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Gender and Poetry in Muslim Spain: Mapping the Sexual-Textual Politics of Al-Andalus

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Gender and Poetry in Muslim Spain: Mapping the Sexual-Textual Politics of Al-Andalus**O. Ishaq Tijani**Department of General Undergraduate Curriculum Requirements
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This article revisits the role of women in the Andalusian literature and culture of the period between the 8th through the 15th centuries C.E. Drawing on some Western sexual-textual political models of analysis, the article reexamines the literary methods and devices employed by selected Andalusian women poets to demonstrate their intellectual equality with men. Moreover, by providing a sexual-textual political reading of some of the women's poems and/or the anecdotes (*akhbār*) about them, the article demonstrates how these women exerted their social and political agency in a male-dominated society. The article seeks to bolster an argument that the frequent mention of the preponderance of women poets—their names and the anecdotes about them—suggests the existence of a female literary sub-culture in al-Andalus that was more vibrant than has been documented in the male-authored classical Arabic texts.

Keywords: Muslim Spain, poetry, sexual-textual politics, women and gender

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Introduction

Many contemporary scholars have highlighted the fact that modern Arab feminism has evolved not solely in imitation of the modern Western feminist movement. Some modern Arab women poets and writers have always referred to historical antecedents, to archetypal Arab women literary figures—such as the pre-Islamic al-Khansā', the Abbasid Rābi'a al-'Adawiya, and the Andalusian Wallāda—as their role models and sources of inspiration (Badran, 2009; Badran & Cooke, 1990/2004; Handal, 2001). This article revisits the topic of medieval Arab feminism, with a special focus on the representation of sexual and textual politics in the conventional or standard form of Arabic poetry composed by and about Andalusian women. Drawing on the conceptual framework of some Western-oriented, sexual-textual politics critical models, the article reassesses the issue of female creativity and the literary and rhetorical devices employed by the selected Andalusian women poets through which they exerted their agency—ability to act in defense of their rights and privileges—in both the private and public spheres.

Conceptual Framework

Millet (1970/1977) made popular the term 'sexual politics' in the early 1970s when she used it as an analytical tool for exposing patriarchy—the ideology of male supremacy—in various sectors of human society. She identified literature as one of the effective mediums through which women's oppression has been entrenched over the centuries (Millet, 1977, pp. 127-128). As Mills, Pearce, Spaul, and Millard (1989) explained, "sexual political criticism can be thought of most simply as an analysis of the images of women [i.e., sexual or sexist] perpetrated by patriarchal culture especially through the medium of literature [i.e., textual]" (p. 48). Unlike Millet (1970/1977), who focused exclusively on male writers, other feminist critics have espoused theories and readings which have been applied not only to male-authored works, but also to women's writing. Thus, in addition to Millet's (1970/1977) sexual political critical model, this article will appropriate Gilbert and Gubar's (1979) concepts of the 'anxiety of authorship' and 'feminist poetics', and Gubar's (1981) further criticism of the myth of the gendered link between biology and creativity.

On their own part, Gilbert and Gubar (1979) countered the notion, in the Western literary tradition of the pre-modern and modern periods, "that creativity is inextricably linked with male sexuality," meaning that "the writer 'fathers' his text just as God fathered the world" (as cited in Mills et al., 1989, p. 122). Their reaction to this notion was that "If the pen is a metaphorical penis, with what organ can females generate texts?" (as cited in Mills et al., 1989, p. 122). They also argued that women in patriarchal societies have historically been reduced to mere properties, to characters and images imprisoned in male texts. The male act of imprisoning the female in literature is tantamount to silencing, stilling and, in effect, killing her (Gilbert & Gubar, 1979, p. 14; Mills et al., 1989, p. 125). In view of this, Gilbert and Gubar (1979) asked: "How do women negotiate their position within (or outside) the male literary tradition? And what is their relationship with their female precursors?" (as cited in Mills et al., 1989, p. 127).

In their attempt to answer these questions, Gilbert and Gubar (1979) invoked Bloom's (1973) famous notion of the 'anxiety of influence' whereby he hypothesised that "In order to establish his own literary position as a writer, [a man] must first do battle with his literary fathers; he must assert his 'authority' over their achievements; his style and subject-matter over

theirs” (as cited in Mills et al., 1989, p. 127). Based on this, Gilbert and Gubar (1979) described the 19th century Anglo-American “woman writer’s reaction to literary history not as an ‘anxiety of influence’ but as an ‘anxiety of authorship,’” arguing that, “Because she has been ‘enclosed’ by male definitions of herself and her own potential, the woman writer doubts not only *what* she writes, but her ability to write at all” (as cited in Mills et al., 1989, p. 127; emphasis in original).

