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The American University in Cairo  
School of Humanities and Social Science

**The Image of Woman in Pre-Islamic Qasida: The Mu'allaqat Poetry as a Case Study.**

A Thesis Submitted to  
The Department of Arab and Islamic Civilization (ARIC)  
In partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Arts in  
**Arabic Studies (Arabic Language and Literature)**

Presented

By

**Kamaldeen Yakubu Zahrrah**

Under the supervision of

**Prof. El-Sayyed Fadl Faragallah**

**May/ 2012**

## **Dedication**

For my daughter

**Maryam Kamaldeen Yakubu (Nnna)**

and my friend

**Beylal Racheha.**

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## **Abstract**

This study is intended to examine the depiction of woman in the pre-Islamic poetic collection known as the Mu'allaqat; which are considered the best piece of poetic collection in literary Arabic. The significance of this study is to identify the true rationale behind the poets' over emphasis on woman in their odes. A combination of both empirical and library-based method is adopted in this study and Discourse and Qualitative contents Analysis are the techniques applied in interpreting the data.

The study identifies two different types of women in the odes, the ideal woman who is not a specific woman per se, but a woman considered a deity and worshiped due to her fertility and reproductive function as a mother, she was deified by invoking her memory in the prelude of the poems as form of reverence and incantations which the poets inherited from the ancient religious legend and standardized it as format for starting a Qasida. The other type of woman is the real normal woman, whom most of the time is a true beloved of the poet, who the poet describes in his poem by giving a vivid account for their love affairs. She may also be a bar attendant, and *Jaariya* or slave woman.

The study found the depiction of both the Ideal and real woman in Mu'allaqat to confine to descriptions and similes them to objects found in the surroundings of the poets. She is therefore compared to wild deserts animals and birds and from such descriptions it is deduced women were always given priority in moments of insecurity and draught, they command a maximum freedom in choosing their partners and had absolute rights to revoke marital relationship with their male partners without any hindrance or obstacle. Above all, she also participates in the warfare by nursing the injured, the horses as well as feeding them.

## Introduction

### **Background**

Since the beginning of the 1970s, Feminism and gender issues became a matter of concern globally. Gender activists, Academia and concerned Civil Society Organizations, begin to explore the diversity of women's experiences and their contributions historically and across cultures. In the field of literary studies and Arabic Literature is no exception, scholars also contribute to this concern and begin to critically and holistically analyze the diversity of women throughout the various literary historical periods. However I am with the conviction that, the needed attention or, better put, a comprehensive and focus study of women in the pre-Islamic poetry, particularly in the Mu'alaqats has not received the deserved attention. It is against this background that this research aims at examining how the poets of pre-Islamic long odes, popularly known as the Mu'allaqat posit and project woman in their poems.

The goal of this thesis is basically to fill this gap by conducting a comprehensive and more focus study on the image of woman in the Mu'allaqat. Unlike the existing valuable studies, which investigate the posit of women in Jahiliya poetry from a broad and general perspectives, and by widening the parameters of their research to cover all the pre-Islamic poetry collections, and also carry their analyses on the basis of rhetorical or historical critique and interpretations, this research will stand unique by limiting its parameters to a rigorous coverage of the image of woman by the Mu'allaqat poets elucidating the significance of woman portrayal in their odes. The analysis, where necessary, will also fall on the '*Akbar al-Arab*'- which is a codified historical background and interpretation of poetic work of the classical poets.

The rationale behind limiting the scope of the research to the Mu'allaqat is due to their centrality in Arabic literature. In other words, the Arabs regard the Jahilliya Qasida particularly the Mu'allaqat Poetry as the '*diwan* - '*Arab*' which means, Arabs view it as expression of their cultural ideals and greatest aspirations. They call upon it to fulfill the visible public function and it has been upheld through the centuries.<sup>1</sup> In the words of Prof. Gibb;

'The productions of the great qasid-poets were handed down from generation to generation. It was, again, not merely that they set the linguistic and aesthetic standards which were to dominate almost all poetry .....but they fulfill also another function, by no means less important. Poetry, said the later philologists was 'the *diwan* of the Arabs'; it preserved the collective memory of the past, and gave an element of continuity and meaning to otherwise fleeting and insubstantial realities of the present'.<sup>2</sup> The Jahilliya Qasida along with the Qur'an stand the twin foundation of Arab-Islamic literary culture<sup>3</sup>.

