

Ya‘qūb ibn al-Rabī‘ read by al-Mutanabbī and al-Mubarrad: a contribution to an Abbasid
history of emotions¹

ABSTRACT

The now little-known early Abbasid poet Ya‘qūb ibn al-Rabī‘ was famous for his elegies on his slave woman, Mulk. While scholars such as al-Mubarrad transmitted them, along with a biography patterned on the “sold slave-girl” tale-type, al-Mutanabbī plagiarised them and reversed their message. This yields a corpus which can contribute to an

¹ This paper follows on from a contribution to a Roundtable on Abbasid slavery moderated by Matthew Gordon (Bray, Toward an Abbasid History of Emotions); a paper on “The New Psychology of Ninth-Century Baghdad: Self-Concepts vs. Social Codes”, given on the kind invitation of Professor Beatrice Gründler at the Freie Universität, Berlin on 31 May 2016 in the Third Annual Lecture Series “The Long Ninth Century in Arabic-Islamic Knowledge and Culture” (Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies); and a discussion of the history of emotions that took place at the Thirteenth Conference of the School of Abbasid Studies, hosted by the Leiden University Centre for the Study of Islam and Society (LUCIS), 12-15 July 2016. I should like to thank the reader of the first version of this article for valuable comments and suggestions.

Abbasid history of emotions. Approaches to the history of emotions are discussed in an introduction, and key elements of the corpus are translated in Appendices I to III.

KEYWORDS

Abbasid history of emotions; *rithā'*; “sold slave-girl” tale-type; biography; Ya‘qūb ibn al-Rabī‘; al-Mubarrad; al-Mutanabbī.

Introduction

The history of emotions in European studies

In European studies, the history of emotions is a field, developed over the past decade, which not only treats the emotions as historically significant, but argues that, like fashions and technologies, they are socially conditioned, the shared products of a culture, and subject to change over time. This contrasts with the view that emotions are universal, timeless, individual biological urges.² In order to reconceptualise emotion, the history of emotions has turned to disciplines ranging from the life sciences to

² For overviews, see Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Interview*, and Deluermoz et al., *Ecrire l’histoire des émotions*.

philosophy.³ Its practitioners include historians of music, art and literature as well as social and political historians. The problems arising from the kinds of evidence available for different fields and periods have given rise to different theoretical stances. The medievalist Barbara Rosenwein works with a minimalist and pluralist notion of “emotional communities”—people who share the same understanding and culture of the emotions—arguing that, in any given society, several emotional communities will coexist.⁴ William Reddy, a modernist, equates emotional communities with societies, and maximises the explanatory power of the history of emotions, which, he asserts, is a necessary dimension, “a way of doing”, every kind of history.⁵ A recent survey concludes that emotion is not reducible to community or to overarching schemes of explanation:

“[S]on étude interdit toute tentation généalogique linéaire . . . Face à son évidence massive dans la marche des sociétés, l’émotion apparaîtra moins au final comme un objet autonome, réifié et séparé, que comme une catégorie irradiante, susceptible de donner à saisir une multitude de mécanismes souvent occultés dans

³ An overview is provided by Solomon, *True to Our Feelings*.

⁴ Plamper, *The History of Emotions*, 252-3.

⁵ Plamper, *The History of Emotions*, 249.

l'explication des rapports sociaux et du changement historique" ("In sum, given the huge place that it holds in human affairs, rather being treated as a separate object of study with its own history, emotion should be seen as a pervasive factor, the analysis of which can throw light on otherwise disregarded aspects of social interaction and historical change").⁶

Meanwhile, the question of what constitutes an emotion remains a matter of debate. A historical overview of western theories of the passions, emotions and feelings is provided by the philosopher Robert C. Solomon.⁷ The most important point of consensus to emerge from recent theory is that thinking and feeling are not separate and antithetical processes; rather, emotion is a mode of thinking.

The emotions in Abbasid studies

There is an embryonic Abbasid history of emotions, but it does not identify itself as such, and has not taken part in either the theoretical debates outlined above or in discussion of the methodological problems raised by different kinds of source. For example, Boaz

⁶ Deluermoz et al, *Ecrire l'histoire des émotions*, 5 [online version].

⁷ Solomon, *True to Our Feelings*.

Shoshan observes of Abbasid historiography that “Miskawayh’s predilection for eyewitness appears no less than Ṭabarī’s, and these accounts tend to provide the reader not only with the main contours of this or that episode, but the narrators’ more private concerns and experience.” That this is an argumentative “trope” and not naïve “mimesis” does not, Shoshan suggests, diminish the importance of the use of character to explain events, nor the importance of “drama” to showing their significance.⁸ But Shoshan’s own readings of passages of “physiognomic description”, revelatory dialogue and psychologically omniscient narration⁹ assume that the authors and protagonists of Abbasid narratives thought and felt in much the same way as we do, and that narrative realism is a universal, default prose register that needs no explanation.

Outside historiography, work has also been done on Abbasid theories of physiognomy and psychology;¹⁰ and if we turn to particular emotions, since the 1960s, one emotion, love, has been extensively mapped in Abbasid literary sources by, among others, Jean-Claude Vadet, Lois Anita Giffen, Suzanne Enderwitz, and, most recently,

⁸ Shoshan, *Poetics of Islamic Historiography*, 258.

⁹ Shoshan, *Poetics of Islamic Historiography*, especially 13-16, 44-7, 57-9.

¹⁰ For an overview, see Swain, *Seeing the Face, Seeing the Soul*.

Thomas Bauer and Rajāʾ Bin Salama.¹¹ There has been no exchange, however, between such largely descriptive and enumerative literary scholarship and other disciplines. Only with recent work on the sociability and sociology of Arabic literature has literary culture been acknowledged as a social, and therefore ultimately historical, agent, and this mainly for post-Abbasid societies. In a few instances, attempts to link the uses, effects or wider cultural significance of Abbasid literature to its content have focused on emotion. Early Abbasid poetic melancholy and irony were interpreted historically in Andras Hamori's *On the Art of Medieval Arabic Literature*.¹² Nearly twenty years later, the enduring symbolic and emotional importance of literary nostalgia received its own monograph in Jaroslav Stetkevych's *The Zephyrs of Najd*.

To date, then, historical, medical, philosophical, and especially literary scholarship on Abbasid emotions has contributed a substantial body of material and some important ideas to what could become a new field; but, for lack of an umbrella identity, internal interaction and momentum are missing, and what has been achieved so

¹¹ Vadet, *L'Esprit courtois en Orient*; Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love among the Arabs*; Enderwitz, *Liebe als Beruf*; Bauer, *Liebe und Liebesdichtung*; Bin Salama, *al-ʿIshq wa-l-kitāba*.

¹² Hamori, *On the Art*, Chapter Two: *Ghazal* and *Khamrīya*: The Poet as Ritual Clown.

far remains invisible to search tools and to scholars outside Abbasid studies.

Developing an Abbasid history of emotions

In an important and far-ranging article, the Ottoman scholar Walter Andrews sets out to “suggest a context in which the evidence derived from the literary [sources] could be organized to produce productive models for understanding and talking about the emotional life of [Ottoman] society.”¹³ “Understanding and talking about the emotional life” of Abbasid society, and identifying emotional communities within that society, are the initial goals I would propose for an Abbasid history of emotions.

This article is a small move in that direction. It will not attempt to construct a model, and does not put forward general ideas about the complex and multifarious relationships between Abbasid literature and lived experience, other than to assume that, by presenting their readers with emotional scenarios, Abbasid writers wished to shape their emotional imagination, if not their lived emotional practice. What it contributes is a case study built on close readings of four kinds of source: poetry, poetic criticism, story telling and biography. It follows on from two earlier attempts—one of

¹³ Andrews, *Ottoman Love*, 21.

which is revisited in this paper—to understand how mourning poetry (*rithāʿ*) could be used to reflect on loss and manage grief.¹⁴ Rather than establishing the existence of emotional communities as social fact, it identifies two distinct strands of emotional thinking, the first represented by the early Abbasid poet Yaʿqūb ibn al-Rabīʿ, his biographer the critic and theorist al-Mubarrad (ca. 210-85/825-98) and the “sold slave-girl” tale-type, the second by al-Mutanabbī (ca.303-54/915-65).

I Yaʿqūb ibn al-Rabīʿ

Yaʿqūb ibn al-Rabīʿ was active from the late second/eighth century to perhaps early third/ninth century. Most of what remains of his poetic output, and the biographical material about him, centres on his love for, and loss of, his slave woman, Mulk. The topos of the master who loves his *jāriya*, who also loves him, and the vicissitudes of their love, is well-known in both Abbasid biography and romantic story-telling, chiefly through the “sold slave-girl” tale-type, whose emergence, variants and distribution have, however,

¹⁴ Montgomery, Al-Mutanabbī and the Psychology of Grief, and Ashtiany [Bray],

Mutanabbī’s Elegy on Sayf al-Dawla’s Son.

only begun to be investigated.¹⁵ Although Ya‘qūb’s life is equated by all his biographers with a variant of the tale-type, they nevertheless give differing accounts of him and of his poetry.