As a solution, Gilbert and Gubar (1979) claimed that contemporary woman writers will have to “seek out a *female* precursor in order to overcome the worst effects of the patriarchal literary tradition against which they are defined” (as cited in Mills et al., 1989, p. 127; emphasis in original). A woman, Gilbert and Gubar (1979) emphasized, must do “battle not against her [male] precursor’s reading of the world but against his reading of *her*” (as cited in Mills et al., 1989, p. 127; emphasis in original).

Many have criticized the concept of the anxiety of authorship for being universally essentialist (Mills et al., 1989, pp. 128-129); Moi (1985), for instance, adopted the term ‘sexual/textual politics’ to expose not literary patriarchy but the discrepancy in feminist criticisms. This article posits that an anxiety of authorship affects, though not necessarily, most new and upcoming writers, artists, scholars, etc., irrespective of gender or race. In view of the foregoing, the article will use the conjoined (hyphenated) term ‘sexual-textual politics’ to refer to the underlying politics of the struggle between the sexes as embodied, explicitly or implicitly, in Andalusian literary works and literary historiography.

Sexual-Textual Politics in Andalusian Poetry

Arabic poetry has developed over the centuries in both the *Mashriq* (eastern) and the *Maghrib* (western) parts of the medieval Arab-Islamic world, inclusive of Muslim Spain which, as Derhak (1995) noted, was not only “artistic, scientific and commercial, but it also exhibited incredible tolerance, imagination and poetry” (para. 1). Women contributed to the development of Andalusian literature predominantly through the medium of poetry. One of the reasons that have been given for the preponderance of women’s poetical compositions in Muslim Spain is that its rulers greatly encouraged scholarship and literature among their subjects, irrespective of gender, race, and religion (al-Maqqarī, [c. 1617]/1968; al-Zayyāt, n.d.; Nykl, 1946; Bayhum, 1962; Hitti, 1970; Burckhardt, 1972; Chejne, 1974; Monroe, 1974).

Andalusian women of letters sat with their male counterparts in literary salons, and some of the women—especially those from the upper-class—opened similar salons solely owned and managed by them. As Handal (2001) noted, Sukayna bint al-Ḥusayn and the Princess Wallāda bint al-Mustakfī, for instance, had “established the literary salon hundreds of years before such salons became popular in sixteenth-century Europe” (p. 6). While women’s writing began to gain momentum in Western societies in the 19th century, it had already grown and developed into a formidable subculture in Arab societies by the 13th century. Nevertheless, some of the features of Western women’s writing of the 19th and 20th centuries are decipherable in the poetical works of their Arab ‘sisters’ of the earlier periods, and Western feminist critical theories can be, and have been, applied to analyses of classical Arab women’s writing.

One of the issues of contention in modern feminist scholarship is epistemology, an intellectual platform that has been dominated by men across the world for centuries. As Hartsock (1983) remarked:

Feminists have argued that traditional epistemology, whether intentionally or unintentionally, systematically exclude the possibility that women could be ‘knowers’ or *agents of knowledge* [...] They have proposed alternative theories of knowledge that legitimate women as knowers. For these theorists, knowledge emerges for the oppressed only through the struggle they wage against their oppressor. (p. 169)

Despite their divergence in theories and critical approaches and terminologies, feminist writers, critics, and activists seem to have the same goal: to deconstruct male hegemony, real or imaginary, in all aspects of human experience, including epistemology.

That classical Arab-Islamic hermeneutics and epistemology are gender-biased has been pointed out by many contemporary writers and critics who have separately highlighted the textual marginalization of Arab women at different historical epochs (Badran & Cooke, 2004; Malti-Douglas, 1991; & Ahmed, 1992). The existence of sexual-textual politics at the level of literary-historical narrative is more discernible in the available records on women’s poetry composed during the earlier periods of Muslim Spain than the later periods. To prove this, for example, Bayhum (1962) mentioned that around sixty thousand (60,000) women poets emerged in Muslim Spain; there has been some debate about whether this figure has been exaggerated or not (Viguera, 1992; Hammond, 2010). What is certain from available records, however, is the fact that a far higher percentage of women participated in literary and cultural expressions in al-Andalus than in other parts of the Arab world at that time. Unfortunately, the names of a large majority of those Andalusian women poets have gone into oblivion and most of their poems have not survived. Their extant poems—complete or in fragments—have been preserved in male-authored classic works such as al-Maqqarī’s (c. 1617/1968) famous book, *Nafh al-ṭib*.