The significance of this research is to unveil the misrepresentation and misinterpretation held against the Jahilliya poets and poetry that, the poets were infatuated about women and the poetry is boring and monotonous: full of description of desert and its wild animals found in the poet's surrounding<sup>4</sup>, as well as physiological structure of women. This thesis is intended to offer the true rationale behind the poets' over emphasis on woman in both the prelude and within the qasida. Apart from its contribution to scholarship, it will also offer a better understanding of Jahilliya woman's position not only in the Mu'allaqat but in the entire Jahilliya society, and in a way; it will be a significant contribution to feminists and

<sup>1</sup>Allen Roger, An Introduction of Arabic Literature., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000 pp.65

<sup>2</sup>Gibb., H.A.R., 'Arabic Literature :An Introduction' 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963 pp.30

<sup>3</sup>Stetkevych. J.. The Zephyrs of Najd: The Poetics of Nostalgia in the Classical Arabic Nasib, Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press, 1993 pp xi

<sup>4</sup> السيد فضل، الشعر الجاهلي وقضية التفسير، القاهرة: مكتبة الأنجلو المصرية 1989 ص 35



gender concern in the sense that it will pave a way to tracing the impact of woman in the socio-cultural set up of the Jahiliya era. It is also worthy of mentioning here that, the discussions in thesis focus only on the Seven renowned Mu'allaqat as enumerated by the critic and philologist Ibn al-Anbari.

### **Research Question/ The Problem formulation**

The core question this thesis intends to address is what social status a woman occupies in the socio-cultural set up of the pre-Islamic/*Jahilliya* society as expressed in the content of the *Mu'allaqat*? It is obvious there is always a mentioning of the beloved in the prelude or the '*nasib*' of all the *Mu'allaqat* by the poets, this thesis intends to examine its significance and offer realistic motive for it. There is also references to woman, in the body of the *Mu'allaqat*, the poet either expresses his relationship with her, gives a vivid description her by comparing her with wild desert animal and birds, this study will analyze whether or not the woman described in the prelude of Qaida is the same one described in the *nasib* of the *qasida*. Eventually the findings will be helpful in determining the types of women that existed in pre-Islamic society and will be helpful in determining their corresponding socio-cultural roles in the *Jahilliya* society.

In a net shell, this paper is intended to find out how and why woman is portrayed in the aforementioned *Mu'allaqat* and explore a potential significance for such portrayal and determine how were they positioned and valued in the *Jahilliya* society.

### **Method for Data Collection:**

Primarily, this thesis falls within a qualitative method and therefore a combination of both empirical and library-based strategy is adopted. Empirically, reference is made to the Arabic

text of the seven Mu'allaqat, namely Mu'allaqa of Imru'al-Qais, Tarafa ibn al-Abd, Zuhair ibn Abi Sulma, Antara ibn Shadad, Amr ibn al-Kulthum, Labid ibn Rabi'a and El-Harith ibn Hilzza, as well as to the available English translations, exegesis and commentaries. Secondarily, documentary research and peer reviews publications on Jahilliya poetry which focus on woman's role and diversity in Jahilliya society and poetry is also utilized.

Qualitative methods are traditionally associated with research which sees 'truth' of any matter to be determined through experiments and observation. Qualitative researchers are 'more interested in deeply understanding specific cases within a particular social context than in hypothesizing about generalizations and causes across time and space.'<sup>5</sup>

The term 'qualitative research' is sometimes taken to imply an approach to research which quantitative data are not collected or generated.'<sup>6</sup> This is not to say that the distinctiveness of qualitative method solely reside in the absence of numbers. The technique is very ambivalent, complex, changing and contested field... a site of multiple methodologies and research practices ...and is therefore not a single but an umbrella term which encompasses enormous variety.'<sup>7</sup> This paradigm is the technique, under which the basis of thesis is built, and by it, exploring and investigating how the Mu'allaqat posit woman is evaluated.

This study relies on qualitative methodology in deducing how the poets of the Mu'allaqat speak on and about their beloved or how they express about women in general. Put simply, since this thesis is exploratory, the analyzed data is basically the Mu'allaqat and its divergent interpretations, articles on Jahiliya poetry from peer review journals, books and encyclopedia. Documentary means for data collection is considered appropriate for this

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<sup>5</sup>David, M. & Gerry, S. 'Theory and Methods in Political Science' Hound mill: Macmillan Press Ltd.2002 p14

<sup>6</sup>Patton, M.Q. Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods, 3rd. eds. London: Sage Publication. P114

<sup>7</sup>Punch, K.F. Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches. London: Sage Publication 1999 p139

thesis because the research problem is directed toward the use of concepts in language and within semantic field, with the aim to offer a comprehensive understanding of certain contents from the Mu'allaqat, namely the image of woman in the Jahiliya society based on the context of their poems.

