

Martyrdom in Literature

Visions of Death and Meaningful Suffering
in Europe and the Middle East from Antiquity to Modernity

Friederike Pannewick (ed.)



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The 'Udhri Narrative in Arabic Literature

Stefan Leder (Halle-Wittenberg)

Pre-modern Arabic literature shows an intense interest in love, both as a topic of narration and as a matter of theory. The nature of love, its causes, variances and effects, dangerous as well as educative, are discussed in books and treatises which unfold a detailed and varied discussion of profane and also divine love.¹ Stories mostly illustrating the vicissitudes experienced by those in love are part of Arabic narrative prose from its formative period in the 8th century onwards and constitute an affluent branch of Arabic literature. Books on poetry and poets relate the experience of lover-poets;² hundreds of love stories have been collected in compendia, which treat, in particular, the unfortunate destiny of lovers often culminating in their death.³ This kind and other kinds of love stories are also part of *adab* literature dedicated to polite education where they constitute the core of literary treatises⁴ and are preserved either as specimens quoted in various contexts, or arranged in such a way as to complete chapters in works of encyclopaedic range.⁵ Miscellaneous love stories found their way into the collection of the 1001 Nights,⁶ and Ibn al-Nadīm's (d. 338/998) *Catalogue (al-Fihrist)*, the first history of Arabic literature, already mentions the names of about one hundred lovers and couples whose stories were composed in specific works, dedicated to their misfortunes and adventures. Love is also an important topic in the popular epic of the later Middle Ages.⁷

The Arabic love story is multifarious. Stories tell of happy and unfortunate experiences, relate examples of love triumphing over adversities, and treat the complications brought about by carnal love, such as infidelity, seduction – often through female ruse – as well as jealousy and revenge. One of the most successful, productive and fascinating narrative patterns in Arabic literature, however, is the so-called 'Udhri love story.

In these stories, 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 lovers' 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 a 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 ab-

1 Giffen 1971, Giffen 1998.

2 Ibn Qutayba 1966; Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī 1345/1927-1394/1974; Weisweiler 1954

3 Al-Kharā'iṭī 1421/2000; Al-Sarrāj 1378/1958; Paret 1927; Ibn al-Jawzī 1381/1962; Pseudo-Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya; Ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyya 1986; Mughultāi 1936; Dāwūd al-Anṭākī 1413/1993.

4 Al-Washshā', M. ibn Ishāq 1372/1953; See Bellmann 1984.

5 Ibn Ḥamdūn, M. ibn al-Ḥasan 1983-1996, Vol. 6, *Fī l-nasīb wa-l-ghazal*, 49-232; Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī 1961, Part 3, *al-Ghazal wa-mā yata'allaq bihi*, 39-133; Al-Ibšīhī 1403/1983, chapter 7, *Fī dhikr al-'ishq wa-man buliya bihi*, 345-367.

6 Chauvin 1892-1909, 105-119; Basset 1924-1928, 3-199.

7 Ibn al-Nadīm: *al-Fihrist*, 365f.; Heath 1996, 74-78.

sence of union, and, in its most accomplished form, does not have to be required. 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. Both, the fate of being afflicted with passionate love, and the willingness to bear the suffering and ecstasy of love to great extremes are conceptual prerequisites for the functioning of love as a symbolic code. This code emphasizes the idea of love, which transcends, and even belittles, pragmatism and interest, and values a purely selfless relationship and effort. Closely connected with this idea is the concept of individual experience, which stands out against customary rules. This last aspect is even reinforced by the fact that the conflict between the lover and his social environment is a prominent theme in many stories. Since the lover defends and maintains an emotional relationship with his female friend, these stories may also be seen as contradicting the usual depiction of gender relations, as the woman merits and occasionally nurtures and designs the highly cultivated affection of ideal love. The true, passionate lover (*āshiq*) became an established character in literature representing submission to his lady's will. He was supposed to tolerate her rudeness, "clothing her" (*yaksūhā*) with his loving affection.⁸ The obvious tendency towards internalization, control of desire, sublimation and self denial has most probably contributed to the overwhelming success of this literary model in Islamic society.

Many of these stories deal with poets of the Umayyad period and their female friends, such as Qays ibn Dharīḥ and Lubnā, 'Urwa ibn Ḥizām and 'Afrā', Jamīl and Buthayna, Qays ibn al-Mulawwah alias Majnūn and Laylā. A number of couples of this same period who are less famous and do not always conform precisely to this model, however relate to this scheme, as, for example, Tauba and Laylā al-Akhyaliyya, Dhū l-Rumma and Mayya, Kuthayyir and 'Azza.⁹ These stories often share elements of the same plot and refer to an established repertoire of motifs.¹⁰ Some of them are nearly identical in terms of their plot, as the stories of Qays ibn Dharīḥ and its allegedly pre-Islamic parallel, the story of 'Abdallah ibn 'Ajlān and Hind, or 'Urwa and 'Afrā' and the legend of al-Muraqqish and Asmā'.¹¹ With Jamīl and 'Urwa ibn Ḥizām the tribe of 'Udhra became famous for the lover-poets who exemplified, through their poetry and their romance, a selfless, faithful and persistent devotion to one's friend. Therefore the term 'Udhri love often signifies this type of affection, and its narrative representation will be referred to as the 'Udhri love story.

In this type of story, narrative 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. Superiority of poetry in love-matters seems to be established on chronological

8 al-Zubayr ibn Bakkār 1972, 50.

9 Rescher 1983, 197-218; Vadet 1968, 354-60, 473-75 ; Blachère 1966, 649-60.

10 Muḥammad al-Qāḍī 1998, 433-479.

11 Stories about pre-Islamic love heroes are most probably based on the 'Udhri model; see Blachère 1961, 1960.

grounds, too. Both, the *nasīb*, the amatory verses which have formed the first section of the *qaṣīda* since pre-Islamic times, and the love poem (*ghazal*), which was widespread in early Islamic times, predate the Arabic love story, at least with regard to its preserved literary form. They make up a rich repertoire of intrinsic motifs, which stories elaborate or allude to. Moreover, love poetry serves as a referential framework of love stories in general, and even theoretical discourse refers to verses of poetry as an illustration of certain states of mind and attitudes related to the experience of love.

However, stories constitute their own genre of literary expression and function in accordance with specific rules. Due to their realistic air they are often considered as documents “reporting” the original occasion of a poetic uttering. But story telling does not aim at preserving the situation, time and place of the poet’s words. Instead, two types of relationship can be distinguished in poetry and narrative. When narratives create a situational framework around a group of verses, they project poetry into fictitious history; when they elaborate on independent subject matters, they may make use of poetry in order to attest to their validity.

A narrative about Qais b. al-Mulawwah alias Majnūn, the “lunatic”, of Laylā, one of the main representatives of ideal love, illustrates the first type of relationship.¹² Majnūn was afflicted with suffering because he was passionately in love with Laylā, who was married to another man. His Bedouin tribesmen used to take him along with them when they went out in search of pasture, because they feared that he would get lost or die, if he was left behind. Once they came to a place called “the two mountains of Na’mān”, close to Madina. When Majnūn was told that Laylā and her people had camped there before, he insisted that he would not move on before he could feel the East Wind, which was said to blow from these mountains. In order to understand this reaction, it is necessary to know that, in Arabic poetry, the East Wind (al-ṣabā), is closely associated with Najd, the alleged homeland of Laylā.¹³ His companions then went on without him, and on their return, they stayed with him for a few days until the wind really started to blow – upon which, Majnūn exclaimed:

O two mountains of Na’mān, by God, give way
to the east wind that its breeze will get to me,
that I will either find its cooling chill, or that it takes away from me the heat
upon (my) heart of which only the core remains.
Since, when the east wind gently blows
upon a saddened soul, its sorrows are dispelled.