Al-Marzubānī (ca. 297-384/910-94) identifies Ya‘qūb as:
 the chamberlain (*ḥājib*); a member of the household of al-Manṣūr (*mawlā l-Manṣūr*,
 r. 136-58/754-75)—though some say that that person was al-Rabī‘ ibn Yūnus ibn
 Muḥammad ibn Abī Farwa [. . .] Ya‘qūb was a handsome dandy (*kāna . . . ṣarīfān
 jamīlan*), and it is said that, during his father’s [al-Mahdī’s, r. 158-69/775-85]
 lifetime, [Hārūn] al-Rashīd had a penchant for him (*kāna yamīlu ilayh*). He is a good
 poet, not prolix (*shā‘ir muḥsin ghayr muṭīl*). He devoted his output to elegies on

¹⁵ An example involving the poet, bookman and slave-trader Maḥmūd al-Warrāq (d. mid-third/ninth century) and his slave Sakan, is given below at Appendix I on account of its early date (it comes from Ibn al-Mu‘tazz (247-96/861-908), *Ṭabaqāt al-shu‘arā’ al-muḥdathīn*), and because its happy ending provides a contrast with the tragedy of Ya‘qūb and Mulk.

his slave woman (*jāriya*) Mulk.¹⁶ For seven years he pursued her, sacrificing his wealth and standing until he gained possession of her. She lived with him for six months before dying.¹⁷

Al-Marzubānī then quotes four two-line passages in illustration of Ya‘qūb’s poetry. The first contrasts the blue or black clothes other people wear to funerals with Ya‘qūb’s own garment of grief for Mulk, which will not wear out with time:

ra’aytu thiyāba l-nāsi fi kulli ma’tamin [metre: *ṭawīl*]

idhā ḥṭafalū zurqa l-thiyābi wa-sūdahā

wa-innī ‘alā Mulkin labistu mulā’atan

mina l-ḥuzni mā yublī l-zamānu jadīdahā

The proper dress at funerals

is blue or black.

For Mulk, I have put on a cloak

¹⁶ The name Mulk means “dominion”, but also “chattel”, or, in some circumstances, “all [my] worldly goods”, see note 62.

¹⁷ Al-Marzubānī, *Mu‘jam al-shu‘arā’*, 573, no.1101.

of grief forever fresh that Time can't rot.

The next quotation picks up the keyword, “rot” (*balā*), which it uses three times:

baliyat Mulkun fī l-turābi fa-ablā— [metre: *khafīf*]

—nī balāhā wa-dhikru Mulkin jadīdu

yanquṣu l-wajdu kullamā qaduma l-‘ah—

—du wa-wajdī fī kulli yawmin yazīdū

That Mulk has rotted in her grave

rots me. Her memory stays fresh.

With time, pain decreases.

Mine increases daily.

The same word is the theme of the third passage, where it occurs twice:

yā Mulku lam tajidī massa l-bilā wa-la-qad [metre: *basīṭ*]

wajadtū massa l-bilā wa-l-ḍurri fī l-badani

Mulk! You rot without feeling it; but

my body feels the pain of rot and loss.

The final example chosen by al-Marzubānī does not seem to belong to the Mulk corpus. It describes a living lover, has an unnamed, grammatically masculine subject, and its second line parallels one in the same rhyme and metre sometimes attributed to the first/seventh-century ‘Udhri poet Majnūn Laylā (Qays ibn al-Mulawwah):¹⁸

yuqaṭṭi‘u qalbī bi-l-ṣudūdi tajanniyan [metre: ṭawīl]

wa-yaz‘amu annī mudhnibun wa-hwa mudhnibu

ka-‘aṣfūratin fī kaffi ṭiflin yudhīquhā

afānīna ṭa‘mi l-mawti wa-l-ṭiflu yal‘abu

He lacerates my heart by shunning me,

falsely claiming I’m at fault—it’s he who’s at fault!

[My heart is] like a sparrow in a child’s hand, made to taste death

¹⁸ *Ka-‘aṣfūratin fī kaffi ṭiflin yaḍummuhā * tadhūqu ḥiyāḍa l-mawti wa-l-ṭiflu yal‘abu*, “Like a sparrow squeezed in a child’s hand, tasting the draughts of death—mere sport to the child,” *Dīwān Majnūn Laylā*, no.6.

in all its forms—mere sport to the child.

Closer in date to Ya‘qūb ibn al-Rabī‘, although born, presumably, well after his death, al-Mubarrad (ca.210-85/825-98) quotes him at some length in the section, near the end of his miscellany *al-Kāmīl*, which he devotes to elegies.¹⁹ (He does not mention him in his monograph on elegies, *al-Ta‘āzī wa l-marāthī*.) None of the four poems quoted by al-Mubarrad—they are discussed below in section VI and translated in APPENDIX III—overlaps with those quoted by al-Marzubānī. The only biographical information that interests al-Mubarrad is the story of the love affair whose happy ending turns to tragedy. Here is al-Mubarrad’s summing-up of Ya‘qūb’s life and works:

Among the Modern (*muḥdath*, i. e. ‘Abbasid) poetry that we find novel/striking (*mimmā staṭrafnā*) is what Ya‘qūb ibn al-Rabī‘ wrote about a slave woman whom he pursued for seven years, sacrificing his wealth, standing and friends until he gained possession of her. She lived with him for six months before dying.²⁰

Finally we come to al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (392-463/1002-71). He describes Ya‘qūb

¹⁹ Al-Mubarrad, *Kāmīl*, III, 1464-6.

²⁰ Al-Mubarrad, *Kāmīl*, III, 1464.

ibn al-Rabīʿ as:

the chamberlain of Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr, and brother of al-Faḍl ibn al-Rabīʿ.²¹ A cultured man of the world who was also a poet (*kāna mina l-udabāʾ al-shuʿarāʾ*), he was a libertine and a rake (*mājinan khalīʿan*), versed in many branches of knowledge. He had a slave woman whom he pursued for seven years, sacrificing his wealth and standing until he gained possession of her. He was offered a hundred thousand dinars for her but refused to sell,²² but she lived with him for only six months before dying. He wrote many elegies to her, and it is these that show him at his best (*iḥsānuhu kulluhu majmūʿun fī marāthihā*). His other poetry, nonetheless, is by no means deficient.

²¹ On the political role of the undistinguished but tenacious al-Faḍl ibn al-Rabīʿ under Hārūn al-Rashīd and al-Amīn from 187 to 198/803 to 814, see Sourdel, *Le Vizirat ʿabbāside*, I, 183-94.

²² The first verb in the passage could be either active, in which case *bāʿa* would have the meaning of “to buy” (*aʿṭā bihā . . . fa-lam yabiʿhā*, “he offered . . . but could not buy her”), or passive (*uʿṭiya bihā*, “he was offered”), in which case *bāʿa* would mean “to sell”.

We cite al-Tanūkhī,²³ who quotes Muḥammad ibn ‘Imrān al-Marzubānī, who says:
 ‘Alī ibn Sulaymān al-Akhfash [the Younger, d. 315/927] recited to me [three lines]
 by Ya‘qūb ibn al-Rabī‘ . . .²⁴

Following these three lines (a comparison of an unnamed beloved to a gazelle, al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī quotes a further couplet, also on the authority of al-Akhfash the Younger, who heard it from al-Mubarrad’s rival Tha‘lab (200-92/815-904). Supposedly addressed to Mulk, it does not name her.²⁵ Neither poem overlaps either with those in al-

²³ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī means his own contemporary, ‘Alī ibn al-Muḥassin al-Tanūkhī (365-447/976-1055).

²⁴ Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, XIV, 267-8, no.7561. Ibn al-Anbārī (d. 577/1181) reproduces this biography almost verbatim, *Nuzhat al-alibbā’*, 45-6, the only significant difference being the phrase *aḥsanu shi‘rihi lladhī qālahū fihā marāthihā* (“the best of the poetry he wrote about her is his elegies on her”) in place of *iḥsānuhu kulluhu majmū‘un fī marāthihā*. For the sources of citations of Ya‘qūb referred to here, see APPENDIX IV.

²⁵ These two quotations, both discussed below in section V, are also the only poems quoted by Yāqūt (575-626/1179-1229) in his entry on Ya‘qūb ibn al-Rabī‘, *Mu‘jam al-*

Marzubānī's *Mu'jam al-shu'arā'* or with those in al-Mubarrad's *Kāmil*.

II Al-Mubarrad's theory of *rithā'*

Abbasid elegies are a type of poetry that goes more directly than any other to the heart of the question of what an emotion is, in terms of literary and social production. There is a close connection in Abbasid culture between poetry and other social expressions of mourning, grief and commemoration.²⁶ Al-Mubarrad, a powerful intellect as well as a social sophisticate, and himself a poet as well as a preeminent linguistic scholar and

udabā, VI, 2842-3. Seemingly the earliest surviving quotation of the second poem is in al-Jāḥiẓ (ca.160-255/776-868), *Ḥayawān*, VI, 504.