In selecting the Seven Mu'allaqat besides other pre-Islamic poetic collections, Purposive sampling, (which means undertaking sample with specific purpose or focus in mind) is applied; the justification for the choice is that, it will not be convenient for a thorough analysis of the entire poetic collections of all the pre-Islamic poets within the given time frame for this project. Besides, the lengths of the entire collections are so heavy that an MA could not cover them all. The reason for the choice of the Seven Mu'allaqat in particular is for the basic reason that they are considered the best poetic collections of the entire literary Arabic historical period. To mention only few, Imru'al Qais is regarded as the greatest of all the Jahilliya love poets, and *Antara's* qassida has been a legendary story told and re-told all the times throughout the Arab world. Not the least, Zuhair's aphoristic poems is considered the first and best poem of reconciliation that settles the two warring factions in the Jahiliya period, a civil war believed to have lasted for more than 40 years.

Punch rightly indicates that, 'in case study research, qualitative sampling involves identifying the case(s) and setting the boundaries, where we indicate the aspects to be studied, and constructing a sampling frame, where we focus selection.' In this regards, this study will entirely depend on documentary data. Punch stresses further that '(although) documentary sources of data might be used in various ways in research, some study might depend entirely on documentary data, with such data the focus in their own right<sup>8</sup>'

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

In a net shell, data for this study is collected via textual analysis of primary documents (the Seven Mu'allaqat) and secondary sources analyzing and critiquing them. In other words, the data collection basically relies on texts, essays, published articles and documents collected from various sources, which are of relevance to research topic.

### **Analysis of Data/Theoretical Framework**

This project adopts discourse and qualitative contents analysis as methodological technique for interpretation and analysis. Content analysis may be defined as 'a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context. Intuitively, it could be characterized as a method of inquiry into symbolic meaning of a message'<sup>9</sup>. Qualitative content analysis is chosen as a tool for the analysis and interpretation for this paper because of its suitability to method used in collecting data. As Bryman rightly says, 'qualitative content analysis is probably the most prevalent approach to qualitative analysis of document; it comprises searching-out of underlying themes in materials being analyzed.'<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, discourse analysis is a series of interdisciplinary approaches that is used to explore many different social domains in many different types of studies. Discourse analysis is sensitive to how spoken and written languages are used and how accounts and descriptions are constructed....it emphasizes the interrelationship between account and hierarchies, power and ideology.<sup>11</sup> It must be emphasized here that, there is no clear consensus as to what discourse analysis is, it is not a single approach, and can be applied to all areas of research. However, it cannot be used with all theoretical frameworks. Phillips and Jorgensen contend that 'discourse analysis is not to be used as a method of analysis

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<sup>9</sup>Bryman, A. Social Research Methods, Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press. 2001. Pp 381

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

detached from its theoretical and methodological foundation, it is not just a method for data analysis, but a theoretical and methodological whole.’<sup>12</sup>

Hence, in analyzing the data, these two methodologies are used in an intertwined manner to ascertain how the context of the Mu’allaqat portray and project Jahilliya woman.

At this juncture, one misconception needs to be corrected; discourse and qualitative content analysis are not mutually exclusive techniques. They are interconnected, overlapping and complementary. They are applied to this research because of their compatibility and suitability to this research project.

### **Literature Review:**

Studies on pre-Islamic poetry have received a lot of attention. Although most of these studies are worthwhile, their concentrations are on other subject matters. Those studies that are related to women, approach the topic from general perspective and hence widen their perimeter to cover the entire collections of the pre-Islamic poetry and sometimes all the classical periods making the scope of the studies too wide and unspecific. On the other hand, those that are focused concentrate on analyzing the structure and thematic nature of the qasida or sometime analyze the poems by applying theories from diverse disciplines such as psychology, anthropology, mythology and other social sciences, making their conclusion far departed from the contextual and literary implication of the ode itself.

In her book entitled ‘The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual’ Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, contends that, modern literary critics, both from East and West have failed to formulate a comprehensive procedures for a proper and effective analyses of the Jahilliya *Qasidas*, as a result the pre-Islamic Qasida have been misread as

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<sup>12</sup>Phillips, L. & Jorgensen, M.W. ‘Discourse Analysis as Theory and Methods’ London: Sage Publications, 2002 pp3-4

purely descriptive of the life of Jahilliya poet, and attributed the practice juxtaposition of themes within the Qasida to the illogical or pre-logic of the Bedouin Arab<sup>13</sup>. In this book, Stetkevych undertakes to bring together the findings in the field of literary criticism, anthropology and history of religion to create a poetics suitable to the body of Jahilliya Qasida. She proposes that, the pre-Islamic Qasida is ritual in both form and function and offer the patterns of rites of passage and sacrifice as a basis for her interpretation. She employs the extensive body of lore, legend and myth which accompanies pre-Islamic poetry in the classical commentaries and literary compendia of the Islamic period as an exegetical tool for reading the qasida.<sup>14</sup> She suggests a distinct inter and intratextual aesthetics for originally oral Jahilliya poetry which is intimately derived from exigencies of oral composition of and preservation of the ritual obligation and function. Also, she addresses the paradoxical identity of the of Jahiliya qassida which although oral in origin was codified and institutionalized as one of the twin foundations of a preeminently literary Arab-Islamic culture.<sup>15</sup> Her goal in this study is to explore the neglected aspect of the complex and multifaceted poeticity of the Jahilliya qassida. Indeed this work provides some inspiration for this thesis but nevertheless it did not have a direct reflection to it. Besides, her Judgment that modern critics fail to offer comprehensive methods for understanding pre-Islamic Qasida is also a fallacy, the Judgment is not applicable to all the writings of modern critics, such as the studies of Hassan El-Banna Ez-Din, Sayyid Ibrahim Mohammed and Mohammed Birairi to mention only few. These writings have approached Jahilliya poetry effectively and comprehensively. Even the chapter seven of the book which concentrates on