This story is based on verses. But it teaches us that the lover-poet finds his closest ally in nature, as nature alone allows him to have the sensual and emotional contact with his beloved which society refuses to allow. The narrative provides a situational dimension, identifying the pragmatic meaning of the poetic utterance and, in doing so, offers a clue to its interpretation.

12 Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī 1345/1927-1394/1974, vol. 2, 25f.

13 Stetkevych 1993, 125, 133.

The image of the ideal lover, as it was conveyed by poetry and narratives, had, and still has, an intense and enduring presence in Arabic literature. The educated used to communicate personal experience through love poetry, of course, and would, when it appeared to be appropriate, refer to the sufferings caused by passionate love. An illustration of such use of the literary model in the framework of personal communication may be gained from the ḥanbalī jurist, traditionist and famous preacher Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201). He is the author of a well-known book entitled *Censure of passion*, which warns against the idleness of passion and exhorts reason, religion and pious practice.¹⁴ At the same time the author was obviously fascinated by the topic of ‘Udhri love, and he was known for his affective relationship with women.¹⁵ It is said, that he once was married to a lady called “the breeze of the east wind” (*nasīm al-ṣabā*), whom he loved all the more after they had separated because of some quarrel that had occurred between them. One day she attended a preaching session of Ibn al-Jawzī, and when he caught sight of her amid the crowd, he cited the verses just mentioned above. The women left, ashamed because of this public insinuation of her presence. Nevertheless she was struck by this declaration of love and finally agreed upon marrying him again.¹⁶

Ibn al-Jawzī used to cite love poetry in his preaching as a means to incite the passion and emotion of his audience,¹⁷ and although we don’t know whether this scene ever happened as it is told here, reference to these verses remains significant of the paramount importance of ideal love as a literary topic. If his only intention had been to cite verses containing the expression “the breeze of the east wind” in an attempt to reveal his awareness of her presence, he could have chosen other examples.¹⁸ The citation of poetry belonging to the lover-poet Majnūn entails the allusion to his experience depicted in stories known to everybody and it thus conveys the image of ardent, faithful, abiding love which is at stake in this scene.

The Arabic narrative is, to a large extent, responsible for the fame and literary impact of the image of ideal love, which was “promoted” by hundreds of short stories like this one, and by an elaborate narrative concept as well. The pre-eminence of lover-poets such as Jamīl or Majnūn is not only due to their poems, but stems from widespread story-telling, which divulges the details of their mischievous experiences, thus creating the characters.

Love stories generally relate how adversities occur and what they induce. Complications, solvable and unsolvable ones, confront the exalted experience of love with ordinary traits of human character and social constraints, with selfish intentions and rigid customary restrictions. These elements of plot refer to reality, no matter whether they are real or fictitious, and thus allow and encourage comparison with the recipients’ experience. Even if we consider that stories draw on pre-existing themes and motifs and

14 Cairo 1381/1962.

15 Leder 1984, 41.

16 Dāwud al-Anṭākī 1957-58, vol. 2, 129f.

17 Leder 1984, 6-10.

18 For instance Imru’ulqays: „When (those two ladies) stood up, their scent dispersed the breeze of the east wind bringing the fragrance of the clove“. See Ahlwardt 1870, 164, (no. 48, vs. 6).

thus relate to stories as much as, or much more than they relate to life, the design of conflict remains a significant representation of what love means and stands for.

The specific significance of the 'Udhri love story is imbedded in narrative form and engendered by its literary historical background. The rise and historical significance of the 'Udhri ideal of love remain interesting issues, since it is quite obvious that the poetry of the 'Udhri *ghazal* as it came to prominence in the second half of the 7th century, promotes a new ethos. It is distinguished from the *nasīb* representing the remembrance of a relationship of the past, which is often depicted as a pleasant experience, and it contrasts as well the light hearted, even frivolous love characterized by amorous adventures, as it is depicted in the *ghazal* of 'Umar ibn Abī Rabī'a and his like.¹⁹

These love stories were transmitted and composed by philologists and literati. The shaping and reshaping of narratives was a long-lasting process which can still be observed in Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī's *Kitāb al-Aghānī* (from the middle of the 4th/10th century) and may occasionally be observed in later books, too. The time between the second quarter of the 8th and the first quarter of the 9th century can be identified as a formative period, important for the shaping of the 'Udhri love story, which transforms the tribal poets into romantic heroes, as Blachère once suggested.²⁰ The narrative framework of the 'Udhri love story, however, was established as early as the middle of the 8th century, as we may infer from the metamorphosis of an ancient historical account into a fully-fledged love story.

In books on the Prophet's life and early Islamic history we find reports of a Muslim raid on the Banū Jadhīma in the year 8/630. A number of them mention the killing of a young man whose last wish was to talk to his female friend. She then takes his dead body into her arms, kisses and laments his death until she dies.²¹ The transformation of this report into a story which combines some of the most important and elementary motifs of the 'Udhri love story was done by 'Īsā Ibn Da'b (d. 171/787), who came from Medina to Baghdad where he pursued a career as a man of letters at the courts of the caliphs al-Mahdī (reg. 775-785) and al-Hādī (reg. 785-786).²² His story tells of how the hero, 'Abdallāh ibn 'Alqama, fell so passionately in love, that love meant more to him than being alive. The beauty of a gazelle reminds him of his friend, Ḥubaysha. His mother does not give her consent to the marriage of the couple, because she wants him to marry his uncle's daughter. 'Abdallāh cannot comply with her wish even when the beautiful girl comes to visit him, since his love for Ḥubaysha is a burning desire that consumes him. He then communicates with his friend via messengers, and praises her in his poetry. When her family finds out about this relationship, they feel scandalized and force Ḥubaysha to renounce her love during an ensuing meeting with 'Abdallāh. She indeed tries to do so, but does not succeed, since 'Abdallāh sees through this cunning and,

19 Recent research has shown that both types of *ghazal*, notwithstanding their differences, do meet in the formulation of several concepts (Wagner 1988, 71f.; Enderwitz 1995, 15)

20 Blachère 1961.

21 Ibn Hishām (o.J.), 1278f.; al-Wāqidī 1966, 877-79; Ibn Sa'd 1905-1918, vol. 2,1, 106f.; al-Bukhārī 1400/(1980), vol. 4, 1577; al-Ṭabarī 1885, 1652f.; al-Sarrāj 1378/1958, vol. 1, 313.

22 See Pellat 1974, 742.

in addition, ignores her attitude, because, as he says, “I do not love you on account of what you grant me – grumpiness and rejection to make me give up loving you”, but, instead, he loves her truly and unselfishly. Later, tragically, ‘Abdallāh is killed due to tribal strife, and Ḥubaisha laments him until she dies on the spot.²³

The terse style of this narration and the enumerative representation of motifs such as conflict, persistence of love, clandestine contact, acceptance of ideal love, indicate that the author drew on a pre-existing model. Further evidence of this comes from stories about Majnun Laylā. Majnūn is a fictitious character, whose legend became very popular, attracting the attention of authors all over the Islamic world. Its basic narrative outline, which already reflects the doubtful historicity of this character, goes back to about the same time as that of the story about ‘Abdallāh and Ḥubaysha. It already elaborates on the central theme: the lover-poet, desperate because his friend Laylā has been married to another man, finds relief in madness, leading a lonely existence in the wilderness where only the remembrance of Laylā brings back his spirits and poetic inspiration.²⁴ Once again this demonstrates that the ‘Udhri love story was acknowledged as a narrative pattern and was a firmly established literary fashion around the middle of the 8th century and, thus, must have developed during the Umayyad period.

