, do not irritate Anṭākī, as they had intrigued and absorbed authors before him. Instead, his attitude is informed by three assumptions which we may infer from his work and which constitute the subcutaneous structure of his concept.

One is the author's curiosity regarding the many different ways of experiencing love. His stance in this respect is imbued with neutrality. This may be exemplified by his correlating temperament with the behavioural appearance of love: The sanguine person is fast in attachment, reluctant in giving it up; the phlegmatic slow in attachment and reluctant in giving it up; the choleric fast in attachment and fast in giving it up, and the melancholic slow in attachment and fast in giving it up.<sup>25</sup> This interesting typology illustrates Anṭākī's detached stance. From this perspective, the author does not advance any coherent interpretation of the phenomena treated, but rather attempts to present a comprehensive survey of the emotional states referred to in literature.

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23 *Tazyīn*, vol. 2, 205; see also 206ff. for similar advice.

24 *Tazyīn*, vol. 2, 54.

25 *Tazyīn*, vol. 1, 35.

His position towards ardent love, two, is a logical consequence of this factual stance. Although many quotations in his work recognize and highlight the endurance of those who carry love to extremes, including voluntary or involuntary self-sacrifice, the author sticks to a resolute analysis. Ardent love, in general, is subjective; it is the result of an image in the lover's mind. Put differently, it is an expectation of what the world should offer rather than an insight into what it is. It causes physical, intellectual and behavioural damage.<sup>26</sup>

Anṭākī's detailed explication of ardent love as affecting man's physical and mental health contains a detailed explication of seven consecutive states. The author claims that his analysis is more coherent than all the previous explanations of love, as those were lost in the process of applying a multitude of distinctive terms, and confounded observations concerning the nature of love with speculations over its causes.<sup>27</sup> Instead, his explanation of the states of ardent love is meant to offer a realistic account of its dynamics based upon behavioural reasons. He thus also delivers guidance for the avoidance of such wicked effects. In contrast to ordinary love (*ḥubb*), which may arise from an accidental meeting, at first sight, ardent love (*'ishq*) is a voluntarily provoked affliction and exercise, nourished by exposing oneself repeatedly to the initial stimulus, and cultivated by an inspired imagination which refuses to acknowledge the complexities of reality. In Anṭākī's syntax, love is a sentence which starts with the pronoun of the first person and ends with its annihilation. As a chain of states of mind, love entails fixation, i.e., the inability to perceive perfection outside of the object of adoration. When the lover becomes totally absorbed by his desire, none of the usual treatments offer remedy. All sensations seem to be related illusively to the beloved; every shade seems to hide while every sound one way or the other seems to be connected with the beloved. Permanent unrest, unliveable, takes possession of the *'āshiq*. As the beloved seems dearer than one's own life and death and better than the reality despised, life and love become incompatible.

The author is not primarily interested in the process of sublimation, leading the loving person from an initial state to a refined experience, as depicted in the 'Udhri model. He rather focuses on the state of sublime love itself. From this point of view, love is recognized as a driving force, encouraging and inspiring, as the lover wants to win the object of his desire and to please him. Love demands active engagement and results from some sort of sensitivity; thus, it cannot afflict the dull person.<sup>28</sup> However, it remains a futile effort, or at least is second to the more laudable form of ardent love.

Anṭākī's correlation of sublime love with the mystic's love of God constitutes the third and most conclusive bearing underlying his interpretation of the Arabic discourse on love. Ardent love of God, which also may lead to the person's annihilation, just as in the case of profane love, does not result from a process of sublimation, initiated by conflict, but occurs as an emotion of longing, fear and ecstasy of

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26 *Tazyīn*, vol. 1, 56.

27 *Tazyīn*, vol. 1, 59.

28 *Tazyīn*, vol. 1, 52.



fulfilment. Anṭākī opens his illustrations of love and lover's destinies which he collects from literature with a chapter on lovers martyred by their longing for the Lord. The parallel of profane and divine love is justified according to his argument by the fact that human nature itself is characterized by a duality: love may be directed either towards mundane desires or towards the Hereafter; it may be based on senses directed toward the exterior or the interior, and may pursue higher or self-centred goals.<sup>29</sup>

Anṭākī's conception of man sets nature against spirit,<sup>30</sup> the material world against the intellectual. He sees a body-mind dichotomy at work in everything man-related. Just as man should struggle to free himself from the limitations of materiality (*kathāfa*), he also needs to strive toward refinement (*iṣlāh*) of his emotions, as they are more than anything else characterized by this duality. Love (*'ishq*) may take God as its object of desire, and thus becomes a spiritual or intellectual intentional endeavour. Or love is bound to physical sensation generated from intellectual idleness or standstill. Whereas in religious discourse reason (*'aql*) and knowledge (*'ilm*) are instruments of discipline, as they confer insight into the higher order of God's ordainment, Anṭākī's concern is the human being and his potential to rise above the passive reaction to natural impulse. For this reason, precedence is given to the love of God.

Love may lead to union with the beloved, but that is extremely rare in Anṭākī's view. Lovers do not usually attain their objective.<sup>31</sup> One may argue that it occurs in the absence of the beloved. The question is not why this is so, but rather why people do not stick to more pragmatic choices, when obstacles occur, but engage in an emotional affair that, as everybody knows, demands transcending ego interest in a painful process of refinement. The answer lies in the experience of sublime love,<sup>32</sup> its intellectual and aesthetic experiences. Ardent love bears conflict and thus is a problematic practice. If controlled, it may find expression as an intentional practice. A prerequisite for this practice is discretion, the request not to turn love into a declared relationship, but to completely conceal it (*kitmān*).<sup>33</sup> Anṭākī's interest lies in that mental state, not in the process which leads to it, since the mental motion of the mystic's quest for union with God parallels the *'āshiq's* sublime experience. From this perspective, immorality (*fisq*), an attribute normally associated with the sinful, licentious person, undergoes a characteristic twist in meaning. Introducing a chapter on passionate lovers who were known for their *fisq*, Anṭākī explains that it refers to people who engaged or only thought of nefarious deeds, and that both sorts of people indeed fall under the category of *fisq*, because love, in its most accomplished form demands unmitigated engagement, which means that any thought of finding distraction, and even any idea other than the object of veneration, is con-

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29 *Tazyīn*, vol 1, 71

30 *Tazyīn*, vol 1, 34: *al-naḥs al-ḥayawānīyya, al-naḥs al-malakiyya*.

31 *Tazyīn*, vol 2, 130.

32 *Tazyīn*, vol 2, 133.

33 *Tazyīn*, vol 1, 36.

sidered sinful. This is all the more noteworthy, he explains, as ideas occur in one's mind involuntarily.

The experience of true love thus enables one to dominate what lay outside the reach of legal control, namely, the inner mental movements. To illustrate this thought, Anṭākī refers to the mystic poet 'Umar ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 1235), famous for his outpourings on the topic of divine love: "If any desire except for you appeared to my mind/Inattentively, I judged myself an apostate."<sup>34</sup>

The amalgam of intellectual and emotional experience common to sublime profane and divine love is, for Anṭākī, the significance of the emotion.

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34 *Tazyīn*, vol 1, 339.