Among the earliest Andalusian female poets was Ḥassāna al-Naymīriyya, who reportedly played a vital role in the emergence of the female literary tradition in Andalusia. It was reported that she composed several panegyrics for the Caliph al-Ḥakam ibn Hishām (r. 796-822) and his son, the Caliph ‘Abd al-Raḥmān II (*al-Awsaṭ*; r. 822-852). Yet, her poems are not included in any known anthologies or books of Andalusian literary history. Not also available is detailed information about the lives and poetical compositions of women such as ‘Ā’isha bint Aḥmad al-Qurtūbiyya (from Cordova), Ḥafṣa bint Ḥamdūn al-Hijāriyya (from Guadalajara) and al-Ghassāniyya al-Bajjāniyya (from Bajjāna in Almeria) all of who lived in the early centuries of Muslim occupation of al-Andalus. These three women, among others, were highly cultured and accomplished poets. But, apart from the tersely-worded biographical notes on them (al-Maqqarī, 1617/1968), nothing else has been recorded about their lives and poetry.

Hammond (2010) reiterated the pervasiveness of sexual politics in the manners of the documentation of Arab women’s poetry of the pre-modern times. Their poetry, she wrote, “owes its survival to its occasional inclusion in anecdotal histories” (Hammond, 2010, p. 129) of the various male rulers, scholars, and poets with whom the women had personal and/or professional

encounters. Essentially, any detailed study of the literary contributions of an individual Arab woman poet of those periods will have to “devote a fair amount of biographical attention to the [female] poet’s male relatives, admirers, and paramours” (Hammond, 2010, p. 129). A good example of this gendered phenomenon can be found in the case of Umm al-Kirām, who was a free woman of noble descent, being the daughter of al-Mu‘taṣim b. Ṣumādīḥ, the ruler of Almeria from 1051-1091.

In Jum‘a’s (2001) twenty-page biography of Umm al-Kirām, not a single poem by the latter was quoted. The reason for this may be either that none of the classical sources which Jum‘a (2001) relied on cited a poem by the woman, or that he decided to ignore the very few extant poetical lines that have been attributed to Umm al-Kirām by the literary historian Ibn Sa‘īd al-Mahgribī (n.d./1954) and cited by Hammond (2010, p. 154). Predicated upon this and similar other cases, one can argue that the frequent references to the women’s names and poems are indicative not just of their epistemological marginalization but of the existence of a more vibrant female literary sub-culture in al-Andalus than presented in the male-authored Arabic biographies and anthologies. The case of Ṭarūb, discussed below, serves to further corroborate this argument.

A much less popular and less discussed Andalusian female figure in modern scholarship, Ṭarūb was a slave-girl-turned-queen who benefitted from her poetical prowess. Arguably, she embodied much of the feminine power and ingenuity found in the character of Shahrazād of *Alf layla wa-layla* or *The Thousand and One Nights*. Like Shahrazād, who is a fictional character, Ṭarūb can be described as “a sexual being, who manipulates discourse (and men) through her body” (Malti-Douglas, 1991, p. 11). But this article argues that whereas the fictional Shahrazād belongs to the rank of the nobles in society (being the daughter of a powerful minister and close associate of her husband-royal), the historical figure Ṭarūb exemplified the less-privileged woman’s ability to utilize her talents through her word and body.

A slave of the earlier mentioned Caliph ‘Abd al-Raḥmān II, Ṭarūb was said to be an extremely beautiful woman and a witty poet. It was reported that, due to the excessive love the Caliph had for her, she soon became the *de facto* ruler of al-Andalus during her husband’s reign, dictating to him how to rule and conquer. Whenever he traveled without her, he would not be able to sleep, and whenever he was able to, he would always see her in his dreams. While away from each other, both the king and the queen would exchange love letters, which were always in the poetic form (Jum‘a, 2001, pp. 290-298). Illustrating the popular feminist slogan, the “personal is political” (Hanisch, 1970/2006, para. 1), Ṭarūb used the medium of her poetry for personal (love and marital) gains and, at the same time, as a platform for exerting political power and influence. Regrettably, not a single line of poetry by Ṭarūb was mentioned in her biography presented by Jum‘a (2001); Hammond (2010), like many other contemporary scholars of Andalusian literature, did not even mention anything about Ṭarūb. Again, the reason may be either that there is no record of any extant poetry by the woman or that Jum‘a (2001), in particular, whose book contains biographies of Andalusian women, decided to not cite any of such poems. Rather, what is on record is an extensive description of Ṭarūb’s charming beauty and wit with which she had bewitched her husband.

Furthermore, the earlier-mentioned remark that anyone who wants to know about the literary contributions of a classical Arab woman will have to “devote a fair amount of biographical attention to [her] male relatives, admirers, and paramours” (Hammond, 2010, p. 129) is particularly applicable in Ṭarūb’s case. The male narrative of her quasi-biography presents her in the ‘image of the angel’ that portrays women as sexual objects of the desire, as submissive and compliant wives, mothers, and sisters who should uphold patriarchal values and ethics. Gilbert and Gubar (1979) argued that both the ‘image of the angel’ and its opposite, which is the ‘image of the monster/monstrous woman’, have been used by male writers and critics to further their “*control* [of] the female subjects of [their] texts, and by conclusion, women themselves [...]” (as cited in Mills et al., 1989, p. 125; emphasis in original).