²⁶ For material evidence of what death and mourning meant in medieval Islamic societies, the exemplary survey is Diem and Schöller, *The Living and the Dead in Islam*. Based on surviving epitaphs and literary mentions of epitaphs—a number of which draw on echoes of line 5 of the elegy by al-Mutanabbī discussed below in section III and translated in full in APPENDIX II—it is the most chronologically and geographically specific, and anthropologically nuanced, point of entry to the subject. The development of Arabic mourning poetry (*rithā'* or *marthiya*) is surveyed in Hammond and Sajdi, *Transforming Loss*.

literary critic,²⁷ wrote a monograph on prose and poetic “consolations and elegies”, *al-Ta‘āzī wa-l-marāthī*. In it, it appears that the appeal to “the heart” (*qalb*)—not an unproblematic term, since *qalb* is seen, in Abbasid and earlier Arabic theory and writing, variously as the seat of the intelligence and of emotion—is the overriding criterion of excellence in mourning poetry. (For our purposes, blurred boundaries between the thinking and feeling heart work very well, given that the history of emotion is posited on a refutation of binary oppositions between rationality and emotion as ways of thinking.)²⁸ In one place, al-Mubarrad tells his readers that “as soon as this poem [on his dead son, by the Abbasid prince and poet-musician Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī (d. 224/839)] is heard, it will be recognised that it springs from *niyya ṣādiqa*” (sincere intent). *Niyya* is an

²⁷ Bernards, al-Mubarrad.

²⁸ Especially relevant here is the Stoic position, which provides a precedent and will be referred to again later: “[T]he Stoics had an ingenious theory of the passions . . . the upshot of which was that all of the passions turn out to be counter to happiness and well-being and poor life strategies. But the Stoics also taught that the emotions are judgments, in other words, shot through with intelligence (although misleading intelligence, in their view)”, Solomon, *True to Our Feelings*, 131.

internalised combination of rational choice and emotional commitment (and a term with serious connotations: ritual prayer is invalid without *niyya ṣādiqa*, and the worth of other actions depends on their underlying *niyya*). This is the overarching reason why the poem “should in truth make hearts (*qulūb*) weep and tears fall.” The other reasons are its writerly and imaginative qualities (*li-ḥusni lafẓihi wa-ṣiḥḥati maʿnāhu*) and “the noble rank of the poet” (*li . . . sharafi qāʿilihi*). Equally compelling for al-Mubarrad is a poem written by the Abbasid vizier Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Malik Ibn al-Zayyāt (d. 233/847)—well-known for his sadism in his official capacity—when the slave (*jāriya*) mother of his son died. It “lies close to the heart, cannot but be believed (*yaqrubu mina l-qalbi wa-yuḍṭarru ilā taṣḍīqihī*), arouses compassion for the poet’s faithfulness, and pity for the suffering which gave rise to it.”²⁹

III Al-Mutanabbī’s thefts from Yaʿqūb ibn al-Rabīʿ

Just because sincerity is conventionally the hallmark of mourning poetry, devices that may not spring from, or appeal directly to, the heart also need to be brought into the picture, to see what they add to the convention. Margaret Larkin’s discussion of al-Mutanabbī’s elegy on Sayf al-Dawla’s young son Abū l-Hayjāʾ shows how part of its power

²⁹ Al-Mubarrad, *Taʿāzī*, 153, 167.

rests on its incongruous echoing, in its first line, of perhaps the most famous and evocative verse in Arabic poetry, the first line of the *Mu‘allaqa* of the pre-Islamic poet Imru’ al-Qays. Capturing attention by using the same metre (*ṭawīl*) and rhyme (*-li*) and echoing Imru’ al-Qays’s assonances (*qifā nabki min dhikrā ḥabībin wa-manzili*, “Halt, you two. Let us weep at the remembrance of a beloved and tenting-grounds”), al-Mutanabbī establishes his claim to like stature: *bi-nā min-ka fawqa l-ramli mā bika fi l-ramli* (“We by the grave and you within it suffer alike”).³⁰

Al-Mutanabbī’s listeners would have realised, with a shock, that he was changing the whole bearing of a classic poetic discourse, because Imru’ al-Qays is mourning past loves, which he will go on to relive in joyful detail, whereas al-Mutanabbī mourns a child who, he says, died almost at birth (lines 14, 19, 23),³¹ and of whom nothing is recalled

³⁰ Larkin, *Al-Mutanabbi*, 47. Al-Mutanabbī’s poem is transliterated and translated in full at Appendix II. My earlier reading and translation was: Ashtiany [Bray], *Mutanabbī’s Elegy*.

³¹ “... his son, a sword just drawn (*salīl*)”; “Alas that this babe just born should return to barren-bellied earth!” (*bi-naḥsī walīdun ‘āda min ba‘di ḥamlihi * ilā baṭni arḍin lā tuṭarriqu bi-l-ḥamli*); “Is the soil then to wean him before his weaning, to eat his flesh while he yet suckles?” (*a-yaḥṭimuhu l-tawrābu qabla fiṭāmihi * wa-ya’kuluhu qabla l-bulughi ilā l-akli*). In

except the promise that death has betrayed (lines 6-8, 20-26).³²

Larkin argues that this device of al-Mutanabbī's sets a "poetic landscape", whose feminine elements are then "subverted" when female mourners (in the poem's third and fourth lines) replace Imru' al-Qays' lovers:³³ "You leave the cheeks of the women wet with tears dissolving the beauty of their wide eyes / Unpainted in mourning; they drench the earth black, dripping blood-red through their musk-laden hair" (*tarakta khudūda l-ghāniyāti wa-fawqahā * dumū'un tudhību l-ḥusna fī l-a'yuni l-nujli / tabullu l-tharā sūdan mina l-miski waḥdahu * wa-qad qaṭarat ḥumran 'alā l-sha'ari l-jathli*).

Al-Mutanabbī's repurposing of Imru' al-Qays is daring; but not quite as radical as burlesque re-uses of his *Mu'allaqa* by Abbasid contemporaries who interleaved the original with clashing insertions.³⁴ Zoltán Szombathy's article on this kind of

fact, Sayf al-Dawla's son 'Abd Allāh was four years old when he died, in Mayyāfāriqīn, in Ṣafar of 338 (949). He was buried in Aleppo, see Abū al-ʿAlā' al-Maʿarrī, *Sharḥ*, III, 85.

³² See APPENDIX II.

³³ Larkin, *Al-Mutanabbi*, 47-8.

³⁴ As is done in the first "mashup" novel, Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. A mashup is "a work of fiction which combines a pre-existing literature text,

sophisticated silliness, “Stop and Laugh over the Deserted Camping-Ground”, demonstrates vividly that nothing is sacred to the literary opportunist. Equally, nothing is beneath being raised to a higher register. Moving in the other direction from Szombathy’s parodists, elevating the trivial to the portentous, one of the aphorisms that structure al-Mutanabbī’s elegy on Abū l-Hayjā³⁵—“What is death but a thief of subtle stature, a handless assailant, a limbless pursuer” (*wa mā l-mawtu illā sāriqun daqqa shakhṣuhu * yaṣūlu bilā kaffin wa-yas‘ā bilā rijli*)—is lifted from a riddling description of a reed pen by Qudāma ibn Mūsā al-Jumaḥī,³⁶ which has the same metre and the same

often a classic work . . . with another genre . . . into a single narrative”,

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mashup_\(book\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mashup_(book)) .

³⁵ The number and sequence of lines in the version used here follow the recensions of two major medieval editions and commentaries: (Pseudo-)‘Ukbarī (d. mid-7th/13th century), *Tibyān*, III, 43-52, and Abū l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī (363-449/973-1058), *Sharḥ*, III, 85-95.

³⁶ Little seems to be known of Qudāma ibn Mūsā al-Jumaḥī as a poet. Al-Ziriklī, *A‘lām*, V, 191, gives his death date as 153/770 and identifies him as the imam of the Prophet’s mosque in Medina. As biographical sources al-Ziriklī cites works on transmitters of *ḥadīth* and Ibn Sallām al-Jumaḥī (d.232/846), *Ṭabaqāt*, I, 250.

rhyme-consonant:

yakhubbu bilā rijlin wa-yastū bilā yadin

wa-yabkī bilā ‘aynin wa-yadrī wa-yajhalū

It trots without legs, a handless assailant;

it weeps without eyes, both knowing and ignorant,

as Abū Sa‘d Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-‘Amīdī (d.433/1042) noted.³⁷

No less startling is a borrowing noted by (Pseudo-) ‘Ukbarī (d. mid-7th/13th century). In this instance, the genre and register are unaltered although the metre and rhyme are different. Al-Mutanabbī’s opening line:

binā minka fawqa l-ramli mā bika fī l-ramli

wa-hādhā lladhī yuḍnī ka-dhāka lladhī yubli

We by the grave and you within it suffer alike:

the grief that saps us, the decay that rots you, are the same,

³⁷ Al-‘Amīdī, *Ibāna*, 81.

unmistakably recalls Ya‘qūb ibn al-Rabī‘, as Pseudo-‘Ukbarī points out:

yā Mulku in kunti taḥta l-arḍi bāliwatan

fa-innanī fawqahā bālin mina l-ḥazani

Mulk! If you rot in the grave,

grief rots me at the graveside.³⁸

The couplet quoted by al-Marzubānī immediately before this line (“That Mulk has rotted in her grave rots me . . .”) sets up the contrast and parallel between decay in the grave and living pain that al-Mutanabbī copies in the structure of his opening line. So too does the line that follows (not quoted by Pseudo-‘Ukbarī): “Mulk! you rot without feeling it; but my body feels the pain of rot and loss.”³⁹ It is evident that al-Mutanabbī appropriates Ya‘qūb ibn al-Rabī‘’s idea bag and baggage (and we may wonder why al-Marzubānī, al-Mutanabbī’s contemporary, who outlived him by thirty years, did not

³⁸ Pseudo-‘Ukbarī, *Ṭibyan*, III, 43.