Unfortunate ardent love effecting the lover’s health and even bringing about his death, may have been a topic of narratives already before Islam, as we might infer from a poem of Ṭarafa (flourished in the second half of the 6th century): As an example of the sufferings which love may cause, the poet refers to the unfortunate al-Muraqqish, whose friend Asmā’ was married by her father to another man. The poet’s reference to this incident does not reveal how the story may have looked like, and unfortunately authenticity of the verses is doubtful, too.²⁵ In any case, the idea that passionate love may engender death was well known in the Umayyad period, as we learn from the poet Jamīl.²⁶ The misfortunes of the ‘Udhri lover poets also appear as a topic of conversation among the educated elite of the Umayyad period,²⁷ but it is hard to establish whether such accounts are more than narrative embellishment used to frame the stories told on these occasions.

Unfortunate love considered as disease and causing insomnia, emaciation and death is a current motif of the Greek novel in late antiquity,²⁸ and also Arabic literature knows of this concept of course. Malady of love is discussed as an adoption of Greek tradition, and as an “Arabic” explanation of love.²⁹ Also adaptation of narrative matters from

23 “*wa-lam yaku ḥubbī ‘an nawālin badhaltihi / fa-yusliyanī ‘anhu l-tahajjumu wa-l-hajru*”: Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, vol. 7, 280-289, here 282. Variants: al-Sarrāj, *Maṣārī‘ al-‘ushshāq*, vol. 1, 314-316 = Ibn al-Jawzī 1381/1962 (as note 3) 497-99. Dāwūd al-Anṭākī 1413/1993 (as note 3) vol. 1, 218-220.

24 Leder 1995.

25 For the doubtful authenticity of his poetic remains, see Montgomery 2000, 219f. For the text, see *The Divans of the six Ancient Poets* (as note 18), 69f. (Ṭarafa no. 13, vs. 12-19).

26 See below, note 74.

27 ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Ibrāhīm 1972, 296

28 Grunebaum 1947, 283f., see further Van Hooff’s article in this volume.

29 Biesterfeldt 1984; Beeston 1980, 27f., (arab.) 15.

Classical literature may occasionally be observed; a story about a loving couple suffering from the hostility of their surroundings, for instance, seems to be adopted from Ovid's *Pyramus and Thisbe*: Their clandestine meeting ends tragically, because the lover commits suicide as he assumes that his friend was killed by a beast, whereupon she follows him by causing her deliberate death. There are several versions of this narrative. An especially fanciful elaboration in the 1001 Nights presents Jamil as a witness to the incident, which he reports, quite a-historically, but obligatorily in this context, to the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd.³⁰

Whereas Arabic love stories in general mirror many influences, in particular those received via Persian literature, the 'Udhri love story exhibits a specific and genuine idiosyncrasy. It is characterized by a structure of plot which may be described as a chain of events, generating an increasing refinement of love from passionate love to ideal love and finally to love for love's sake. Each of these "stages" constitutes a micro story, which may develop its own complex structure.

An approach to the analysis of the *histoire*, or plot of narratives is the assumption that the occurrence of something will provoke the occurrence of an adversity, and that resulting confrontation functions in such a way as to cause specific changes in the characters' role.³¹ In the case of the 'Udhri love story, analysis of the structure of its plot does indeed help to elucidate the narrative design which is perhaps one of the principal reasons for its success: There is a movement of gradual internalisation in the course of the story, induced by a change from exterior to interior obstacles, and this results in a transformation, or ascending refinement of love which often culminates in the lover's death.

In the first stage, the lover is confronted with strict and insurmountable opposition to his desire. Various kinds of conflict may be involved. They stem from customary marriage preferences, such as marriage between paternal cousins; they are caused by a widespread disapproval of sentimental bonds between lovers before marriage as soon as this becomes public through love-poetry, or may arise from social differences in terms of wealth and status. By nature love is opposed to these restrictions, but the lover who remains ostensive in his affection despite established norms is not only a victim of passionate love; he also emerges as a challenging, vulnerable and sentimental rebel, whose only weapon, however, is his suffering.

Persistent and faithful devotion – even though a union with the friend remains unattainable – is the passionate lover's reaction. This stance enables him to adopt an active role in the events, after having been passively subjected to refusal and restriction. Continued contact with the friend is combined with an abstention from sensuality. However, at this stage the lover expects, and depends on, recognition of his love through some form of

30 (Pseudo-) al-Jāhiz 1898, 103-107; al-Sarrāj 1378/1958, vol. 2, 104-107. Ibn al-Jawzī 1381/1962 (as note 3), 575-577. Macnaghten 1839-42, vol. 3, 391-98.

31 Todorov 1966. We do not intend a formally correct structural analysis here as it was sketched out by V. Propp and further developed by Claude Bremond (*Logique du récit*, Paris 1973), but refer to functional aspects of the plot.

emotional union. His friend's distrust with regard to his honesty, as well as his own doubts concerning his friend's feelings towards him, are major obstacles.

But the ideal lover usually liberates himself from the duality of devotion and doubt by realizing that true love does not depend on what he receives from his friend. At this stage, love is meant to preserve its pure and refined stance, shunning away from any form of union. However, longing for the friend causes ardor which consumes the lover's vital energies until he finally dies. Love seems to be an affliction because of its compulsive nature, and yet is a deliberate exertion.

The purpose of this abstract from the 'Udhri love story's plot is to illustrate its typical structure, although each story has its particular traits of course. We may also note that the narrative cycle, beginning with the occurrence of love and ending in death from love can easily be interrupted in the first stage of development, when hindrances are overcome, and union is attained. Later however, when the lover does not *want* a union, the string of events becomes compulsory.

In some parts of the narrative pattern we often come across a particularly detailed elaboration. Especially the first of these parts, the theme of conflict, has rather few parallels in poetry and, therefore, has to be considered as a genuine contribution of story-telling to the tradition of 'Udhri love.

Often short narratives establish an allegedly direct link between the first of these stages and the end of the cycle, death from love. Stories like that could be summarized as: a lover is prevented from entering a union with his friend and dies of love. In some of these stories the widespread concept of love as a fateful malady is mobilized, yet most of them allude to the stages represented in our scheme, although they do not elaborate on them. I would therefore propose to read the bulk of these stories as abridgements, which culminate directly in death. They often appear in a religious context, because of the ambiguity of death from love which appears as a manifestation of man's ability to sacrifice and as well as a warning of the fatal consequences of passion. These stories are an extension of the 'Udhri pattern and often transfer it to social milieus, different to the original 'Udhri social setting.³²

The heroes of original 'Udhri love stories and the poets of the 'Udhri *ghazal* are tribal people, mostly leading a Bedouin life. Contemporary theories concerning the rise and historical signification of the 'Udhri ideal of love in *ghazal* poetry stress the role of social change in precisely this milieu. The poet's assertion of an ideal personal relationship is understood by Renate Jacobi as a reaction to the disentanglement of social ties and a loss of confidence, which had occurred at that time in tribal society.³³ More precisely, Tahir Labib Djedidi puts forward the idea that this poetry is a reflection of frustration caused by the uncomfortable and marginal position into which those tribal groups who cultivated this ideal were put during the upheavals of the new Islamic