Women, Sparring, and Poetic Artistry

Beginning with the phenomenon of ‘sparring’, this section reexamines some of the literary techniques and rhetorical devices employed in the extant poetical works by Andalusian women and through which they were able to establish a sense of self and to expand their horizons of empowerment. ‘Sparring’, or verbal games and wit, is prevalent in classical Arabic prose literature known as *adab*. As Malti-Douglas (1991) noted, much of the Arabic literary-biographical corpus provides examples of anecdotes in which “two parties, one male and one female, treat the reader to a verbal duel” (p. 34). In most cases, “The male is attempting to delimit or define the woman, even putting her on the spot;” the female, on the other hand, “faces the issue head-on and counteracts with a verbal display involving a pun or a play on words that calls attention to her body or her sexuality” (Malti-Douglas, 1991, p. 34). At the end, the female wins, as “The male is left speechless” (Malti-Douglas, 1991, p. 34).

Sparring was also one of the driving forces for classical Arab women’s poetical composition, and it gave rise to popular anecdotes regarding male-female encounters in Andalusian literary history. As Malti-Douglas (1991) further explained, wit plays “a pivotal role in an intricate system of exchange that governs” (p. 36) classical Arabic anecdotes. “What wit can be exchanged for,” she continued, “obviously depends on the [...] character in question. [...] In the case of women, wit, sexuality, and the female body interact in an explosive literary mixture that leads to interesting exchanges indeed” (Malti-Douglas, 1991, p. 36). It should be noted, however, that cases of sparring between Andalusian women poets are rare to find in the available anecdotal sources; there are instances of female-female exchange of romantic or satiric poems (Hammond, 2010, pp. 24 & 161-168), but these do not involve sparring.

Many anecdotes illustrate how sparring helped some Andalusian women win the heart of a male ruler or influential figure in society. While some of the popular anecdotes have been discussed by many scholars writing in Arabic and European languages, they are equally noteworthy here because of their relevance to this article’s argument. The first case study to be reexamined here is the story of the talented slave-girl al-Rumaykiyya (also known as al-ʿIʿtimād), who later became the wife of al-Muʿtamid ibn ʿAbbād (r. 1069-1091), the last ruler of Seville from the Abbadid dynasty, who himself was a renowned poet.

It was reported that one day, the slave-girl al-Rumaykiyya was with other women doing some washing at a riverbank in Seville. Al-Muʿtamid, who was a crown prince at that time, was

passing by on horseback in the company of his respected lieutenant, Ibn ‘Ammār. Both men were amazed by the picturesque wave which the wind had made of the river. As a reaction, al-Mu‘tamid extemporized with her famous hemistich (half-line) to describe the exotic scene:

..... صنع الريح من الماء زرد

The wind has made a coat of mail from the water.

.....

(as cited in Afsaruddin, 1991, p. 166)

and then he challenged his companion to also improvise with an appropriate hemistich to complete the line.

In the Arabic poetical tradition, when a person is challenged this way, they are expected to produce a continuing half-line or line(s) in conformity with, or similar to, the *wazn* (meter) and *qāfiya* (mono-rhyme) of the original (first) hemistich. While Ibn ‘Ammār failed the test, it was al-Rumaykiyya who, unexpectedly, produced an appropriate response to the prince’s poetic challenge, when she said:

أي درع لقتال لو جمد

.....

What a coat of mail suitable for a fight if only it were solidified.

(as cited in Afsaruddin, 1991, p. 166)

This sequel half-line, extemporized by al-Rumaykiyya, is in consonance with the hemistich by the challenger in several ways. Rhythmically, both were composed using the same tripartite pattern of the same *Ramal* meter and the same mono-rhyming sound or letter ‘d’. Contextually, too, the second half-line is commensurate with the first in terms of message, as obvious in both the Arabic and English versions cited above. The message in al-Rumaykiyya’s half-line builds on the metaphor created by al-Mu‘tamid, just as it also contextualizes the theme within al-Mu‘tamid’s royal status by alluding to the coat of mail that was often used for a fight, most especially, by nobles in some parts of the world during that era.

The anecdote about the al-Rumaykiyya–al-Mu‘tamid poetic encounter points to the fact that, even though she was reportedly a beautiful woman, it was not her beauty that first attracted her to the prince-poet. On the contrary, it was her eloquence and poetical ingenuity that led al-Mu‘tamid to ask for her hand in marriage (al-Maqqarī, 1617/1968; Afsaruddin, 1991, p. 166). Her poetic artistry ultimately contributed to her empowerment by allowing her to jump on the ladder of social nobility.