³⁹ Al-Marzubānī, *Mu‘jam al-shu‘arā’*, 573.

point out the theft).

IV Reading al-Mutanabbī against Ya‘qūb ibn al-Rabī‘

In al-Mutanabbī’s century, the tale-type of the man who fritters away his wealth on a beloved slave woman is dear to al-Muḥassin al-Tanūkhī (327-84/939-94), who develops a number of variants on the theme in Chapter 13 of *al-Faraj ba‘d al-shidda*;⁴⁰ but, unlike Ya‘qūb ibn al-Rabī‘ and Mulk, al-Tanūkhī’s couples, once united—usually after the hero has foolishly sold her—always live happily ever after. This is also the case in the earlier example from Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s *Ṭabaqāt*, quoted below in APPENDIX I.

Although Ya‘qūb seems to have been quite well known in literary circles in al-Mutanabbī’s day,⁴¹ al-Mutanabbī may not have been thinking primarily of the story of Mulk when he plagiarised and transposed Ya‘qūb’s line(s). But he must have been responding, later in the poem, to the kind of love-stories such poetry connoted, of which Ya‘qūb’s, Ibn al-Zayyāt’s and Maḥmūd al-Warrāq’s are only some instances. And al-

⁴⁰ See examples in Bray, *Isnāds and Models of Heroes*, 12-15.

⁴¹ Ibn al-Nadīm’s (d. end fourth/tenth century) sources attribute to him a *dīwān* of either seventy or thirty folios, *Fihrist*, 186, 191. Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (d. ca. 363/972) mentions him only in passing, however, and does not refer to the story of Mulk, *Aghānī*, XIV, 62.

Mutanabbī's readers would have brought to his poem emotional values shaped by exposure to the *adab* ideal to which the "sold slave-girl" story-type belongs, in which life and literature form a continuum and offer readers patterns for recognition and reflection. According to the "sold slave-girl" story-type, lovers who have lost each other and suffered go on to enrich each other emotionally and ethically. This is the optimistic ideal found in al-Tanūkhī's happy-ever-after tales of sundered lovers, in which women tend to hold the moral high ground.⁴² An alternative is al-Washshā's (d. 325/937) pessimistic treatment of the contradictions of romantic passion (*ishq*), which is reminiscent of Stoic views of emotion as summarised by Solomon.⁴³ In al-Washshā's view, for a male elite, *ishq* affords an opportunity to apply to the suffering caused by female worthlessness the exquisite sensibility, moral purity and self-command in which they have educated themselves; but this is such a difficult experience that, for those lacking elite qualities, it is an area of moral risk that should be avoided.⁴⁴ As these examples suggest, in *adab*, love of all kinds is usually tested, or its full extent and implications

⁴² Bray, "Men, women and slaves", 136.

⁴³ See note 28.

⁴⁴ Al-Washshā, *Ẓarf* [= *Muwashshā*], [chapter 21], 229, penultimate paragraph.

revealed, by loss or disappointment.

Al-Mutanabbī fashions a Sayf al-Dawla who is an ethical hero because he has risen above both sincere, natural feelings (such as those which al-Mubarrad’s ideal elegies spring from and respond to) and the subtle cultures of sensibility just outlined. His is a Sayf al-Dawla whose name, ceasing to be a metaphor, has reified him: “(l. 11) Take comfort, Sayf al-Dawla, Sword of the State and example to all, for you are a sword—and terrible things belong to the sword—(l. 12) Dwelling wholly in the camps of war as though weapons were all your kin . . . (l. 15) . . . his fortitude endures all things, for all to see, like a blade much burnished.”

According to the logic of this poem, ordinary human couples are doomed to suffer grief—“For what is a cherished child but a sop; what are women’s embraces but hurt to their lords?” (l. 29: *hali l-waladu l-maḥbūbu illā ta‘illatun * wa-hal khalwati l-ḥasnā’i illā adhā l-ba‘li*). Only the perfectly self-sufficient couple is invulnerable: “Whoever’s soul, like yours, is free, she is his all in all, and he her consolation” (l. 16: *wa-man kāna dhā nafsīn ka-nafsika ḥurratin * fa-fīhi lahā mughnin wa fīhā lahu muslī*). The perfect couple, the solitary hero wedded to his own noble or unenslaved (*ḥurra*) soul or self—al-Mutanabbī makes brilliant use of the fact that *nafs* is grammatically feminine—produces nothing outside itself and is inalterable. In the world of al-Mutanabbī’s poem, the immaculate

sterility of self-sufficiency stands in contrast not only to abortive human fecundity, but also, on a wider, indeed cosmic scale, to natural processes, messy and grotesque. (The historical grounding of my perception of these epistemological categories is impressionistic, but, I think, coherent with the poem.) For the human body and the elements or natural forces that are likened to it are all either accidentally or essentially deformed: the tears that “dissolve” the beauty of women’s eyes in line 3; death as a limbless pursuer in line 17; the flesh-eating soil in line 23; the unnatural, “barren-bellied earth” of line 19; and the monstrosities of the animal kingdom in line 18 (*yaruddu abū l-shibli l-khamīsa ‘ani bniḥī* wa-yuslimuhu ‘inda l-wilādati li-l-namlī*, “So the lion, who could turn back a host from his son, to creeping things”—literally, “ants”—“must yield his newborn cub”).

The elegy exacerbates grief in a way that pushes it beyond spontaneous suffering, beyond even prolonged revulsion or despair such as those of Ya‘qūb ibn al-Rabī‘ (“That Mulk has rotted in her grave rots me . . . With time, pain decreases. Mine increases daily”).⁴⁵ For in the logic of al-Mutanabbī’s poem, because death is unnatural, grief is perverse and should be denied. Death, therefore, locks the emotions of its chronicler, the

⁴⁵ Al-Marzubānī, *Mu‘jam al-shu‘arā’*, 573.

heroic poet, into mutual rebellion with his superior understanding, and stalemate is all the resolution that the poem can achieve: “(l. 27) Bitterly we mourn our dead, for no lost fulfilment of wishes in this world, for no great gift. (l. 29) To consider time and its vicissitudes is to conclude that death is murder always . . . (l. 32) Of Destiny, we cannot even hope for life, nor may we crave posterity.”

Here al-Mutanabbī, in asserting the utter bleakness of loss, has turned his back on human connection and wider emotional community, and denies that they can even exist. His own experience and understanding anticipate anything that grief can have to teach, and only Sayf al-Dawla and the Ḥamdanids, who are immune to emotion, are fit to share his knowledge.

Did the emotional community whose premises al-Mutanabbī lays down ever exist? Did the Ḥamdanids like the portrait it painted of them, and try to live up to it? In an earlier sensibility—a sensibility exemplified not only by Ya‘qūb ibn al-Rabi‘, but also by the brutal Ibn al-Zayyāt, who, in private, was apparently a man of tender feelings—bereaved love accepts its vulnerability and does not try to harden its heart. On these emotional premises, continuation and connection are possible, even after loss.

VI Al-Mubarrad’s selections from Ya‘qūb ibn al-Rabi‘

It is in accordance with these premises that the last poem by Ya‘qūb quoted by al-

Mubarrad takes an unexpected turn halfway through:

1. *fuji‘tu bi-Mulkin wa-qad ayna‘at* [metre: *mutaqārib*]

wa-tammat fa-a‘zim bihā min muṣībah

2. *fa-aṣbahtu mughtariban ba‘dahā*

wa-amsat bi-Ḥulwāna Mulkun gharībah

3. *arānī gharīban wa-in aṣbaḥat*

manāzilu ahlī minnī qarībah

4. *khuliftu⁴⁶ ‘alā ukhtihā ba‘dahā*

fa-ṣādaftuhā dhāta ‘aqlin adībah

5. *fa-aqbaltu abkī wa-tabkī ma‘ī*

bukā’a ka’ibin bi-ḥuzni ka’ibah

6. *wa-qultu lahā marḥaban marḥaban*

bi-wajhi l-ḥabībati ukhti l-ḥabībah

7. *sa-uṣfiki wuddī ḥifāẓan lahā*

⁴⁶ Unlike the editors of the several editions of *al-Kāmil* that I have consulted, I read this

verb in the passive. See following translation and note 50.

*fa-dhāki l-wafāʾu bi-ṣahri l-mughībah*⁴⁷

8. *arā-ki ka-Mulkin wa-in lam takun*

*li-Mulkin mina l-nāsi ʿindī ḍaribah*⁴⁸

1. When Mulk had reached her perfect prime, I lost her. What disaster could be greater?
2. Her death made me an exile, and Mulk a stranger in Ḥulwān.
3. I see myself as a stranger too, even though the dwellings of my kin are nearby.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ The editors of the different editions of *al-Kāmil* consulted read *maghībah*. For the reading proposed here, see following translation and note 53.

⁴⁸ Al-Mubarrad, *Kāmil*, III, 1466.

⁴⁹ Do the echoes that are pointed out by Pseudo-ʿUkbarī in line 12 of al-Mutanabbī’s

elegy—*muqīmūn mina l-hayjāʾi fī kulli **manzilin** * ka-annaka min kulli l-ṣawārimi fī **ahli***

(“**Dwelling** wholly in the camps of war, as though weapons were all your **kin**”)—include a reversal of this idea?