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<sup>13</sup> Stetkevych, S.P. *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual*. New York: Cornell Univ. Press. 1993 pp xii

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

the *Mu'allaqat* of Imru'al Qais, aims at identifying dominant themes in the qasida and pattern that helps her to interpret the poems on levels beyond the literal. Although, the strategy she applies in her study is beneficial to my study, nevertheless its prime aim was not on women posit in the Jahilliya Qasida, again her analysis did not cover all the Seven Mu'allaqat.

Another work that immensely influences this thesis is Charles Greville Tuety 'Classical Arabic Poetry. This book offers an English translation with introduction of 162 selected poems from Imru'al-Qais to Abu Ala al-Ma'arri. The translation is in simple everyday English, the author has kept close to the Arabic while allowing the English idiom to develop its natural strength, adjusted to the increasing sophistication of the originals. Although this rich book has deepened my understanding of the text of poem of Imru' al-Qais and Antara and many more, it is restricted mainly to translating only few verses of the odes relevant to this thesis.

In the same strand, Stetkevych Jaroslav in his book, the *Zephyrs of Najd: The poetics of Nostalgia in the Classical Arabic Nasib*, addresses the misconception the western readers have on the pre-Islamic Qasida. He laments that, The Arabic *Qasida's* integrated polarity of lyricisms and formalism-two properties which in the western genre theory remained baffling to western aesthetic norms and sensibility. To clear this notion, he makes the *nasib*, (the lyrical-elegiac opening section of the qasida) the subject matter of his study. In fact the study is both polarized and integrated; it approaches classical Arabic qasida from western literary perspectives, and does so with two main objectives. First, to demonstrate the rigorous formal tradition of classical Arabic qasida, far from producing the constraint and artifice that western readers have expected and, indeed read into it, was able to generate a

vibrant and delicate lyrical mode; and second, through a comparatist approach, to integrate the classical Arabic lyric into an enlarged understanding of lyrical poetry as category of genre and as experiential quality.<sup>16</sup> With the elucidation of the *nasib* as the main objective of *The Zephyrs of Najd*, Stetkevych Jaroslav offers a methodologically circuitous and progressively tightening manner from question of the structure of the qasida to the pursuit of the historicity of the lyrical immutable- the *nasib*. It is glaring that, this study provides some general background information about the structure of the qasida, it is still restricted in the sense that it did not focus on specifics of each Mu'allaha, but rather, it is general analysis drawing examples here and there from a whole lots of Jahilliya poetry.

Likewise, Wahb Rumiyyah's study entitled 'Journey in the Jahilliya Qasida'<sup>17</sup> is another great resource to this thesis. He traces the significance of the *rihlah* motive in Jahilliya poetry analyzing its different forms, importance and interpretations. Rumiyyah believes most critics of classical Arabic literature, both in the west and East miss the actual implications of the *rihlah* or Journey motif of the *nasib*. In his paradigm he explains the motifs behind the poets' description of a riding-camel and a journey to reach his beloved one in the distant place, an event apparent in all the Jahilliya Qasidas. He elucidates also on the origin, impact and the significance of mentioning variety of animals in the Journey – for example camel, bull, and wild donkey and ostriches. To Rumiyyah, mentioning of woman in the *nasib* of Jahilliya Qasida as well as the description of the camel and the stories of bull and hunter cum hunting dogs are all symbolic and figurative. The Jahilliya poets hide behind these symbols to express about life and the conscience of the society they live in. He

<sup>16</sup> Stetkevych, J *The Zephyrs of Najd: The Poetics of Nostalgia in the Classical Arabic Nasib* Chicago: the Univ. of Chicago Press.1993 pp xi

<sup>17</sup> وهب رومية ، الرحلة في القصيدة الجاهلية ، بيروت: مؤسسة الرسالة، 1979



explains further that, the story of the bull, hunter and dogs in the Jahiliya qasida connotes real life existence and the struggle of life in desert of the Bedouin world. He laments that the overconcentration of the poets in explaining the challenges of desert animals symbolize the real struggle of life facing the deserts dwellers. The journey in the deserts is pictorial presentation of the real journey of man in this world with all its facets: peace and war, easiness and difficulties, sadness and happiness.<sup>18</sup>