32 For this subject see further Gründler's article in this volume.

33 Jacobi 1971, 224.

epoch.³⁴ In a more general vision, the 'Udhri ghazal is seen as an expression of criticism of social norms and as referring to an individualistic perspective, as Salma Jayyusi argues.³⁵ Thomas Bauer adds that this attitude remains, as the expression of suffering shows, influenced by burning anxiety and uneasiness caused by a new situation, engendering the loss of importance of traditional tribal society.³⁶

A basic idea, common to these explanations, is the contradictory nature of the two milieus; the Bedouin society which gave rise to the image of ideal love, and the city dwellers who gave shape to the realistic *ghazal* poetry of 'Umar ibn Abī Rabī'a and his like. It would be erroneous however to believe that there is a natural relationship between ideal love and Bedouin life, although Arabic literature seems to support such a concept.³⁷ On the contrary, 'Udhri love must be seen as resulting from a close interaction between the two groups whose productive coexistence is a peculiarity of the Ḥijāz. 'Udhri love did not come from any other region in Arabia inhabited by Bedouins. The image of the heroic poet lover may be understood as an attempt to replace the warrior hero of the past, as Susanne Enderwitz suggests,³⁸ and was admired by a public including the urban élite of Ḥijāz. Therefore it signifies, to the same extent, the successful attempt to gain the reputation of literary nobility, as it provides evidence of the particularities of Bedouin life in a region, where the benefits of the new order, brought about by the Islamic conquest, were concentrated in the Islamic cities and their vicinities. The luxurious lifestyle of the élite of the early Islamic state was a favourable circumstance for the establishment of literary fashions, as Régis Blachère has shown,³⁹ and, at the same time, created sharp contrasts by excluding groups, which did not participate in this new prosperity except indirectly through the reception of their poetry.

The concept of abstinence inherent to 'Udhri love was repeatedly seen as resulting from the impact of a religious orientation, which gradually spread with the rise of Islam.⁴⁰ Although this does not sufficiently explain the specific reasons for a genesis of this concept among the Bedouin tribes people of Ḥijāz, it may be a clue to a better understanding of its literary success in the homeland of Islam.

Love and Conflict

'Udhri narratives are often skilfully constructed compositions, but the manners of storytelling characteristic of the *khavar*-narration, which is firmly established in classical Arabic do not always reveal these merits. Narrative prose is very straightforward and succinct, observes a rather strict chronological order, and only provides short descriptive

34 Tahir Labib Djedidi: *La poésie amoureuse des Arabes. Le cas des 'Udhrites*. Alger n. d.; quoted from: Enderwitz 1995, 13-15.

35 Jayyusi 1999, 425.

36 Bauer 1998, 48, 51.

37 Among the modern studies which deal with the Bedouin milieu of ideal love Khristū Najm 1402/1982, 186f. notes that this concept hardly fits Bedouin habits.

38 Enderwitz 1995, 5.

39 Blachère 1965, 281.

40 Shukrī Faiṣal 1959, 279-282. 'Abdalḥamid Ibrāhīm 1972, 122.

passages. The art of this prose consists in a terse and precise depiction of the events and in the extensive use of direct speech, which is the principal instrument used to elucidate the characters' intentions and background. On these premises, most love stories are rather short narratives, favouring a dramatic, or mimetic, style of narration. At times they are brought into sequences, or are moulded into integrated compositions, offering a comprehensive vision of the lovers' experience.

An example of comprehensive composition, combining integrated narrative with a sequence of episodic stories, is the account of the experiences of Qays ibn Dharīḥ who is said to have died in about 68/687. He is commonly considered a representative of the 'Udhri type of love, although he belonged to a group of the Kināna who occupied territories close to Mecca. The 'Udhra lived further north and were particularly linked to the Wādī al-Qurrā, north of al-Madina.

The narratives about Qays ibn Dharīḥ illustrate the main topics of the 'Udhri love story and therefore may serve as a guide through the narrative universe of 'Udhri love. The author of the *Book of the Songs*, Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, carefully composed his account from a number of older narratives, in order to produce a comprehensive and harmoniously arranged version of the life-story of Qays.⁴¹ The narratives are adorned by many quotations of poetry. We will first give an abridged rendering of the introductory narration in the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* and then quote – with some abridgements – a number of the episodic narratives, which he selected in his book.⁴²

Qays ibn Dharīḥ was a foster-brother of the fourth caliph's son and grandson of the Prophet, al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī. He and his family lived on the outskirts of Madina, where they lead a settled life. Once when Qays went out of town, he passed the tents of the Ka'b ibn Khuzā'a. Stopping at one of the tents – the tent of Lubnā – while the men were absent, he asked for water. Lubnā came to serve him. She was tall and slim in stature, had a deep blue gleam in the black of her eyes and was lovely to look at and listen to. When he saw her, he immediately fell in love. She invited him to come in and hide from the heat. After a while, her father came back, honoured the guest, slaughtered a beast for him and served him a meal. When Qays left, his heart was burning from love. He started to recite poetry in her praise, and this became known and was recited. One day, love-sick, he went back and said his salutation from outside of her tent. Lubnā appeared and answered his greetings with much tenderness, whereupon he revealed to her his love and longing, and she did the same in many words, until both of them were assured of what each of them meant for his friend.

Qays went to his father asking him to arrange the marriage. But Dharīḥ was a wealthy man and having no other son, he preferred him to marry his uncle's daughter according to established custom, because in this manner his inheritance would be restricted to his own kin. Qays was deeply distressed by what his father told him and went on to his mother, but could not gain her support. Finally he went to al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī (the grand-son of the Prophet) and Ibn Abī 'Atīq⁴³ to complain about his father. Al-Ḥusayn said: "I will suffice you", and went with Qays to Lubnā's father. When the man saw him, he showed great respect and hastened to him saying: "O son of the Prophet, what has brought you here? You should have sent for me!" Al-Ḥusayn replied: "No, the reason I came requires that I make my way to

41 Kilpatrick 1994.

42 Abū l-Faraj (as note 2), vol. 9, 181-188.

43 A personality renowned for the companionship with poets and singers at Madina.

you. I came asking for permission for your daughter to marry Qays ibn Dharīḥ." Lubnā's father replied that he would never refuse him anything, nor had he any reservations concerning Qays. But he preferred his father Dharīḥ to ask him himself for his consent to the marriage, because when Qays got engaged without his father's consent, he himself would be disgraced. So al-Ḥusayn went to Dharīḥ, whom he met as the men of the tribe were gathering around him. He welcomed him in quite the same way as Lubnā's father had done. When al-Ḥusayn urged him to marry his son to Lubnā, he could not refuse, and together they went to Lubnā's family where the marriage was arranged.

Qays and Lubnā then lived as a happy couple, but Qays, who devoted all of his attention to his wife, was distracted and failed to pay his mother the respect and give her the care that she was used to. She bitterly resented her son's negligence and in her heart she blamed Lubnā for this. But not until Qays fell seriously ill was she able to find a way to talk about it. After his recovery she went to her husband saying: "I was afraid that Qays would die and you would be left without progeny, since Lubnā cannot bear children, and your fortune would then go to heirs who are not your kin. Marry him to another woman, maybe God will grant you a boy." She went on pestering him, until Dharīḥ addressed his son at a gathering of his fellow tribesmen. Using the argument his wife had construed before, he formally requested his son to marry one of his cousins. When Qays declared that he would not accept another marriage, his father proposed buying slave girls for him (the children of whom would be recognized as heirs). But once again Qays refused, pointing out that he would not do anything that might harm Lubnā. His father did not let him go, although Qays pleaded on behalf of his wife and himself, adducing that death was better than separation. He also put forward alternative solutions, such as his father remarrying, or that he and Lubnā should emigrate. But his father would not agree. Dharīḥ finally swore not to protect himself from the sun until his son gave in. During the next weeks, Qays stood beside his father every day, protecting him with his cloak, while he himself was exposed to the merciless sun. Then he would go to his wife and they would embrace and weep and she would beg him not to give in for his own sake. However, in the end, Qays could not bear the quarrel with his parents any more and got divorced.