4. After her death, God gave me her sister in her stead.⁵⁰ She was, I discovered,
intelligent, well-bred (*dhāta ‘aqlin adībah*).
5. I gave myself up to weeping, and she wept with me, her grief and sadness
matching my sad tears.
6. “Welcome, welcome!”—I said to her—“to another aspect⁵¹ of my beloved:
my beloved’s sister.
7. I will love you truly in loyalty to her. This is keeping faith with her,⁵² now

⁵⁰ The underlying expression seems to be *khalafa llāhu ‘alayka khayran/bi-khayr*, “Que Dieu te remplace (sa perte) par quelque bien (en parlant d’une personne dont la perte ne peut être réparée)” (“May God compensate you in some way for their loss, speaking of someone whose loss is irreparable”), Kazimirski, *Dictionnaire arabe-français*, s.v. *khalafa*. Here there is an inversion (*qalb*) between the constructions of the verb’s two complements.

⁵¹ I take it that there is a play here on *wajh* meaning “face” and *wajh* meaning “aspect”, the latter being the foundation of the poet’s argument about his fidelity.

⁵² In the first three lines of the passage referred to in note 57 below, Ya‘qūb ibn al-Rabī‘ reproaches himself for abandoning Mulk in her grave. In the fourth line, he concludes:

that she, husbandless, is forbidden to me.⁵³

8. In my eyes, you are Mulk, even though, to me, there is no-one else like Mulk.”

*mā wafā fi l-‘ibādi ḥayyun li-mayyitin * ba‘da ya’sin minhu lahu fi l-iyābī* (“No living mortal keeps faith with the dead once he knows they will not return”; metre: *khafīf*), al-Mubarrad, *Kāmil*, III, 1465. See APPENDIX III, (2)(i).

⁵³ *Mughīb* or *mughība* is a woman whose husband is absent, a grass widow. I take it that what we have here is play on legal concepts, and that *zahr* is used in allusion to *zihār* divorce (of which the formula is: “be as my mother’s back [= body] to me” = “be forbidden to me”). The question arises: were the couple (master and slave) really married? Theoretically, in law, marriage to a free man would have required the slave woman’s manumission (as in the story of Maḥmūd al-Warrāq and Sakan; see APPENDIX I); but social practice may have been different. At all events, in the second half of line 2 of the first poem in the sequence quoted by al-Mubarrad, Ya‘qūb ibn al-Rabī‘ says: *yā qurba ma’tamiḥā minā l-‘urusi* (“so soon did her funeral follow her wedding”, metre: *kāmil*), *Kāmil*, III, 1464 and APPENDIX III, (1).

A sharing of grief and a healing of sorts—this is the story the poem tells and the self-justification the poet offers. Al-Mubarrad quotes it as the last of the sequence of elegies he attributes to Ya‘qūb ibn al-Rabī‘, and I suppose that he intends it both to round off the biography and to suggest that emotional gain can grow out of two negatives: the experience of loss, and slavery, a condition often adverse to gentle and equitable gender relationships.⁵⁴ Mulk’s slave status is, however, presented only from a male viewpoint (not always the case in such stories, some of which imagine what it feels like to be a female chattel with her own emotional viewpoint).⁵⁵ For many years Mulk was beyond Ya‘qūb’s reach, as an unaffordable chattel in other people’s possession. Whether this made her as unhappy as it did him, we are not told, since neither Ya‘qūb nor the biographers lend her a voice; nor do we know if she was glad to enter his possession; and how her unnamed “sister” (perhaps simply a fellow-*jāriya*) afterwards came to be available and affordable to him is not explained. Perhaps the sister is just a thought-

⁵⁴ Al-Nāṭifī, for example, used to whip his slave, the poet ‘Inān, Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Imā’*, 30, 32.

⁵⁵ See, for example, Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī’s biographies of women slave poets, *al-Imā’ al-shawā‘ir*.

experiment, the only kind of relationship Ya‘qūb could imagine that might bring consolation without guilt. At all events, what the poem does *not* say raises down-to-earth questions about the basis for the exquisite sentiments it conjures up.

V Biography, novel, or song-cycle?

Ya‘qūb’s idea of love living on to console those who share a common grief may be less a self-exculpatory record of what happened after Mulk’s death than an imagining and exploration of the emotionally creative uses of suffering. Likewise, the narrative in which al-Mubarrad includes it is something other than a documentary deployment of biographical data. Rather, it is an example of the psychological exploration of the materials of biography, through which al-Mubarrad builds up a coherent picture of the poet’s inner life, which he offers to his readers as a means to reflect upon the complexities, and often unavowed realities of coming to terms with grief (“No living mortal keeps faith with the dead”).⁵⁶

On this basis, some Abbasid uses of biography may be equated, in intent and function, with the modern uses of fiction. In a more prolix culture, Ya‘qūb ibn al-Rabī’s story could have been the subject of a novel. Within its own culture, in a period of

⁵⁶ APPENDIX III, (2)(i), l.4.

intense intellectual and literary experiment, al-Mubarrad's sequence combines several nascent or established formats, genres and voices: biography, autobiography, literary criticism and lyricism, and for purposes of interpretation may usefully be compared to a song-cycle.

What I call lyricism is, in this instance, the building of an autobiographical narrative through poetry, as is done in the great German song-cycles of the early nineteenth century. In a manner comparable to Robert Schumann's selective settings of Heinrich Heine's *Dichterliebe* and Adelbert von Chamisso's *Frauenliebe und -leben*, al-Mubarrad takes his own pick of Ya'qūb ibn al-Rabī's poetic passages to construct a first-person cycle with a running thread of narrative,⁵⁷ chronicling the progress of love, grief,

⁵⁷ Chamisso's verse cycle *Frauenliebe und -leben* has a final verse, omitted by Schumann, in which the heroine, just before her death, hands on her spiritual legacy to her granddaughter; see the sleeve note by Graham Johnson (1999) on his Hyperion Records recording of Schumann's *Frauenliebe und -leben* (www.hyperion-records.co.uk).

Schumann was even more radically selective with Heine's *Lyrisches Intermezzo*, picking only 16 of the 65 poems, not all in sequence, for his *Dichterliebe*, Op 48.

despair and anger,⁵⁸ and adding up to a tale which he, al-Mubarrad, has crafted, and which may not be the poet's own understanding of his story, nor the only way in which it could be told.

Thus the two lines of love poetry with which al-Marzubānī ends his entry on Yaʿqūb ibn al-Rabīʿ (quoted above in section I) are given “as transmitted by Hārūn ibn ʿAlī ibn Yaḥyā ibn Abī Maṣṣūr [al-Aʿlā] al-Munajjim” (251-88/865-901),⁵⁹ whose selection, and narrative—if he ever gave his quotations a context—may have been very different

⁵⁸ For the poet's anger with himself, see the first passage from the second poem quoted by al-Mubarrad (beginning *layta shiʿrī bi-ayyi dhanbin li-Mulkin * kāna hajrī li-qabrihā wa-jtinābī*, “What has Mulk done to deserve that I should desert her and shun her grave?”, metre: *khafif*), APPENDIX III, (2)(i), l.1. The poet expresses his frustration in the second passage from the same poem, *Kāmil*, III, 1465 and APPENDIX III, (2)(ii), ll.5-9.

⁵⁹ Al-Marzubānī, *Muʿjam al-shuʿarāʾ*, 573. Hārūn ibn ʿAlī's transmission may have formed part of his book on the best verse of one hundred and sixty-one early ʿAbbasid (*muwallad*) poets, which was hailed by Ibn Khallikān as the prototype of such later maps of the cultural scene as al-ʿImād al-Iṣfahānī's (519-97/1125-1201) *Kharīdat al-qaṣr*, *Wafayāt*, VI, 78-9, no. 780.

from both al-Marzubānī's and al-Mubarrad's. And, unlike al-Mubarrad, al-Marzubānī does not fit the poetry he quotes into a life-story: his choice of pieces on Mulk showcases conceits on the theme of Ya'qūb's inalterable grief, contrasted with Mulk's bodily decay, which do not progress beyond raw grief.

Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī's choice of verse takes an oblique view of Ya'qūb ibn al-Rabī's great love affair. Having said that his elegies on Mulk are his best poetry (or the best he wrote about her; see note 24), he then chooses to quote, without contextualisation or explanation, three lines of love poetry which may or may not be addressed to Mulk, and might date either from the period of Ya'qūb's courtship of her, or from after her death. In them the poet declares that he cannot join in a gazelle hunt, because he cannot cause the death of animals "whose necks and eyes resemble yours".⁶⁰ The two, equally uncontextualised, lines with which al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī concludes his biography of Ya'qūb are renunciatory—or bitterly ironic—in tone:

la-in kāna qurbuki lī nāfi'an

[metre: *mutaqārib*]

la-bu'duki aṣbaḥa lī anfa'ā

⁶⁰ Metre: *kāmil*; rhyme: *-āmā*, al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, XIV, 268.