Women Challenging Male Authority

Classical Arab-Islamic history is replete with instances of women openly challenging male political and juridical authority, thereby exerting their personal agency and subjectivity. Examples of women's rejection of male political authoritarianism in Andalusian society can be found in the anecdotes about Asmā' al-Āmiriyya and al-Shilbiyya, who both lived during the 12th century. Al-Āmiriyya, from Seville, was reported to have written a poetic letter to the Almohad ruler 'Abd al-Mu'min b. 'Alī (r. 1130-1163) in which she overtly protested the ruler's confiscation of her (family's) belongings during a battle, and she demanded to have them back. Similarly, al-Shilbiyya, from Lucena, once wrote a poetic letter to the ruler Sulṭān Ya'qūb al-Manṣūr (r. 1184-1199) in which she complained about the misrule of the governor of her province (al-Maqqarī, 1617/1968; Afsaruddin, 1991, p. 166).

Apart from the act of demanding good governance, al-Shilbiyya was also a quick-witted defender of her personal dignity. Another anecdote about her shows that she was married to a *qāḍī* (judge) in Lucena, and that, because she was renowned for possessing prodigious knowledge about Islamic law and jurisprudence, she was more respected than her husband-judge in the circle of the Lucenan jurists. The poetic exchange between her and another judge-poet, who was a colleague of her husband, confirms this. In a two-lined ditty, the judge-poet mocked al-Shilbiyya's husband:

وَأَحْكَامُهَا فِي الْوَرَى قَاضِيَةٌ	*	بُلُوشَةٌ قَاضٍ لَهُ زَوْجَةٌ
وَيَا لَيْتَهَا كَانَتْ الْقَاضِيَةُ	*	فَيَا لَيْتَهُ لَمْ يَكُنْ قَاضِيًا

In Lucena there is a *qāḍī* who has a wife,
Her decisions hold sway among the people.
Only if he were not a *qāḍī*,
And she was the *qāḍī* instead.

(as cited in Afsaruddin, 1991, p. 166)

Though missing in the English translation, the Arabic version of this poem depicts sexual politics through the juxtaposition of the Arabic masculine form for a male judge, *qāḍī*, and its feminine form, *qāḍiya*. Whereas the masculine form appears in the first hemistich of each of the two lines, the feminine form appears in the second hemistich of each line. Could this structure be intentional or just a coincidence?! Anyway, one can observe a kind of inversion of patriarchal codes in the poem: at that time and place, the societal expectation was that the male was supposed to be more knowledgeable and respected than the female. But, according to the poem, al-Shilbiyya embodied the reverse. As usual among Andalusian literary figures, the above poem was also written in the form of a letter sent to al-Shilbiyya's husband. On receiving the letter, her husband was dumbfounded, but she came to his rescue by writing back:

هُوَ شَيْخٌ سَوْءٌ مَزْدَرِي	*	لَهُ شَيْبُوبٌ عَاصِيَةٌ
كَلَّا لَنْ لَمْ يَنْتَهُ	*	لَنْسَفَعًا بِالنَّاصِيَةِ

He's a bad, despicable old man
With sinful gray hairs.

“Let him beware! If he desists not,
We will drag him by the forelock.”

(as cited in Afsaruddin, 1991, p. 166)

While there may be no obvious sexual political overtone in this poem, its formal aspects illustrate how some Andalusian women used poetry to establish a sense of intellectual equality with men.

Though, as mentioned in the anecdote, it was an impromptu response, al-Shilbiyya's poem matches the judge-poet's sarcastic one in several ways. Just as the man used *iqtibās*—‘borrowing’, from the Qur’ān chapter 69 verse 27—in the first hemistich of his second line so, too, did al-Shilbiyya. She even surpassed the man by improvising with a complete adaptation of two consecutive Qur’anic verses into one line: each verse constitutes a hemistich, and each appears not just in her own second line (in a similar way as in the man's poem), but also, more gratifyingly, in the same successive order of their occurrence in the Qur’an chapter 96 verses 17 and 18. Furthermore, she matched her *qāfiya* (rhyming in the last two sounds/letters: ‘يَهْ’) with the same *qāfiya* in the offensive poem. The difference between the two is in terms of the *tafīla* (metric pattern): while the offensive poem uses a quadripartite form of the *Mutaqārib* meter, the defensive one uses a dipartite form of the *Kāmil* meter; nevertheless, these two metrical forms are almost equal in length. This type of formal, prosodic achievement—matching the challenger's poem in the aspects of borrowing, (similarity in) meter, and mono-rhyming—constitutes a remarkable feat that is quite difficult to achieve in the realm of classical Arabic poetics.