When Lubnā became aware of the divorce, and contact was broken off, Qays no longer had his wits about him and was overcome with something akin to insanity. He constantly thought of her and what she meant to him. He regretted everything, wept and sobbed. When her family came to take her back, he tried to enter her tent, but was prevented from doing so at which point he fainted. Then he stood up and recited the following verses:

They say: 'Lubnā is an affliction, you were in a good state before,
don't feel sorry for her, get divorced!'

I obeyed my enemies and rebelled against my honest adviser,
thereby pleasing the gloating and feigning observer.

I wish, by the house of God, that I had rebelled against them,
and that for her sake I had imposed upon myself everything that mortifies.⁴⁴

He blamed himself for his obedience saying: 'Had I only left my country with her, I would not have seen what he did, nor would he have seen me! If I had got away from him, he might have refrained from doing what he did, and if he had been far away from me, I would not have been troubled by what he did. I would not be to blame for what has happened now, if I had kept aloof, or stayed together with Lubnā's tribe, or in any other place in the steppe, or if I had only been disobedient! I have committed a crime against myself, and nobody else is to blame for it. As a result of what I did, here is [meaning himself] a dead man, since who

44 Abū l-Faraj (as note 2), vol. 9., 183-185.

will ever return to me my spirit? Will there ever be a way to be near Lubnā after a divorce?' And while he rebuked and scolded himself, he wept and sobbed, pressing his cheeks to the ground [where he could recognize] the traces of Lubnā's tent.⁴⁵

Various schemes of conflict are combined here. Social status is an important topic, present in the depiction of different social settings pertaining to the two fathers, who we have left out here, and is fundamental to al-Ḥusayn's intervention. In conjunction with the concept of patrilineal succession it is the main motivation behind Dharīḥ's objection to marriage. But neither the lack of social equality between the families, nor Lubnā's functional deficiency, her barrenness, is a main issue in the conflict. There are two other aspects that lead to insoluble dissent. First the jealousy of Qays' mother triggers off an unfortunate string of events. Her feelings may appear as an individual, psychologically valid motive, but they may also be understood as a reaction to the imposing and exclusive, in this respect even anti-social power of love. This is followed by the quarrel between son and father, which is also a struggle for power. Dharīḥ rejects his son's faithfulness, as it is contrary to the rule of reasonable and decent behaviour, which he demands. Qays explains in his comments, however, that subjugation to the social norm, obedience, is not – contrary to what his father maintains – the way to put an end to dissent. Instead it causes a tragedy, because love proves to be stronger than any other bounds and cannot be suppressed. The depiction of personal conflict, although psychologically convincing, reveals only one side to the underlying dilemma. As is quite clear from what Qays says, love is an autonomous force, which cannot be subjected to rules and prescriptions, but, if oppressed, unfolds, freeing destructive forces. Moreover, the introspective element, so obvious in Qays's monologue, gives way to a feeling of guilt, which is transformed into something productive in the subsequent narrative elaboration of ideal love.

Marriage between cousins features in many love stories, either as justification for rejecting the lover's request due to a reluctance to accept exogamy, or as a circumstance in favour of a young man's claims, which are then unjustly refused. A rationale behind this form of preferred marriage is explained in an amusing story about a proud man's bet that nobody would refuse when he asked him to marry his daughter. The only one expected to resist, first refuses and then complies, but his daughters give the man a lesson. The first daughter to be asked by her father whether he should accept the request replies: "Don't do that. My face is not spotlessly beautiful, and my character is not without its faults. Since I am not his uncle's daughter, he would not be mindful of parentage [which otherwise would protect me from divorce], and since he is not your compatriot, he would not feel ashamed. So I cannot be sure that he will not divorce me because of something he dislikes."⁴⁶

An arranged marriage even disregarding the bonds of parentage is a motif often used to trigger off stories about love, hampered by circumstance. But apart from the 'Udhri scheme, this does not necessarily have to provoke disaster: Ṣakhr from the 'Uqayl, a

45 Ibid., 190.

46 Abū l-Faraj, vol. 10, 395.

tribe from central Arabia, was in love with his cousin. They used to meet and stay together during the night, chatting until daybreak. When his father married him off to somebody else, Laylā refrained from having contact with him. Şakhr fell terribly ill and was carried away by a relative to the accustomed place of their meetings to commemorate the hours of his happiness and to weep over her 'traces'. Since Laylā, who was also longing for her friend, sent her slave girl to find out whether Şakhr was still coming to that place, he was able to explain that the marriage had been arranged against his will. But neither was he able to divorce his wife and thus act against his father's will, nor was she willing to incite him to do so. Only when his father learned that Sakhr did not touch his wife did he inform her father that the marriage had failed. Now Sakhr's wife satirized Laylā in verse, and Laylā replied in the same way, until their story became known. Everybody then agreed that they should be married since their love was so ardent.⁴⁷

In the framework of the 'Udhri love story obstacles arising from social stratification generally do not generate dynamic solutions. Instead a static society is depicted, which insists on assets and status, all the more since these are acquired rather than inherited: 'Urwa ibn Ḥizām, one of the 'Udhri lover-poets, grew up in the family of his uncle 'Iqāl, whose daughter 'Afrā' was his companion as long as he was a child. As a young man he asked his aunt to impart to her brother 'Iqāl that he wanted to marry his cousin. The father objected, although he did not dislike him, because 'Urwa was poor and being a young man should first improve his situation. 'Afrā's mother, hoping for a better match for her daughter, was strictly against the idea of a marriage between the two. When a wealthy suitor appeared, 'Urwa went to 'Iqāl appealing for consideration of parentage. However, he could neither persuade his uncle, nor his wife. He decided to travel to Iran to visit a wealthy relative of his in the hope of gaining his support. He was assured that 'Afrā' would not be married before he was back. 'Urwa was well received by his relative, but meanwhile a noble suitor succeeded in convincing 'Afrā's mother that her daughter would miss the best of all opportunities. She finally won over her husband, the marriage was arranged and the man took 'Afrā' to Syria. When 'Urwa came back, 'Iqāl and his people pretended that 'Afrā' had died. 'Urwa visited the alleged grave every day and became emaciated until he nearly died. A slave girl took pity on him and told him the truth, whereupon he left and went to Syria.⁴⁸ The betrayal of the guileless young man, devoted to his faithful love, depicts an extreme opposition between himself and his social milieu and predisposes the martyrdom of 'Urwa, which is crowned, as we shall see, by his voluntary acceptance to die from love.