*li-annī amintu razāyā l-duhūrī*⁶¹

wa-in jalla khaṭbun bi-an ajza‘ā

If your presence was good for me, your absence is better:

my grief shields me from Fate’s blows, how great soever.⁶²

This is an ambivalent closure, as regards the experience of love—but only by inference does it read as an elegy; and there is no mention of any consolation in the form of a “sister”. (The same goes for a poem cited by Muḥammad ibn Ja‘far al-Kharā‘īṭī (d.327/938) in his book on love and lovers, *I‘tilāl al-qulūb*.)⁶³

⁶¹ The line break, which is faulty in *Tārīkh Baghdād*, is correctly placed in Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr al-Namarī (368-463/978-1070) *Bahjat al-majālis*, III, 360. The couplet is also attested with minor variants by al-Jāḥiẓ, *Ḥayawān*, VI, 504.

⁶² Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, XIV, 268.

⁶³ Al-Kharā‘īṭī, *I‘tilāl*, 337: metre: ṭawīl: *a-yā Mulku yā man lam yakun fī mawaddatī * li-unthā siwāhā min naṣībīn wa-lā shirki / idhā dhakarati l-naḥsu bādarat dhikrahā * bi-fayḍi dumū‘in lam tazal ba‘dakum tabkī / [fa-yā] ṭūla shawqī layta lī minki naẓratun * fa-abdhila fihā mā aḥāṭa bihi mulkī* (“Mulk, I have loved no woman other than or besides you. / To think of you is

Al-Mubarrad elects to end on a piece—“When Mulk had reached her perfect prime . . . there is no-one else like Mulk”—that affords a smooth closure. At the same time as bringing the internal narrative of what I call his lyrical sequence to a close, his skilfully chosen poem itself describes a circle—from Mulk to pseudo-Mulk to Mulk again—and implicitly closes the biographical frame or frame-story (“Among the Modern poetry that we find novel/striking is what Ya‘qūb ibn al-Rabī‘ wrote about a slave woman whom he pursued for seven years . . . She lived with him for six months before dying”). This frame is, in addition, a critical framing of the poems al-Mubarrad is about to quote, of which he uses the verb *istatrafā*, “to find novel/striking”, twice, and the adjective *malīḥ* twice, as well as pointing out a borrowing and a similarity. Such intuitive evaluations and learned parallels were becoming standard heads under which a poem’s

to weep, as I have never ceased to do after you[r death], / Forever longing for one glimpse of you, for which I’d give all my wordly goods”, a play on Mulk’s name, see note 16). The poem is cited with no story to contextualise it, as is a four-line piece attributed to Ya‘qūb on wine and the cup-bearer, metre: *ṭawīl*, rhyme: *-afu, I‘tilāl*, 342.

craftmanship and resonance were evaluated.⁶⁴ In al-Mubarrad's biography, the voice of the biographee, Ya'qūb ibn al-Rabī', is thereby interleaved with other, anonymous autobiographical voices, in excursions on intertextuality which further explore love and loss⁶⁵ and establish the literary basis for an emotional community.

⁶⁴ For the borrowing and the similarity, see the next note below. I will not try to translate *malīḥ*, which al-Mubarrad applies to the fourth (and final) piece in his biography ("When Mulk had reached her perfect prime . . . there is no-one else like Mulk"), and to the third piece—probably extracted from the same poem as his first piece—which describes how Mulk withered like a narcissus, and her beautiful features shrank or darkened in death (reading *tashahhalat* for *tasahhalat* in line 2), an image of dissolution that recalls al-Mutanabbī's metaphor of tears "dissolving" the beauty of the women's eyes in line 3 of his elegy. Al-Mubarrad calls all of Ya'qūb ibn al-Rabī's elegies on Mulk "novel/striking", but singles out the second piece, *Kāmil*, III, 1464, 1465, 1466.

⁶⁵ *Wa-akhadha mā fī ṣadri hādhā l-kalāmī min qawli l-qā'il . . .* ("The first part of this is taken from [a couplet by a poet whom al-Mubarrad does not identify]"); and: *qarībun min hādhā qawlu mra'atin sharīfatin tārthī zawjahā wa-lam yakun dakhala bihā . . .* ("Similar to this are

What al-Mubarrad does may be compared, and in a number of respects contrasted, with what Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, his contemporary, does with his biography of Maḥmūd al-Warrāq. Ibn al-Mu‘tazz is equally if not more selective in the poetry he quotes, and it must be on purpose that he chooses to demonstrate Maḥmūd’s stature as a poet with a piece which lays down as a rule for living the stoic (or Stoic) disciplining and dampening of the emotions, whereas the story of Maḥmūd’s love for Sakan shows his real-life emotions see-sawing between self-denial and self-interest, and finding their ultimate equilibrium in a reckless commitment to romantic love. Is this ironic? Comic? Does it undermine the values of the biographical vignette, or, rather, prove that, whatever they think they believe, people live by more than one set of truths?

Al-Mutanabbī does something different again. He wanted his portrayal of Sayf-al-Dawla’s stoicism to merge with his own, autobiographical poetic voice in conveying a lofty, lonely, unique acquaintance with grief: “(l. 30) In youth I too tasted the sweets of progeny: think not, therefore, I speak in ignorance. (l. 31) I know far more of Time than Time itself, and Fate cannot keep pace with my dictation. (l.32) Of Destiny, we cannot

lines by a noblewoman whose marriage had not been consummated, lamenting her husband . . .”), al-Mubarrad, *Kāmil*, III, 1464.

even hope for life, nor may we crave posterity.”

In modern times, al-Mutanabbī's has become the more authoritative voice; but the many Abbasid poets and biographers of before and after his period who saw life on a different scale were no less convinced than he that their understanding of the meaning and management of loss and grief was true and instructive.

Conclusion

Barbara Rosenwein's work on emotional communities and the history of emotions⁶⁶ gives good reasons why the voices of the many should be listened to. The many—as opposed to the classics such as al-Mutanabbī, who have often become almost dehistoricised—show us more clearly how the artists of a given time worked out their ideas, and how the public responded to them: how, between them, emotional values were created and circulated.

It is still true, as James E. Montgomery says, that “we do not really know how [emotional] values, beliefs . . . were organized at any given point in time during the Arabo-Islamic past. What,” he asks, “. . . are the schemes of emotional organization which obtained in the pre-modern eras? What variations, fluctuations, alterations, and

⁶⁶ Rosenwein, *Emotional communities and Generations of feeling*.

articulations were they subject to by different writers at different times?”⁶⁷ He argues that it is the conventions of medieval Arabic poetry that supply “schemes of cognition.”⁶⁸ The “novelties” of Ya‘qūb ibn Rabī’s poetry, and al-Mubarrad’s appreciation of them, inflect generalised emotional “schemes of cognition”, as does Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s simultaneously romantic and ironic biography of Maḥmūd al-Warrāq, and the hundreds and thousands of Abbasid encounters between poetry and biography that remain to be explored in depth.

Essential to a historical and critical re-cognition of the Abbasid literary landscape is the work of probing the terse biographical narratives and critical pronouncements that hold a commanding place in the tradition. By examining their dialogue with both poetry and story-telling, we can come much closer to a history of the emotions, which in turn will help us organise our understanding of Abbasid literature.

APPENDIX I

⁶⁷ Montgomery, *Convention as Cognition*, 171.

⁶⁸ Montgomery, *Convention as Cognition*, 173.

Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, *Ṭabaqāt al-shu‘arā’ al-muḥdathīn*: biography of Maḥmūd al-Warrāq⁶⁹

Al-Qāsim ibn Dāwūd informed me: I was told by al-Ḥasan al-‘Alawī.⁷⁰

Sakan, the slave of Maḥmūd al-Warrāq, was a most beautiful creature. She was highly accomplished (*min . . . aktharihim adaban*), sang most sweetly, and wrote excellent poetry.

It happened that Maḥmūd lost a lot of money and found himself in great difficulties. He said to his slave Sakan:

“Sakan, I expect you can see that I’m in a bad way and have fallen on hard times. I swear by Almighty God that I don’t mind for myself, but it hurts me to see you suffer. I should like you to live in luxury. If I put you up for sale, it may please God to rescue you from this miserable poverty and make you rich and comfortable. Tell me if this is what you wish.”

The slave replied: “It is as you please,” and Maḥmūd offered her for sale.

All the aristocracy wanted to buy her, and bid against each other. One of the

⁶⁹ Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, *Ṭabaqāt*, 366-7.

⁷⁰ Both unidentified.

bidders was a Ṭāhirid grandee,⁷¹ who offered a hundred thousand dirhams. Once the cash was brought and Maḥmūd saw the fat purses, he weakened, and was eager to close the deal. He said to Sakan:

“Get dressed and go!”

She put on her things and advanced among them like the full moon rising in splendour, with Maḥmūd at her side. Eyes streaming, she asked him:

“Maḥmūd, is this how it’s to end between us? Do you prefer a hundred thousand dirhams to me?”

He replied: “Do you want to live a life of abject poverty?”

“Yes!” she said. “I can bear it. You complain if you want!”

Then Maḥmūd said: “I declare before you all that I set this woman free unconditionally, and that I give her as her dowry my mansion, which is all that I possess, and which is worth fifty thousand dirhams.—You, sir, take back your money, and may it bring you blessing.”

The Ṭāhirid replied: “You have earned the money by your actions. It belongs to

⁷¹ Mainstays of the Abbasid regime, one branch of the family governed Khurasan, the other Baghdad. They were famous for their love of the arts.

the two of you; I refuse to take it back.”

Maḥmūd accepted the money and lived happily ever after with Sakan.