Gender, Love, and Romantic Poetics

Some other Andalusian women poets showcased individualism and empowerment through romantic exchanges. Indeed, one of the most studied aspects of Andalusian literature is the theme of love and romance, which has traditionally been presented in the Arabic biographical and anthological works in the “He Said, She Said” narrative format (Brann, 2007, pp. 7-15; Hammond, 2010, pp. 129-130). The Wallāda-Ibn Zaydūn affair has been one of the most celebrated and extensively studied poetical-romantic, male-female relationships in Arabic literary history (e.g., Bayhum, 1962; al-Shak‘a, n.d.; Afsaruddin, 1991; Jayyusi, 1992; Farrin, 2003; Brann, 2007). This is mainly because Wallāda's personality, socio-cultural activities, and poetry have come to symbolize the extent of freedom of expression and association enjoyed by Arab women in Muslim Spain.

As in the case of Wallāda and Ibn Zaydūn, sexual-textual politics also resonates in the poetry depicting the relationship that existed between Nazhūn and Abū Bakr ibn Sa‘īd, a prominent Granadan vizier and intellectual of the 11th-12th century. Ibn Sa‘īd became enamored with Nazhūn's beauty and poetical prowess so much so that he was always jealous of her popularity among the people, as evident in the following exchange between the duo:

He said:

Oh you who have a thousand male intimate friends:
Some lovers and, some others, acquaintances.

I know you have dedicated a house
For (literary-minded) people to assemble.

She said:

Abu Bakr, you occupy in my heart a position that I have
Forbidden for others;
Even if I have so many beloved male friends,
For sure, the love of Abu Bakr supersedes.

(Jum'a, 2001, pp. 301-302; the present writers' translation).

This exchange underlies the complexities of the relationships that existed between the two sexes at the personal and professional levels. As seen in his couplet above, Ibn Sa'īd was obviously jealous of Nazhūn's popularity among her supposedly too many male admirers. Her statement, "Even if I have so many beloved male friends" (Jum'a, 2001, p. 302), implies a subtle reproach of the man as well as her insistence on maintaining her freedom of association. Her poem under discussion here serves to register her desire for and right to personhood and self-determination.

Satire or Sexualized Polemics

As exemplified also by Wallāda and Nazhūn's poetry, some Andalusian women employed satire, among other themes, as a medium through which they fought patriarchy in the public, intellectual realm. Wallāda's ability to poetically defend her dignity and pride in the face of Ibn Zaydūn's later disloyalty—his flirtations with one of her maids—has earned her an acclaim among literary critics and historians, male and female alike, ancient and modern/contemporary. For instance, in one of her satirical poems against Ibn Zaydūn, Wallāda voiced some of the most vulgar words ever used against a person of high caliber in the classical Arabic literary tradition:

You've been branded the 'hexagon', a label
That will stick long after you're gone.
For you're a sodomite, a catamite, a fornicator
A cuckold, a wittol, a thief.

(as cited in Hammond, 2010, p. 25)

Evidently, she used carefully selected attributes that denote or connote sexuality and sexual orientations to qualify Ibn Zaydūn—'hexagon, sodomite', 'catamite', 'fornicator', 'cuckold', 'wittol'—all of which have been discussed extensively in previous scholarship. With these words, Wallāda has been ranked among the boldest Arab women poets of all times; and Nazhūn, though less popular than Wallāda, has been similarly ranked. The present writers will add that whereas Wallāda's satire against Ibn Zaydūn was jealousy-driven, Nazhūn's was ideologically-driven, as it was composed in reaction to the patriarchal ideology of male social and intellectual superiority.

As discussed earlier in this article, feminist critics have disapproved of the prevalent perception and representation of the pen as a symbol of the male sexual organ in the works of pre-modern and modern male Western writers and theorists, such as Dante, John Milton, Sigmund Freud, John Ruskin, John Stuart Mill. Most of these so-called 'misogynist' intellectuals

have conceptualized literature and scholarship (which the pen literally symbolizes) as a domain solely for men to exploit and control (Millet 1970/1977). Similar misogynist ideology was also prevalent in some sections of Andalusian society.

A good example can be found in the narrative of Nazhūn's encounter with Abū Bakr al-Makhzūmī. It was reported that Nazhūn was one day attending a gathering being held at the house of the vizier Abū Bakr ibn Sa'īd, her minister-lover mentioned above. The gathering was full of dignitaries from Granada province, and al-Makhzūmī—a blind poet from Cordoba who was dreaded for being a notorious satirist—was invited as a special guest. During the event, al-Makhzūmī reportedly recited some poetic lines in which he described the host's magnificent house as paradise, and to which the vizier remarked: "Until now there's no way to get to [this paradise] except through the ears" (as cited in Hammond, 2010, p. 140). Although the vizier might have implicitly incited al-Makhzūmī's fury—knowing that the latter was blind and so could only hear about the beauty of Granada as a paradise on earth—the poet's response was rather more insulting.