A lack of material means or an inferiority of social status is represented in many love stories as a disadvantageous situation, which does not, however, decide the lover's fate. In an urban context, the love of singing girls is an oft-treated topic. In this case, sorrow caused by the lovers' insufficient means to purchase the luxurious maiden he loves, or when purchased, to entertain her, leads to despair. Generous and noble friends, benevolent and pitiful of the lover's mischief, sometimes come to help, even if this is no guar-

47 Al-Sarrāj 1378/1958, vol. 2, 294-96.

48 Abū l-Faraj, vol. 24, 145-150.

antee of a happy end. Helping an unfortunate lover to unite with his friend is regarded as a virtuous deed, worthy of the gallant gentleman as demonstrated by ‘Umar ibn Abī Rabī‘a, who helps his ‘Udhri friend to persuade the brothers of his beloved to consent to their marriage.⁴⁹ Also from an Islamic point of view, honest lovers merit help, as is exemplified by the second caliph ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb who brings together a loving couple separated by war.⁵⁰

In contrast to this, the dramatic setting of ‘Udhri stories construes insurmountable obstacles. Injured pride figures among the most fundamental adversities. Love as it occurs outside of a legal or sanctioned relationship is subject to the demands of discretion. Obviously the lover lives in conflict with this principle, since he needs to at least intimate his feelings towards his beloved and must be aware that this will be noticed in public, all the more so if he expresses his emotion in poetic verse. The making public of the lover’s experience then results in restrictions, which – according to this type of story – finally determine his unfortunate fate.⁵¹ Love poetry, which is otherwise held in high esteem, must not necessarily give expression to real sentimental bonds, since switching from a symbolic code to individual purposeful communication is a disgrace to the addressee and her family, and thus constitutes a real obstacle to a sanctioned matrimonial relationship.

Faithful Devotion, Abstinent Relationship

Faithfulness is a distinguished feature of ideal love and an exclusive demand, since it does not hold a place of comparable prominence in the adventurous love in search of seduction and playful entertainment, as practiced and described in poetry by ‘Umar ibn Abī Rabī‘a. A lack of steadfast devotion is seen as an infringement of the code, as we learn from the example of Kuthayyir and ‘Azza.⁵² In the case of Qays ibn Dhariḥ, faithfulness is the topic of several stories showing that his attachment to Lubnā prevails over any attempt at distraction. Although passionate love disturbs the social order, as we have seen, it does not directly bring about disorder, since predictably constant devotion is a prerequisite for it.

(When Lubnā had gone,) Qays’ mother sent some girls from his tribe to him. In order to make him forget Lubnā and to comfort him in his grief, they were asked to approach him. So they went and gathered around him, were charming and playful, spoke ill of Lubnā and reproached him for his behaviour. But he remained unmoved finally saying (the verses):

I rejoice when I am near her, and whoever speaks
ill of her causes me to be more in love.⁵³

49 Ibid., vol. 1, 92-98.

50 Ibid., vol. 2, 266-68.

51 Ibn Qutayba (1345/1925-1349/1930): *‘Uyūn al-akhbār*. 1-4. Cairo, vol 4, 128-30. Abū l-Faraj, vol. 22, 78.

52 Abū l-Faraj, vol. 9, 32. Ibn al-Jauzī, *Dhamm al-hawā*, 444, 637

53 Abū l-Faraj, vol. 9, 193

But Qays, the passionate lover, unwillingly entered a second marriage: People advised his father to send Qays away, since he might, while being abroad, meet a woman who would help him to forget. On his journey, Qays stopped by chance at a group of the Banū Fazāra. There he saw a beautiful girl, just as she pulled down the silken cloth covering her face and thus appeared like the gleaming moon at night. Upon hearing her name, Lubnā, he fainted. She came and sprinkled water on his face, frightened by what had befallen him, but soon understood that this could be no other than the lover-poet Qays. When he regained his strength, the girl implored him to stay and accept a meal that she would serve. Qays hardly touched the food, and then mounted. He had just left, when her brother came back, saw the traces of his camel, learned who the visitor was and rode after him insisting that Qays should stay with his people for at least some weeks. Qays agreed reluctantly. When the young man of the Fazāra came to know him and how he talked and thought and what he had experienced, he was all the more impressed and offered him his sister's hand in marriage. Qays refused politely: 'I do like you', he said, 'but my preoccupation makes me worthless in this respect'. However, the people did not stop to urge and blame him saying: 'We are afraid that your comportment will be a shame for us'. The young man continued to insist as well, until Qays gave in and agreed to marry his sister, who was also called Lubnā. (This seemed, at a first glance, to be a good solution, since everybody seemed happy.) 'I will deliver the dowry for you' (i. e. the animals to be given as a dowry) said the young man generously. But Qays refused, adducing that he was the most affluent among his people, and then went back home, where his father rejoiced at what he heard. He immediately sent the dowry for his son, and Qays returned to the Fazāra, so that his wife could be brought to him. However, nobody ever saw him being sprightly and cheerful with her, nor approach her or even talk or look at her. This went on for a while, until he told them that he would leave for his people, which they had to accept.⁵⁴

Since his new marriage does not occur for the sake of love, but is meant to satisfy the wishes and demands of his entourage, his marriage reiterates and amplifies the unfaithfulness shown before when he divorced Lubnā. He will have to repent anew, but this time not only because he sees himself as being guilty of wrongdoing, but also because his actions cause Lubnā to distrust him. He hears that Lubnā, on hearing of his new marriage, accepts, in reaction to his infidelity, the idea of getting married anew. Qays now accepts that his cherished Lubnā is lost forever:

To God I complain of the loss of Lubnā,
 like an orphan complains to God of his parents' loss,
 an orphan mistreated by his relatives, so that his body
 has become meagre, while the time, when his parents were alive, is long ago.⁵⁵

The impossibility of transforming love into a natural and sensual relationship, which is firmly established, and the continuation of emotional attachment, which is a main and indispensable topic of stories about 'Udhri love, in general require the maintenance of

54 Ibid., 198

55 Ibid., 198.

some sort of contact between the lovers. The acceptance of restrictions – as unjustified and cruel as they may be – and the renouncement of a sensual relation, are prerequisites in this framework. Contact between the lovers serves to reflect the experience of love, which does not hope for a union, and yet allows, by the circumvention of prohibitive rules, the development of a relationship capable of offering tenderness and comfort in the absence of physical union. During the pilgrimage season in Mekka, Qays received a woman sent by Lubnā, from whom he gained news and with whom he sent his greetings in verse:

In despair the wounded soul finds respite,
as it craves for something which it cannot achieve.⁵⁶

With the end to the pilgrimage season and the breaking off of contact, Qays fell ill and was prepared to die. On hearing of this Lubnā was alarmed and arranged to secretly meet Qays at night. When they met, she made promises and excuses saying: “I shall always be yours, but I am afraid that you will be killed, and therefore I shun you. If it were not for that, we would not be separated.” Then she bade him farewell and left.⁵⁷

Here Lubnā refers to a grim circumstance as being the reason for her caution, but, in fact, the emotional relationship of ideal love, which is not transformed into physical union naturally implies abstention from impermissible desires. This tendency of inwardness which disconnects love from a realistic relationship is also represented by Qays’ inability to approach Lubnā, since he is ridden with feelings of guilt and failure caused by his faithless acts: after his recovery, Qays decided to drive some camels from his father’s herd to the market at Medina. There he sold an animal to Lubnā’s husband, not knowing who he was. But when he brought the camel to his home, Lubnā recognized him and cautiously revealed her identity. Qays, however was too perplex to respond to her presence:

Lubnā recognized him from his voice, but did not say anything. Instead she told the servant: ‘Ask him why he looks so dishevelled and is covered in dust?’ Qays sighed and answered: ‘This is how a man looks, who has left his beloved and prefers death to life,’ and he began to weep. Lubnā then told the servant to ask him what had happened. But as he started to tell them, she raised her veil and said. ‘Enough! We know your story!’, and then covered her face again. Qays was confounded for a time, and didn’t say a word. Then he burst into tears, stood up and left (...). On his way home he wailed and blamed himself for what he had done.⁵⁸

The unjust and oppressive rule of his parents, which had engendered Qays’ mischief is an issue which is discussed. Qays indeed accuses his parents of having “killed” him because they brought about the sorrow and affliction, which he had not, of course, willingly chosen for himself.⁵⁹ However, this is not the main theme at this stage in the narrative. Instead, the main task of the romance is to give an extensive representation of the practice of ideal love. Whereas shorter stories, which often tell of anonymous charac-

⁵⁶ Ibid., 201f.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 202f.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 204f.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 206.

ters, give prominence to the fateful and principally determined contradiction between love and ordinary life and, thus, feature the unfortunate lovers' end as a standardized element of the plot, the prolonged practice of ideal love, depicted here, has to be embedded in a milieu which accommodates this sort of relationship.