Maḥmūd composed a great deal of poetry, most of it admonitory and aphoristic (*aktharuhu amthāl wa-ḥikam wa-mawāʿiẓ wa-adab*), in which he was no less successful than Ṣāliḥ ibn ʿAbd al-Quddūs and Sābiq al-Barbarī.⁷² Here is an example:

[metre: *mutaqārib*; rhyme: *-i/alā*]

He who is firm of purpose envisions

misfortune, before ever it occurs:

Then, if it strikes, he has no fear,

because he has envisioned it already.

Seeing that one trouble leads to another,

he expects the end of one to be the start of another.

But the fool feels safe from Fate, for he forgets

the downfall of all those who have passed on.

Surprised by vicissitude,

⁷² Ṣāliḥ ibn ʿAbd al-Quddūs (d. ca. 167/783) and Sābiq al-Barbarī (d. ca. 100/718) set the benchmark for aphoristic verse.

he howls in misfortune.

Had he only prepared his mind to be firm,

he would have known how to be steadfast in adversity.

APPENDIX II

Abū l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī, *Sharḥ Dīwān Abī l-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbī*, III, 89-95

1. *binā minka fawqa l-ramli mā bika fī l-ramli*

 wa-hādhā lladhī yuḍnī ka-dhāka lladhī yublī
2. *ka-annaka abṣarta lladhī bī wa khiftahu*

 idhā ‘ishta fa-khtarta l-ḥimāma ‘alā l-thukli
3. *tarakta khudūda l-ghāniyāti wa-fawqahā*

 dumū‘un tudhību l-ḥusna fī l-a‘yuni l-nujli
4. *tabullu l-tharā sūdan mina l-miski waḥdahu*

 wa-qad qaṭarat ḥumran ‘alā l-sha‘ari l-jathli
5. *fa-in taku fī qabrin fa-innaka fī l-ḥashā*

 wa-in taku ṭiflan fa-l-asā laysa bi-l-ṭifli
6. *wa mithluka lā yubkā ‘alā qadri sinnihi*

 wa lākin ‘alā qadri l-makhīlati wa-l-aṣli

7. *a-lasta mina l-qawmi lladhī min rimāḥihim*
nadāhum wa-min qatlāhumū muhjatu l-bukhli
8. *bi-mawlūdihim šamtu l-lisāni ka-ghayrihi*
wa lākinna fī a‘ṭāfihī mantiqa l-fadli
9. *tusallīhimu ‘alyā’uhum ‘an muṣābihim*
wa-yashghuluhum kasbu l-thanā’i ‘ani l-shughli
10. *aqallu bilā’an bi-l-razāyā mina l-qanā*
wa-aqdamu bayna l-jahfalayni mina l-nubli
11. *‘azā’aka Sayfa l-Dawlati l-muqtadā bihi*
fa-innaka naṣlun wa-l-shadā’idu li-l-naṣli
12. *muqīmūn mina l-hayjā’i fī kulli manzilin*
ka’annaka min kulli l-ṣawārimi fī ahli
13. *wa-lam ara a‘ṣā minka li-l-huzni ‘abratan*
wa-athbata ‘aqlan wa-l-qulūbu bilā ‘aqli
14. *takhūnu l-manāyā ‘ahdahu fī salīlihi*
wa-tanṣuruhu bayna l-fawārisi wa-l-raqli
15. *wa yabqā ‘alā marri l-ḥawādithi ṣabruhu*
wa yabdū kamā yabdū l-firindu ‘alā l-ṣaqli

16. *wa-man kāna dhā nafsīn ka-nafsika ḥurratin*
 fa-fīhi lahā mughnin wa-fihā lahu muslī
17. *wa-mā l-mawtu illā sārīqun daqqa shakhṣuhu*
 yaṣūlu bilā kaffin wa-yas‘ā bilā rijli
18. *yaruddu abū l-shibli l-khamīsa ‘ani bnihi*
 wa-yuslimuhu ‘inda l-wilādati li-l-namli
19. *bi-nafsī walīdun ‘āda min ba‘di ḥamlihi*
 ilā baṭni arḍin lā tuṭarriqu bi-l-ḥamli
20. *badā wa-lahū wa‘du l-saḥābati bi-l-riwā*
 wa ṣadda wa-fīnā ghullatu l-baladi l-maḥli
21. *wa-qad maddati l-khaylu l-‘itāqu ‘uyūnahā*
 ilā waqti tabdīli l-rikābi mina l-na‘li
22. *wa-rī‘a lahū jayshu l-‘aduwwi wa-mā mashā*
 wa jāshat lahū l-ḥarbu l-ḍarūsu wa-mā taghlī
23. *a-yaftimuhū l-tawrābu qabla fiṭāmihi*
 wa-ya’kuluhu qabla l-bulūghi ilā l-akli
24. *wa-qabla yarā min jūdihi mā ra’aytahu*
 wa-yasma‘a fīhi mā samī‘ta mina l-‘adhli

the grief that saps us, the decay that rots you are the same.

2. Can it be that, from me, you divined what grief would be,

and, fearing it if you lived on, chose death over bereavement?

3. You leave the cheeks of the women wet

with tears dissolving the beauty of their wide eyes

4. Unpainted in mourning; they drench the earth black,

dripping blood-red through their musk-laden hair.

5. Though you are in the grave, yet you are in our bowels;

though you are but a child, sorrow is no child:

6. Not according to their years are those like you bewailed

but according to their promise and their lineage;

7. For you come of that tribe that counts among its spears

largess, among its victims ungenerousness itself,

8. And though their infant's tongue lacked speech, like any other's,

his whole frame told of virtue.

9. The loftiness of its men will console them for their loss,
their quest for praise of their deeds distract them from distress,
10. Less heedful of calamity than spear-shafts,
swifter to the forefront of battle than arrows: therefore
11. Take comfort, Sayf al-Dawla, Sword of the State and example to all,
for you are a sword—and terrible things belong to the sword—
12. Dwelling wholly in the camps of war,
as though weapons were all your kin,
13. Than whom I have seen none more refractory to weeping,
nor firmer-minded when hearts lose their wits.
14. Traitors to him in his son, a sword just drawn, the Fates
yet give him the victory among horsemen and footmen,
15. And his fortitude endures all things
for all to see, like a blade much burnished.
16. Whoever's soul, like yours, is free,
she is his all in all, and he her consolation.

17. What is death but a thief of subtle stature,
a handless assailant, a limbless pursuer?
18. So the lion, who could turn back a host from his son,
to creeping things must yield his newborn cub:
19. Alas that this babe just born should return
to barren-bellied earth!
20. All could see his promise of a rain of plenty—
but he has departed, and we are a land parched;
21. The high-bred chargers had strained their gaze
to the time when his foot would exchange stirrup for shoe;
22. And even before he could walk, the foe feared him,
and cruel war, undeclared, stirred at his name.
23. Is the soil then to wean him before his weaning,
to eat his flesh while he yet suckles,
24. Before he, like you, can see the working of his bounty
and hear himself chided, like you, for too much giving;

25. Before, seasoned like you in peace and in war,
he can like you become a prince without peer,
26. Whose spears are all the charter of his rule,
so sharp that he can never be deposed?
27. Bitterly we mourn our dead, for no lost fulfilment
of wishes in this world, for no great gift.
28. To consider time and its vicissitudes
is to conclude that death is murder always;
29. For what is a cherished child but a sop,
what are women's embraces but hurt to their lords?
30. In youth I too tasted the sweets of progeny:
think not, therefore, I speak in ignorance.
31. I know far more of Time than Time itself,
and Fate cannot keep pace with my dictation:
32. Of Destiny, we cannot even hope
for life, nor may we crave posterity.

APPENDIX III

al-Mubarrad, *al-Kāmil*: sequence of quotations from Ya‘qūb ibn al-Rabī‘

(1) *Kāmil*, III, 1464; metre: *kāmil*; rhyme: -/x/si; first line: *li-llāhi ānisatun fuji‘tu bihā * mā*

kāna ab‘adahā mina l-danasi

1. God keep my lost darling, so pure and good.
2. News of joy and death arrived together, so soon did her funeral follow her wedding.
3. Fate seized its chance, Mulk, to strike my heart off guard.
4. Many are the tears that will never dry, and many those who sigh out their souls for you.
5. So long as doves sob at dawn, so long shall I mourn you.⁷³
6. You and I, Mulk, are an example, a lesson to grieve all who hold each other dear:
7. Never again, now we are parted, may we delight in each other.

(2) (i) *Kāmil*, III, 1465; metre: *khafīf*; rhyme: -ābī; first line: *layta shi‘rī bi-ayyi dhanbin li-*

⁷³ A proverbial expression; compare al-Khansā’ (d. ca. 24/644), *Dīwān*, 125, no. 7, l. 4: *ta-*

*llāhi ansā bna ‘Amri l-khayri mā * naṭaqat ḥamāmatun [. . .].*

*Mulkin * kāna hajrī li-qabrihā wa-jtinābī*

1. What has Mulk done to deserve that I should desert her and shun her grave?
2. Has she been guilty of something to make me hate her? Or is it because I know
she has other things to do than listen to my reproaches,⁷⁴
3. Or because neither her anger nor her approval can touch me, now that I have laid
her face in earth?
4. No living mortal keeps faith with the dead once he knows they will not return.