What ensued was the (in)famous polemical encounter between Nazhūn and al-Makhzūmī. Hammond (2010) presented a superb analysis of the narrative of that encounter, but there is room for a much closer sexual political reading of the poetic aspects of the polemical encounter. Hence, this article would like to highlight the 'phallogentric'—the notion that the phallus, in other words, man/the male sexual organ, is superior to woman/the female sexual organ (Gallop, 1985)—dimension of the encounter. In the Lacanian (Jacques Lacan's) "account of language acquisition, the phallus is the master signifier, in the face of which the feminine can be identified only as lack. The woman is a gap, a silence, invisible and unheard, repressed in the unconscious" (Mills et al., 1989, p. 157).

In one of the feminist reactions to 'phallogentrism', Irigaray (1985) examined how "the privileging of what is visible and therefore deemed positive, i.e. the penis, elevated the status of the phallus, the master signifier and relegates 'woman' to absence in existing structures of psychoanalytical and philosophical discourse" (as cited in Mills et al., 1989, p. 159). Irigaray (1985) admitted that "sexuality remains phallogentric" and so she recommended that women writers mimic the dominant discourse in order to "decompose" it (as cited in Mills et al., 1989, pp. 176-177). This is what Carter (1967), for instance, has done in her novel *The Magic Toyshop*, in which she used the story of the legendary female figure, Leda, to "parod[y] the cultural sanctioning of phallic supremacy [as] internalised by both male subject and woman object of the desire" (Mills et al., 1989, p. 175).

The same phallogentric discourse and its mimicry can be observed in the Nazhūn-al-Makhzūmī encounter under study here. After al-Makhzūmī retorted, "I say that [Granada is paradise] in order that God send me a bastard who, whenever I pronounce these verses, says: 'Indeed, their reciter is blind'" (as cited in Hammond, 2010, p. 140), the vizier said, resignedly: "As for me, I am not saying a word" (as cited in Hammond, 2010, p. 140), to which al-Makhzūmī then responded: "He who is silent escapes" (as cited in Hammond, 2010, p. 140). While all the men at the occasion surrendered, it was a woman, Nazhūn, who came to their rescue, with this scornful remark:

I suppose you think you're well acquainted with bliss through the burning of incense, music and drink, for you marvel at its passage and compare it to the pleasure of paradise, asserting that it is known only through hearing and cannot be attained through the eyes. But how, Sir, does one who comes from the outpost of Almodóvar, having been raised among roe-bucks and bovines have any knowledge of cultivated gatherings [...] (as cited in Hammond, 2010, p. 140)

After a brief silence, the visitor al-Makhzūmī responded with the following:

On Nazhūn's face there is a slight veneer
 Of beauty, but underneath there is a hidden shame
 Those courting her had given up on other women
 He who comes to the sea finds little canal small.
 (translated by Nykl, 1946, p. 303, as cited in Hammond, 2010, p. 140-141)

to which Nazhūn replied:

Tell the vile one a word
 To be recited until he meets his maker
 In Almodóvar you were reared
 And shit than that place smells sweeter
 There the Bedouin have begun
 To swing and sway in their walk
 Therefore you became
 Besotted with everything round
 You were created blind
 But you get lost in every one-eyed [road]
 I have responded to a poem in kind
 So pray tell, who is more poetic?
By creation, I may be female
But my poetry is male.
 (as cited in Hammond, 2010, p. 134 & 141; emphasis added)

This article interprets al-Makhzūmī's two words in the above poem, "beauty" and "courting" (as cited in Hammond, 2010, p. 140), as portraying Nazhūn in the 'image of the angel', an object of the desire. At the same time, al-Makhzūmī's statement, "... but underneath there is a hidden shame" (as cited in Hammond, 2010, p. 140), implicitly portrays Nazhūn in the 'image of the monster'; that is to say, she should be dreaded and avoided by men because of the danger she might pose—as a 'fallen' woman—to their health, life, and social status.

In the same vein, Nazhūn's poetic response under consideration here explicitly depicts a sexual-textual political struggle. Hammond (2010) discussed, for instance, the sexist implications of two keywords in the Arabic version of Nazhūn's invective, which are *a'war* (literally meaning a "one-eyed person"/"blind") and *mudawwar* (literally denoting "round"). Relying on some

classical Arabic lexical and socio-anthropological texts, Hammond (2010) highlighted how each of these words also connotes the male sexual organ, arguing that they should be interpreted as such in the context of Nazhūn's invective here bearing in mind the anecdotal circumstance that led to its composition. (pp. 135-137).