In a similar strand, El-Sayyed Fadl's treatise on Jahiliya Poetry and Exegetical Issues<sup>19</sup> is equally an indispensable assert and inspirational to this thesis. This study provides a scientific and modern approach to critical analysis and interpreting of Jahiliya qasida. Dr. Fadl in this treatise pinpoints many defects in the approaches and procedures followed by the early critics to explain the content of Jahiliya Qasida. For example the way the stylistics and the experts in Arabic language use only word-structure relationship to interpret and analyze the verses of Jahiliya poems without considering the creative aspect of the poets and their imaginations was defective, in the sense that they discredit the Jahilliya poets of lacking the impetus and potential of creativity and imagination. In other words the early critics were unable to interpret the Jahiliya qasida beyond their literary and rhetorical meaning. He laments that the Jahiliya poets are fond of mentioning names of specific places in their poems, (for instance Siqt al-Liwwa, and Mutathalam in Imru'al Qais' and Zuhair's Mu'allaqat respectively). The early critics, argues Dr. Fadl, could not offer an effective explanation for this recurrence. Dr. Fadl is with the view that, the mentioning or the vivid descriptions of these geographical sites is not for fun; rather it shows the poets' awareness of their geographical environs and to some pertinent events that took place at those locations.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid pp 401-405

<sup>19</sup> د. السيد فضل، الشعر الجاهلي وقضية التفسير، القاهرة: مكتبة الأنجلو المصرية 1989

They mention these sites to invoke the memories of their audience and to remind them of some historical incidents that occurred at those sites which were known by all of them.<sup>20</sup> Another important issue that escapes the early critics, Fadl adds, is the significance of mentioning of stars, sun and moon in Jahiliya poetry, and the comparison the poets draw between these symbols the face of woman. This he said, is figurative and some of the women mentioned in the prelude of the qasida are symbolic and represent goddess, because woman and sun in Jahiliya era are regarded as deities, are therefore symbols for worship and reverence<sup>21</sup>.

As a result of these and other lapses in the ways and approach adopted by the early critics in analyzing Jahiliya qasida, El-Sayyed Fadl calls for a more modern suitable and scientific re-examination of the Jahiliya poetry by the contemporary critics with modern lens with the goal of arriving at an effective explanation and interpretations of some of the symbolic and unexplained images and issues in the Jahiliya poetry. He indicates that, the archaic approaches of the past critics can no more be relied upon because they are outmoded and inappropriate.<sup>22</sup>

Lastly but not least, Ali al-Batal's 'Image in the Arabic Poetry'<sup>23</sup> is another study that provide analytical basis for this research. In this study the author, through a rigorous systematic and artistic deliberations postulates a theory that links the early Arab qasida with pre-Islamic Arab pagan religious beliefs and ancient legendary. He laments that, the mentioning of variety of images in the Jahiliya poetry and the importance attached to ruins, women, animals stars and what have you, are nothing but references to ancient religious

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, pp22

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid pp24-25

<sup>23</sup> على البطل، الصورة في الشعر العربي حتى القرن الثاني الهجري: دراسة في اصولها تطورها، دار الأندلس 1980

beliefs and ancient legendry. Put differently, Ali al-Batal is with the view that those images are deities invoked by the poets in the poetry as a form of reverence and worshipping incantations. In the study, he traces the origin of the concept of image and offers a theoretical definition of the image from rhetorical and philosophical perspectives. To justify the validity of his theorem, Ali al-Batal draws a convincing example from the contents of classical poetry to supports his claim. In his analysis, he elucidates on the image of woman, differentiating between ideal woman and real woman, and shows how the concept of “woman goddess” emerges. A fertile reproductive woman is regarded as deity and was represented in statue as symbol of worship. This is the woman, according to him; the poets refer to in the prelude of the Jahilliya qasida even though various names may be given to her. He further establishes a link between the image of animals as a religious belief and artistic / poetic imitation. He analyses the image of human in the ancient legendary and religious beliefs between life, death and environment. He concludes his study saying unless the critics of Jahiliya qasida factor this reality into their analyses, a comprehensive appreciation of the Jahilliya poems would not be attained, because these ancient beliefs are part and parcel of the thinking of the poets, and are wallowing in the minds of the poets as they sing their poems.

Nevertheless, reviewing all these studies and others, I realized that my thesis will be important for the obvious reasons. Apart from the fact that it will be the first work to carry a thorough study on woman’s depiction in the Mu’allaqat, it will also be, as far as I know, a great resource for students of Arabic Literature in Translation. Not least, it will also be a contribution to scholarship and to gender concerns and serve as well as basis for further studies on women in the classical Arabic poetry.