An additional aspect, supporting this tendency towards reconciliation, is the lover-poet's communication with a wider and sympathetic audience. In the story of Qays, this reinforces the inherent esteem of the female role, as Lubnā is shown to partake in the experience of ideal love: as the terrible fate of Qays became known, and his verse was sung by the famous singers of Madina, everybody listening to them and pitying him, Lubnā's husband blamed his wife for the rumours which scandalized him. But she coolly repudiated his rebuke explaining that he had known of her relationship with Qays before their marriage.⁶⁰

Having become famous by now, Qays finally wins over the support of the caliph's son who offers to put pressure on Lubnā's husband in order to make him accept a divorce. But Qays refused, because his sole desire was that "I live where she lives, wherever that may be, receive tidings of her and be content without it being forbidden to be near her."⁶¹

Here Qays demonstrates an attitude, which is not just the continuation of abstention (*iffa*) from sensuality in a relationship not legalized by marriage. Now, when union with his friend may become possible, Qays does not desire a happy end to his mischief. The harmful restrictions, which were once imposed on him by a hostile social environment – represented by his parents – are transformed through a process of "purification" and become an internalized norm. This code, however, is not suitable for common use, since it is a difficult, contradictory position, incompatible with ordinary life. In a number of narratives this formula introduces the discontinuity of contact, and the lover, sacrificing his only means of attaining emotional revitalization, is doomed to die.

Abstention is a constituent motif of the 'Udhri love story and a main theme of the literature dealing with ideal love. Renouncing union, as Qays does when he objects to exercising pressure on Lubnā's husband, and at the same time remaining devoted to love is the mysterious essence of 'Udhri love. This stance may be explained as resulting from an inherent paradox, since love entails the yearning for fulfilment as well as the apprehension of separation. In this way, the doctrine of 'Udhri love was introduced to mystical teaching, for instance, by the Sīrāzī Sufi Ibn Bākuwayh (d. 428/1037) who relates: "Asked why he did not marry his beloved cousin, a lover says: 'Don't you know that someone who has not experienced union knows that separation will, one day, disappear and someone who has not experienced separation knows that union will one day disappear?'"⁶²

60 Ibid., 208.

61 Ibid., 211f.

62 Ibn al-Jauzī 1381/1962, 352; for the mystical facets of the theory of profane love, see: Bell 1979, 99 and *passim*.

In the world of the narrative, this stance needs to be proven in practice. Visits to the sweetheart's camp are a common feature of love stories set in a Bedouin milieu, but stories of the 'Udhri type insist that on such occasions nothing indecent ever happened. Chaste and exemplary conduct may even induce the sympathy of the lover's adversaries: A certain 'Umar ibn 'Aun and a girl called Bayyā of the Banū Murra had been in love, but she was married to another man. When both refused to break off their mutual attachment, and 'Umar wrote poems, so that the news of their love spread, her husband decided to go away with her. But 'Umar managed to visit her, clandestinely, in the absence of her husband. He grew suspicious and arranged to come home unexpectedly when both were together. He saw them, each asleep in a corner of the tent, as they were accustomed to doing when they tired of talking to each other. The husband realized the innocent nature of 'Umar's desire and let him live close to his wife.⁶³

Especially the romance of Jamīl, the most famous of the 'Udhri ghazal poets,⁶⁴ is known for using this motif. His relationship with Buthayna as it is depicted in many narratives entailed numerous visits to his friend who was married. Although the circumstances of their relationship were often rather adventurous, their chaste and decent conduct is frequently represented. In one particular paradigmatic narration Jamīl asked Buthayna: "You know of my love for you and my heartfelt affection, don't you want to return my love?" "With what?" "With what happens between lovers!" "This is what you desire? I always regarded you as being beyond that. If you ever dare to propose something dubious again, you will not see me again." Jamīl answered laughing: "I said this only to find out your attitude. If I had discovered that you would consent, I would have known that you do the same with others, too. If I had sensed your complicity (with my desire), I would have struck you with this sword in my hand. And if you had complied, I would have left you forever. Did you not hear my verses?"

I am not content to receive from Buthayna that which would cause the informer's impatience, upon seeing what we do, to disappear (because we did what he was waiting for).
Indeed, his hopes must be deceived: I cannot perform illicit acts,
Have only wishes and good expectation,
A quick glance, whereupon
for almost a year we do not meet.⁶⁵

Contact between the sexes, which was less restricted than in urban society, appears as a prominent feature in narratives depicting the Bedouin milieu. Medieval Arabic authors therefore considered Bedouin custom as a realistic background to the 'Udhri narrative. Al-Jāhiz (d.255/869) notes in his *Epistle on Singing-Girls*, which deals with the position of singing-girls in the luxurious urban society of Abbasid Iraq: "Men continued to converse with women both in Pre-Islam and in [the beginning of] Islam, up to the time when the veil was imposed on the wives of the Prophet. Such conversation was the cause of the association between Jamīl and Buthaynā 'Afrā' and 'Urwa (et al.). (...)

63 Al-Sarrāj 1378/1958, vol. 1, 213f.

64 Hamori 1974, 39-47.

65 Abū l-Faraj, vol. 8, 105.

Among Bedouin men and women there was no veiling of women; yet in spite of the absence of the veil, they disapproved of sly glances and secret ogling. Nevertheless, they were accustomed to gathering for conversation and evening parties, and might pair off for whispering and joking.”⁶⁶

However, reality and myth mingle in this image of the Bedouin past. Here it is seen as the cradle of the 'Udhri love story. The custom of light-hearted conversation among men and women beyond the confines of the family and even the tribe may indeed be considered as being attested in narratives in which they appear as a casual circumstantial setting. The dogma of love based upon abstention, however, is not naturally connected with these habits, but rather results from a regional, Hijazi literary taste. The story about Yazid ibn al-Ṭathriyya (d. 126/744) a *ghazal* poet from the tribe of Qushayr living in Eastern Arabia, may illustrate this.⁶⁷ He was a *zīr*, a man fond of light-hearted, courteous conversation with women whom he would impress with his manners, poetry and singing. His unrivalled abilities were respected and feared in the neighbouring tribe. But he fell in love with a woman from that tribe, Waḥshiyya, and could not go to see her because of the animosity between their tribes. His ardent longing caused him to become seriously ill until he was about to die. The only cure was to see her again. He cunningly managed to visit Waḥshiyya in her tent. She was delighted to receive him and kept him with her for three days, in secret, only presenting him to her closest friends. Thereupon, he returned cured of his lovesickness. There is no explicitly erotic scene in this story, but chastity is clearly not an issue here. The unsteadiness of love coming to an end with the visit to one's cherished woman clearly contradicts the 'Udhri ideal of love. In a similar way, the narrative about Bishr al-Ashtar from the Banū Ḥilāl is a testimony to the light-hearted and “realistic” attitude in a Bedouin milieu.⁶⁸ Bishr adored Jaydā'. When their relationship became known a quarrel broke out between the families. Her family moved away, but Bishr could not endure their separation. By means of trickery he succeeded in arranging a clandestine rendezvous. Both lovers spent their time talking to each other in the presence of Bishr's friend, Numayr. But this proof of flawless chastity is somehow questioned by what follows: Bishr did not want Jaydā' to go home at night. Therefore they dressed Numayr in Jaydā''s clothes and sent him back to replace her for the night. Although well instructed on how to behave, his clumsiness angered her husband, who took a whip and beat Numayr whom he assumed to be his wife. At night, Jaydā''s sister lay down beside him, intending to comfort her sister. Numayr revealed what had happened and both spent the night together, talking to each other. The next day, the two friends were reunited and rode home.