What most interests this article, however, is the last line of the poem: "By creation, I may be female. But my poetry is male" (as cited by Hammond, 2010, pp. 134 & 141). Citing Garulo (1986), Hammond (2010) analyzed this line as embodying a straightforward feminist standpoint, when she wrote:

Nazhūn's seven-line invective [...] has earned her the label feminist [...] because it concludes with an apparent boast in which she rejects the sexual limitations imposed on her poetic persona: 'By creation, I may be female,' she asserts, 'but my poetry is male'—*mudhakkar*—or, endowed with a *dhakar*, the male member. With that assertion Nazhūn counts herself among the very best of poets—the *fuḥūl*, or the 'stallion' poets [as they are often referred to in classical Arabic poetics]. (Hammond, 2010, p. 131)

Hammond (2010) concluded on this point saying: "Indeed, it seems that [Arab] women have long been contending with the association of the pen with the penis. Even the legendary al-Khansā' [...] comes across as a bit of a virago in various anecdotes evoking her poetic persona" (p. 131).

But Hammond's (2010) discussion of the line did not consider Nazhūn's statement therein as actually undermining the feminist claim to gender equality vis-à-vis creativity. Thus, this article reads the line quite differently. Obviously, the line portrays several of the binary oppositions inherent in human society and activity: male/female, sex-uality/text-uality. Moreover, Nazhūn's statement in contention here depicts, in some way, her recognition of and agreement with the notion of phallic supremacy from the point of view of biology versus penmanship. Otherwise, why should her poetry not be female as her creation?! Should she not be proud of her gender as she was of her poetry?!

The present writers posit that the equivocation of that line reflects Gilbert and Gubar's (1979) theory of 'feminist poetics', which postulates that much "women's writing contains a hidden story and that that hidden story represents 'woman's quest for self-definition'" (as cited in Mills et al., 1989, p. 129). Expatriating on this, Gilbert and Gubar (1979) noted that literary works by 19th century Anglo-American women writers—such as Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, Emily Bronte and Emily Dickinson—are 'palimpsestic', because their "surface designs conceal or obscure deeper, less accessible (and less socially acceptable) levels of meaning" (as cited in Mills et al., 1989, p. 128).

Being their shared strategy for overcoming the earlier-explained 'anxiety of authorship', those women writers embarked on "the difficult task of achieving true female literary authority by simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards" (as cited in Mills et al., 1989, p. 128). That is why, Gilbert and Gubar (1979) claimed, those women writers seemed "odd" (as cited in Mills et al., 1989, p. 129) to their readers; an oddity that Gilbert and

Gubar (1979) attributed to the sense of ‘inferiorization’ shared by many women writers as a result of factors such as i) “women’s alienation from their male precursors” (explained earlier), ii) the “dread of the patriarchal authority of art,” and iii) the “inherently ‘unfeminine’ nature of creativity” (as cited in Mills et al., 1989, pp. 127-128).

Other feminist theorists and analysts have criticized the concept of ‘feminist poetics’ as essentialist in that it assumes “a universal archetypal female subject which ignores the changing modes of femininity which becomes possible at particular historical moments” (Mills et al., 1989, p. 148). Nevertheless, this article finds the third factor—the supposed “unfeminine nature of creativity” (as cited in Mills et al., 1989, p. 128)—more applicable in the case of Nazhūn’s seemingly apologetic line in focus here. Ultimately, the line highlights the inequalities stemming from a patriarchal society within which the Andalusian male and female poets were operating, a society wherein men and their creations through the written and spoken word were perceived as superior, and women who engaged in similar creative activities invariably held the male standard as a goal to attain and a marker of success.

Conclusion

Despite the conventional sexual-textual politics of literary historiography, hermeneutics, and epistemology, the Arab male authors of the classical period still deserve some commendation. Therefore, the writers of this article subscribe to Meisami’s (2006) word of caution when she observed: “That women’s wit and eloquence are often celebrated [in male-authored literary historical sources] should make us pause for thought” (as cited in Hammond, 2010, p. 129). Meisami (2006) argued further that “Were we to accept that male authors are incapable of presenting women both honestly and sympathetically, we would have to throw out most of the world’s literature, ancient and modern, simply because it was written, or written down, by men” (as cited in Hammond, 2010, p. 129).

Nevertheless, as shown in the foregoing, the poetry of and anecdotes about Andalusian women represent two strands both at once: female social and intellectual equality and agency in a male-dominated cultural milieu and the limits of medieval Arab feminism for which Andalusian women were arguably the frontrunners. Consequently, this article concludes that much of Andalusian women’s poetry is palimpsestic—mimicking the dominant patriarchal ideal while simultaneously subverting it—just as some of the works of their 19th and early 20th centuries Anglo-American sisters and of their fellow Arab sisters of the ancient and modern times.

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