(2) (ii) (a further extract from (2) (i)), *Kāmil*, III, 1465; metre: *khafif*; rhyme: -ābī; first line:

*innamā ḥasratī idhā mā tadhkkar— * —tu ‘inā’ī bihā wa-ṭūla ṭilābī*

5. I grieve to think how long I toiled in pursuit of her:
6. Seven years I pursued her, unremittingly, in every way I could.
7. Then chance and God’s will brought us together; and once together, the years of
parting were nothing.
8. Our six months together were like a dream or a mirage;
9. Then death and joy arrived together, so soon did your departure follow your

⁷⁴ Such as answer the Recording Angels.

coming.

(3) (from the same poem as (1)?), *Kāmil*, III, 1465; metre: *kāmil*; rhyme: -/x/si; first line:

*ḥattā idhā fatara l-lisānū wa-aslamat*⁷⁵ * *li-l-mawti qad dhabalat dhubūla l-narjisi*

1. Then her tongue faltered, and she yielded to death like a narcissus withering;
2. Her lovely features sank, and she moaned, fighting for breath:
3. Death turned my hopes into despair, as death does all hopes.⁷⁶

(4) *Kāmil*, III, 1466; metre: *mutaqārib*; rhyme: -ībah; first line: *fujī‘tu bi-Mulkin wa-qad*

ayna‘at * *wa-tammat fa-a‘zim bihā min muṣībah*

1. When Mulk had reached her perfect prime, I lost her. What disaster could be greater?
2. Her death made me an exile, and Mulk a stranger in Ḥulwān.

⁷⁵ Alternative reading to *aṣbaḥat*, *Kāmil*, III, 1465, note 4.

⁷⁶ Hārūn’s footnote 4, al-Jāḥiẓ, *Ḥayawān*, VI, 504, suggests that *kamā* * *raja‘a l-yaqīnu*

maṭāmi‘a l-mutalammisi is an allusion to the pre-Islamic poet al-Mutalammis, who was

handed his own sealed death warrant by the king of al-Ḥīra.

3. I see myself as a stranger too, even though the dwellings of my kin are nearby.
4. After her death, God gave me her sister in her stead. She was, I discovered,
intelligent, well-bred.
5. I gave myself up to weeping, and she wept with me, her grief and sadness
matching my sad tears.
6. “Welcome, welcome!”—I said to her—“to another aspect of my beloved: my
beloved’s sister.
7. I will love you truly in loyalty to her. This is keeping faith with her, now that she,
husbandless, is forbidden to me.
8. In my eyes, you are Mulk, even though, to me, there is no-one else like Mulk.”

APPENDIX IV

Sources of citations of Ya‘qūb in al-Rabī‘ in this article, in chronological order

al-Jāhiz (ca. 160-255/776-868):

Ḥayawān, VI, 504: “elegy on his *jāriya*”:

2 lines; metre: *kāmil*; rhyme: *-/x/si*; first line: *ḥattā idhā fatara l-lisānū wa-aṣṣbaḥat **

li-l-mawti qad dhabalat dhubūla l-narjisi

Ḥayawān, VI, 505: no specification:

2 lines; metre: *mutaqārib*; rhyme: -a‘ā; first line: *la-in kāna qurbuki lī nāfi‘ā * la-*
bu‘duki qad kāna lī anfa‘ā

al-Mubarrad (ca. 210-85/825-98):

Kāmil, III, 1465: no specification:

4 lines + 5 lines; metre: *khafif*; rhyme: -ābī; first lines: *layta shi‘rī bi-ayyi dhanbin li-*
*Mulkin * kāna hajrī li-qabrihā wa-jtinābī + innamā ḥasratī idhā mā tadhkkar— * —tu ‘inā‘ī bihā*
wa-ṭūla ṭilābī

Kāmil, III, 1466: no specification:

8 lines; metre: *mutaqārib*; rhyme: -ībah; first line: *fujī‘tu bi-Mulkin wa-qad ayna‘at **
wa-tammat fa-a‘ẓim bihā min muṣībah

Kāmil, III, 1464: “poem on a *jāriya* whom he pursued for seven years . . .”:

7 lines; metre: *kāmil*; rhyme: -/x/si; first line: *li-llāhi ānisatun fujī‘tu bihā * mā kāna*
ab‘adahā mina l-danasi

Kāmil, III, 1465: “elegy on her [the *jāriya*]”:

3 lines; metre: *kāmil*; rhyme: -/x/si; first line: *ḥattā idhā fatara l-lisānū wa-aṣḥaḥat⁷⁷ **

⁷⁷ In Appendix III, I followed the alternative reading, *aslamat*.

li-l-mawti qad dhabalat dhubūla l-narjisi

al-Kharāʾitī (d. 327/938):

Iʿtilāl al-qulūb, 342: no specification [wine song]:

4 lines; metre: **ṭawīl**; rhyme: **-afu**; first line: *a-lā innamā l-ʿayshu l-ladhīdhu*

mudāmatun * *ʿuqārūn ka-lawni l-nāri ṣafrāʾu qarqafu*

Iʿtilāl al-qulūb, 337: no specification:

3 lines; metre: **ṭawīl**; rhyme: **-ki**; first line: *a-yā Mulku yā man lam yakun fī*

mawaddatī * *li-unthā siwāhā min naṣībīn wa-lā shirki*

al-Marzubānī (ca. 297-384/910-94):

Muʿjam al-shuʿarāʾ, 573: no specification:

2 lines; metre: **ṭawīl**; rhyme: **-i/abu**; first line: *yuqatṭiʿu qalbī bi-l-ṣudūdi tajanniyan* *

wa-yazʿamu annī mudhnibun wa-hwa mudhnibu

Muʿjam al-shuʿarāʾ, 573: no specification::

2 lines; metre: **khafīf**; rhyme: **-īdu**; first line: *baliyat Mulkun fī l-turābi fa-ablā—* * —*nī*

balāhā wa-dhikru Mulkin jadīdu

Muʿjam al-shuʿarāʾ, 573: “elegy on his jāriya Mulk”:

2 lines; metre: **ṭawīl**; rhyme: **-ū/īdahā**; first line: *raʿaytu thiyāba l-nāsi fī kulli*

*maʿtamin * idhā ḥtafalū zurqa l-thiyābi wa-sūdahā*

Muʿjam al-shuʿarāʾ, 573: no specification:

2 lines; metre: **basīṭ**; rhyme: **-anī**; first line: *yā Mulku in kunti taḥta l-arḍi bāliyyatan **

fa-innani fawqahā bālin mina l-ḥazani

Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr al-Namarī (368-463/978-1070):

Bahjat al-majālis, III, 372: “elegy on his jāriya”:

3 lines; metre: **kāmil**; rhyme: **-/x/si**; first line: *ḥattā idhā fatara l-lisānū wa-aṣbaḥat **

li-l-mawti qad dhabalat dhubūla l-narjisi

Bahjat al-majālis, III, 360: “elegy on his jāriya”:

2 lines; metre: **mutaqārib**; rhyme: **-aʿā**; first line: *la-in kāna qurbuki lī nāfiʿan * la-*

buʿduki aṣbaḥa lī anfaʿā

al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (392-463/1002-71):

Tārīkh Baghdād, XIV, 268: “on his jāriya”:

2 lines; metre: **mutaqārib**; rhyme: **-aʿā**; first line: *la-in kāna qurbuki lī nāfiʿan * la-*

buʿduki aṣbaḥa lī anfaʿā

Tārīkh Baghdād, XIV, 267: no specification:

3 lines; metre: *kāmil*; rhyme: -*āmā*; first line: *aḍḥaw yaṣīduna l-ẓibā'a wa-innanī * la-*
arā taṣayyudahā 'alayya ḥarāmā

Ibn al-Anbārī (513-77/1119-81):

Nuzhat al-alibbā', 46: no specification:

2 lines; metre: *mutaqārib*; rhyme: -*a'ā*; first line: *la-in kāna qurbuki lī nāfi'an * la-*
bu'duki aṣbaḥa lī anfa'ā

Nuzhat al-alibbā', 45-6: “he had a *jāriya* whom he pursued for seven years”:

3 lines; metre: *kāmil*; rhyme: -*āmā*; first line: *aḍḥaw yaṣīduna l-ẓibā'a wa-innanī * la-*
arā taṣayyudahā 'alayya ḥarāmā

Yāqūt (575-626/1179-1229):

Mu'jam al-udabā', VI, 2843: “Ya'qūb ibn al-Rabī' loved a *jāriya*, and pursued her for
seven years . . .”:

2 lines; metre: *mutaqārib*; rhyme: -*a'ā*; first line: *la-in kāna qurbuki lī nāfi'an * fa-*
bu'duki aṣbaḥa lī anfa'ā

Mu'jam al-udabā', VI, 2843: no specification:

3 lines; metre: *kāmil*; rhyme: *-āmā*; first line: *rāḥū yaṣīduna l-ḡibā'a wa-innanī * la-arā*
taṣayyudahā 'alayya ḥarāmā

Pseudo-ʿUkbarī (d. mid-seventh/thirteenth century):

Tibyān, III, 43: “elegy on his *jāriya* called Mulk”:

2 lines; metre: *basīṭ*; rhyme: *-anī*; first line: *yā Mulku in kunti taḥta l-arḍi bāliyan * fa-innanī fawqahā bālin mina l-ḥazani*

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