Death and Sacrifice

This type of light-hearted love story in a Bedouin setting did not become as widespread and productive in Arabic literature as the 'Udhri love story. Instead, death from love has

66 Beeston 1980, “The Epistle” (as note 29), 17, 5 (arab.), and 16, 4 (arab.).

67 Abū l-Faraj, vol. 8, 156-62.

68 Al-Mu'āfā ibn Zakariyyā 1407/1987, 304-307.

become a mark of stories about ideal love. In the 'Abbasid period, the Banū 'Udhra represented those who die when they fall in love. It was Stendhal and Heinrich Heine, who introduced this image to European literature.⁶⁹ The reputation of the 'Udhra, namely of being inclined, by natural disposition, to passionate and fatal love gave rise to the question of whether this should be regarded as a laudable quality, or a default. Whereas sceptics explain this kind of behaviour as being caused by psychological and physical feebleness ("fragility of constitution, weakness of judgement, limited capacity to consider one's affairs"),⁷⁰ defenders of 'Udhri love refer to moral and mental qualities: a prerequisite is the affinity to beauty and decency; the perception of beauty leads to abstention (*'afāf*) from indecent behaviour, and abstention causes tenderness of the heart; ardent, passionate love makes the time before the assigned term of death vanish, while the lover sees (during the visits to his beloved) unveiled parts of the woman's face that others never get to see.⁷¹

This discussion obviously intends to harmonize the idea of ardent love, which does not succumb to the rules of reasonable and sociable behaviour, with standards of moral permissibility. Our stories, however, offer a vision, which goes far beyond this concern. Here death can be perceived as a sacrifice, since the idea of sustaining love, devoid of any response, is combined with thinking about death and even longing for it. Already the above-mentioned story of 'Abdallāh b. 'Alqama illustrates this. When he declares his unselfish love to be independent of what his friend would grant him, he mentions his death as the ultimate fulfilment of his promise. "If I might forget (certain things), your tears and gaze will never be among the things I forget, until the grave takes me away." The narration then focuses on his killing.⁷² In the story of Qays, the narrative elaboration of ideal love culminates in his refusal to arrange Lubnā's divorce from her husband so that he, himself, could be united with his friend. His declaration of absolutely selfless love is the opening of the final section leading to his death.

An example of an explicit connection between ideal love and death is offered by the unfortunate 'Udhri lover-poet, 'Urwa ibn Hizām, who has already been mentioned above: He finally gains the respect of the husband of his cherished 'Afrā'. She invites him to stay with them, but 'Urwa rejects: "I cannot stay, since he (i.e. 'Afrā's husband) knows about me, although I know that I am going away to meet my fatal destiny (*maniyyatī*)."⁷³ When her husband urges him to reconsider his decision, he responds: "Desiring her has done me harm, now I have renounced and induced my soul to accept hopelessness and patience."⁷³ 'Urwa then dies of his ardor.

In the narrative, death thus results from 'Urwa's resolve. Ideal love extends beyond the confines of an emotionally reassuring relationship and means, when it arrives at this stage, repudiating the rules of ordinary and biologically conditioned vitality, which

69 Jacobi 1998.

70 Ibn al-Jawzī 1381/1962, 229, quoting a tradition handed down by Ibn Duraid (d. 310/923).

71 Ibid., 228; cf. a similar dictum in Ibn Qutayba 1966, 441.

72 Abū l-Faraj, vol. 7, 282.

73 Abū l-Faraj, vol. 24, 153.

means, in turn, accepting one's death for the sake of love. In this vein, readiness to encounter death for the sake of love seems to resemble the sacrifice of the martyr (*shahīd*) who offers his life for the cause of God, particularly in defence of his religion and of the lives of the believers. In an Islamic context, a comparison between those who die of love while preserving a chaste and flawless conduct and the martyrs of *jihād* is not a blasphemous vulgarisation of the concept of martyrdom. Already the poet al-Jamīl refers to the idea that love, although a sweet experience, is dangerous, possibly causing death which then can be considered martyrdom. "Every time we meet (the women), we are received with cheerfulness, and every man slain (by love) in their regard is a martyr."⁷⁴ This verse does not reveal, whether the enchanted lover who dies of his love is seen as a martyr in the sense of a victim, or as a man who sacrifices his life, risking death, knowing only too well what he doing.

Religious tradition even produced a saying of the Prophet Muḥammad, investing those who die from love with the title of martyrdom: "Who loves ardently (*ashīqa*), abstains and dies, dies as a martyr." From the end of the 9th century onwards this saying regularly appears in books dealing with the experience of love.⁷⁵ Already the poet Abū Nuwās (d. c. 813) alludes to this concept when he mentions that religious tradition promises the reward of a martyr to those who die from love.⁷⁶ However, all this evidence does not support the idea that sacrifice of one's life for the cause of love gained the reputation of an Islamic ideal. Rather it parallels the considerable extension of the concept of martyrdom already prevalent in the early Islamic period including victims of disease, particularly of the Black Death, and other types of casualties.⁷⁷ As already mentioned before, passionate love was considered to be an affliction and malady. The perception of love as a slaying force is also attested by a Greek inscription on a gravestone of a Hellenized Arab in the Ḥaurān (Syria), whose "death was caused by love".⁷⁸ This obviously was not a shameful cause of death, otherwise it would not have been mentioned. It was not perceived in terms of a sacrifice as far as we can infer from the inscription, but as an unfortunate and even tragic event.

We may therefore note that deliberate acceptance of death, as a consequence of love, is an idea, which we encounter in the 'Udhri love story. When those who died from love were called "martyrs", the extent to which this use of the term is based on a concept of sacrifice for the sake of love is quite uncertain, however. In any case, the motif of dying from love is used outside of the 'Udhri context, too.⁷⁹ The fatal consequences of unrequited love leading to deliberate renouncement are also exposed in narratives not relating to the typical themes of the 'Udhri love story, such as the religiously slanted story of

74 Jamīl 1416/1997, 60: *li-kulli liqā'in naltaqīhi bashāshatun / wa-kullu qatīlin 'indahunna shahīdu*. Cf.: Jacobi's article in this volume.

75 Giffen 1971, 99-105. Leder 1984, 271-278.

76 Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī: Ta'rikh Baghdād. I-XIV, VII, 438. Cf.: Wagner 1965, 35.

77 Kohlberg 1997; Conrad 1992, 95.

78 Grunebaum 1947, 285; cf. Littmann 1953, vol. 6, 707.

79 'Umar ibn Abī Rabī'a 1902, p. 61, no. 74, vs. 44-45; Vadet 1968, 138.

Bishr and Hind.⁸⁰ It is the 'Udhri love story, however, which has elaborated on the theme of faithful abstinent love, worthy of sacrifice.

⁸⁰ Sironval 1991.

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