### **Limitation of the Thesis**

As indicated above, this thesis is limited in scope by confining to only detail exploration of woman's image in the Seven Mu'allaqats qassida. Similar studies could therefore be done on the poetic collections of non-Mu'allaqat Poets such as Mufaddaliyat and 'Dawaween'. Besides, to get vivid picture of woman in pre-Islamic Poetry, concentrating on the Mu'allaqat alone will not give the perfect picture, it is equally important to conduct similar investigations on other type of pre-Islamic qassidas such as on the collections of the Vagabond poets, known in Arabic as al-Shu'ara' al-Sa'aalik (الشعراء الصعاليك) namely Ta'abatsharr and al-Shanfara as well as on the poetics of Jahilliya poetess.

Likewise, limiting the study to the pre-Islamic era alone, will not also project a holistic representation of the woman's image in Arabic poetry. To achieve this, it is necessary to extend similar exploration to the poetry and literary work of the remaining Arabic historic periods namely Islamic, Umayyad, Abbasid, modern as well as the contemporary periods.

# 1 Development of Arabic Poetry and Implications of the Concept of Image

## Overview of the Pre-Islamic Poetry

The dynamism and divergent perspectives of Arabic Poetry make its definition a difficult task. Despite the difficulty some authorities and critics, early as well as modern, attempt to define or explain what it constitutes, yet there is no an agreed upon definition that comprehensively explains all the facet of Arabic poetry in its totality. This has come about as a result of the continual and perpetual evolutions that beset Arabic Poetry. Nevertheless, a Qasida is basically regarded as the ‘record of the Arabs’. A good deal of what has been preserved of the heritage of the past consists of what can be termed occasional poetry. According to Quddamah ibn Ja’far, a critic and philologist of classical literary Arabic, Poetry is ‘a metered rhymed and conveys meaning’ a set of what appear to be definitional minima that came to be adopted as a prescriptive device; the formula was used to exclude any type of writing that did not match those criteria<sup>24</sup>. Beeston A.F.L et el describe Qasida as the supreme verse for Arabic eloquence, consisted of three sections, each leading into the next following it..... A musical composition as well as a logically connected verbal utterance, united from the first line to the last with one terminal rhyming word called ‘*qafiyah*’<sup>25</sup>.

An Egyptian poet, Hafiz Ibrahim who bears the nickname ‘the poet of the Nile’ proposes that poetry is ‘a science to be found along with the sun’. Rather than sticking to Quddamah’s pandemic definition, he suggests, critics should regard poetry as being anything that has an effect on the soul, in what may be seen as a prescient statement. He suggests that, while metrical

<sup>24</sup> Allen, R. ‘An Introduction of Arabic Literature’. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000 pp66.

<sup>25</sup> Beeston, A.F.L. et.el, ed. ‘Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press 1983.pp 29

discourse provides many wonderful examples of poetic, it is not out of the question to consider some prose writers as showing similar qualities<sup>26</sup>. For Adunis<sup>27</sup>, ‘Poetry has a distinct purpose, that of renewing language, of changing the meaning of words by using them in striking new combinations’. Through his critical writings and poetic creativity, Adunis has underlined the completeness of the shift from the time when poems that did not conform with a set of prescriptive formal norms were thereby excluded from the very category of poetry to one in which it is the poet who chooses the subject matter and language of the poem and thereby determines anew in each case what the nature of the poem will be.<sup>28</sup>

One other difficulty associated with Arabic Poetry besides its definition is its origin and genesis. There is no reliable record or documented evidence that comprehensively explains the beginning of Arabic poetry. Nicholson laments that, the obscure beginning of the Jahilliya poetry presided over by the magician and his familiar spirits have left not a rack behind in the shape of literature, but the task of reconstruction is comparatively easy where we are dealing with a people so conservative and tenacious of antiquity as the Arabs. Thus it may be taken for certain that the oldest form of poetical speech in pre-Islamic Arabia was rhyme without meter (*saj*)<sup>29</sup>. In other words, one thing certain is that the primitive form of Arabic poetry was the ‘*Saj’a*’- rhymed prose in which the sayings have no measure and are of different lengths; their ‘*fiqra*’ or parts end in rhyming syllables: it is this common rhyme that makes the formal unity of poem. The ‘*saj*’ was originally used by the ancient pagan sorcerers (*kuhan*) in their oracles, malediction,

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<sup>26</sup> Allen, R. ‘An Introduction of Arabic Literature’ pp 67

<sup>27</sup> Adunis is pseudonym of the Syrio-Lebanese Poet Ali Ahmed Said who was born in 1928

<sup>28</sup> Allen, R. ‘An Introduction of Arabic Literature. Pp 67

<sup>29</sup> Nicholson, R. A Literary History of the Arabs, New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan 1994.pp74

incantations and other kind of magic sayings. This type of sublime oration was called '*kalam al-musajja*' that is talk in rhymed prose.<sup>30</sup>

Scarcely different from the 'Saj' was the primitive type of Arabic poetry called '*shi'r*'. The contents of the '*shi'r*' are best characterized by the Arabic word for poet '*sha'ir*' which literary means perceiver or knower, to whom magic power was attributed in his soothsaying. It was the *sha'ir* or poet who developed the 'saj' into a more disciplined and systematic rhythmical form.<sup>31</sup>

According to Ibn Sallam and others, Arabic poetry first appeared as a short pieces '*qit'ah*' composed of one or two lines or a little more. Then longer poems began to appear and by the end of the sixth century of the Christian era, the Qasida was firmly established<sup>32</sup>.

Nicholson notes: 'By the ancient Arabs the poet..... was held to be a person endowed with supernatural knowledge, a wizard in league with spirits (*jinn*) or Satans (*shayatin*) and dependent on them for the magical powers which he displayed.....the idea of poetry as an art was developed afterwards, the pagan *sha'ir* is the oracle of his tribe, their guide in peace and their champion in war. It was to him they turned for counsel when they sought new pastures, only at his word would they pitch or strike their 'houses of hair' and when the tired and thirsty wanderers found a well and drank of its water and washed themselves, led by him they may have raised their voices to celebrate.'<sup>33</sup>

Out of '*saj'a*' evolved the most ancient Jahilliya meters which is called '*Rajaz*' it is an irregular iambic meter usually consisting of two or three feet to the line, and it is peculiar of *Razaj*, marking its affinity to '*Saj'a*', that all the lines rhyme with each other whereas in the more

<sup>30</sup> Desomogyi, J. 'A Short History of Classical Arabic Literature, Berlin: Hildesheim. 1966 pp8

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Beeston, A.F.L et.el, ed. Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period. pp. 31-32

<sup>33</sup> Nicholson, R. A Literary History of the Arabs, New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan 1994.pp72-73

artificial meters only the opening verse is doubly rhymed. Another feature of *Razaj* is that, it should be uttered extempore, a few verse at time, and it used to express personal feeling and or emotion.<sup>34</sup> The *Razaj* meter is thus a far more regular form of rhythmic expression than ‘saj’.

The forms of songs that existed in the pre-Islamic era such as fountain song, war- songs and hymns to idols, the powers of the poet were chiefly exhibited in satire (*hija*’) which is the oldest known form of poetry; it introduces and accompanies the tribal feud, and is an element of war just as important as the actual fighting.<sup>35</sup> ‘*hija*’- the lampoon is the most ancient types of Jahilliya poetry, it owes its existence to inter-tribal warfare and contentions, it was in it, the poet of one tribe vilifies and mocks the enemy tribe by reviling its origin or detracting from the virtuousness of its ancestors.

The golden age of Jahilliya poetry coincided with Basus war, history tells us that, the first pre-Islamic qasida was composed by Muhalhil ibn Rabi’a, of the tribe of Taglib, on the death of his brother. He set the standards and rules of composing poems and this standards set by Muhalhil have been imitate and mimic throughout the literary Arabic poetic periods until the later part of Abbasid era when the structure of the qassida saw some dramatic reforms and modifications. Nonetheless, some poets even in our contemporary time still mimic the Muhalil’s standards<sup>36</sup>.

Jahiliya poets (or Arabic poets in general) were classified in accordance to their merits into four categories; the major poets were called ‘*fuhul al-Shu’arra*’ or stallions. A poet of the fourth rank was called a ‘*shuway’ir*’ or poetaster, the diminutive *sha’ir*. In this respect it is reported that

The poets are four:

One who can outrun all others,

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, pp 75

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, pp73

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.



One who can declaim amidst the heart of a crowd,  
 One who deserves to be heard,  
 And one who deserves to be struck on the back<sup>37</sup>

The poetaster was also called '*sukayt*' that is the last horse in a race, the truly great poet was called the pedigree stallion '*khindidh*' and the title of one who does something extraordinary '*mufliq*' was often applied to the second in rank and sometimes to the first rank.<sup>38</sup>

### **Al-Qasida: The Standard Arabic ode.**

The term *qasida* is a derivation from Arabic three letter root word (*qa-sa-da*) which literary means to intend or to aim at something. Qasida points to the basic feature that, the author or the poet does not proceed straight on the subject of his poem but reaches his end in a rather complicated, roundabout way.<sup>39</sup> Qasida represents the refined and standardized poetry that existed in the Jahiliya period. It is a collection of verses built in varying number, and ranges from ten to over hundred lines or verses, but are seldom less than twenty five or more than a hundred. The verses or lines in the qasida are called '*abyat*' (literary means houses and its singular is *bayt*). Each *bayt* is laid out so as to emphasize the end-rhyme of each line; the gap that separates the two halves of the line indicates the point at which the metrical pattern is represented in accordance to the -prosodic system of al-Khalil ibn Ahmed.<sup>40</sup> In other words, every *bayt* of a qasida consists of two distiches where distiches of the first verse and the second distiches of all the subsequent verses end in the same rhyme, thus arrangement of rhyme in Arabic Qasida is

<sup>37</sup> Beeston, A.F.L et.al, ed. 'Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period.pp 32

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Desomogyi, J. 'A Short History of Classical Arabic Literature, Berlin: Hildesheim. 1966.pp10

<sup>40</sup> Nicholson, R. A Literary History of the Arabs, New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan 1994.pp77

repeated once in the second, third and every following verse to the end of the poem however the long the qassida may be.

Another worth mentioning feature of a qasida is its name; usually every qasida is named after its '*Qaffiya*' that is the rhyming final consonants, thus, the '*mimiyatul*' Imru'al-Qais, and '*mimiyatul*' Antara are the titles of Imru' al-Qais' and Antara's Mu'allaqat respectively because both ends with letter 'm' whereas the titles of Tarafa's, and Harith ibn Hilzah's Mu'allaqat are '*daalliyah*' and '*hamziyah*' because the last consonants of their Mu'allaqat end respectively with letters 'd' and *hamza*- 'a'. Yet still, some later critics refer to a qasida by mentioning the first two or three words of the first distiches of the first '*bayt*' or verse. For instance the Mu'allaqa of Zuhair bin Abi Sulama is referred to as "أم أوفى" – '*amin ummi awfaa*' which are the first three words of the first verse of his Mu'allaqa.

Some Jahiliya Qasidas, of which the Mu'allaqat of Labid is shining example, developed a traditional and somehow rigid tripartite structure, namely the '*nasib*'-the erotic introductory prelude, the '*rihlah*' or the journey and the actual '*ghard*' or the main purpose of the ode. On the other hand, Imru al-Qais' Mu'allaqa does not follow it in Toto. The word '*nasib*' has a variety of connotations; it may literally mean ascribing or tracing something to its originator<sup>41</sup> or basically eroticism or describing and talking lyrically about woman. The term is however used to refer to the introductory prelude of a qasida. According to Desomogyi ' the first topic (of qasida) is the poet's doleful reminiscence of his past experiences: how he, wandering in the desert, arrives at a place where he had once lived happily together with friends and loved ones. He contrasts the

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<sup>41</sup> Desomogyi, J. 'A Short History of Classical Arabic Literature. pp10

pristine beauty of the place with what has remained as mere ruins (*atlat*) reminding him of his former happiness vanished. This never-missing introduction to the poem is called *nasib*.<sup>42</sup>

In the *rihlah* or *rahil* (the Journey) section of the qasida, the poet describes the scene of departure of his beloved and her family and camel that carries them from their former abode to a new settlement where they could find pasture and water, he describes the mount which could sometime be his own camel or horse, the endurance, speed and strength as well as the incidents which befall him and the mount on his wandering are described by him down to the smallest detail. The vivid account of the departure of the beloved and family as well as for the camel that carries them is referred to as "*Za'a'in or Za'n*". Apart from the details of the movements of the camel that carries the poet's beloved, the *rahil* or *rihlah* section may sometimes focus on the description of desert animals he comes across especially the wild ass and the ostrich. All these episodes are depicted with most vivid illustrations and in the minutest details<sup>43</sup>.

In the words of Gibb, 'After depicting the final separation from his beloved as her tribe moves off to seek fresh pastures, the poet pursues his journey and seizes the occasion to describe, something briefly but often with all an expert's enthusiasm, the fine points of his camel or horse. Its swiftness and endurance of fatigue on his long and dangerous journeys leads him to compare it to a wild ass, ostrich or Oryx, but comparison often seems to become submerged as the theme is developed into a lively picture of animal life or of hunting scene, which to western taste is often the most attractive section of the poem.'<sup>44</sup>

From the *rihlah* the poet reaches his end, where he will discuss the main theme of his qasida. He either goes to praise a prince, governor or king - (*madih*), or, if he falls short of the

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid,pp10

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Gibb,H.A.R. 'Arabic Literature: An Introduction' 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963 pp17

governors/king's expectations he is to disparage a person of consequence who disappointed him or a tribe hostile to him. The poets in this section were also fond of exhibiting self-praise, showing either his personal achievements or strength as in the case of Antara or boasting of his tribal achievements and honor as in the case of Labid, Amr ibn Kulthum and El-Harith ibn Hilzzah.

Thus, the final object of the qasida could be self-praise, eulogy of the poet's tribe, satire directed at rival groups or individual, or panegyric of a patron. But before reaching his climax the poet seeks to build up a favorable climate of emotional reaction among his audience by a series of preliminary themes on various aspects of Arabian life....this opening theme is technically called *nasib*<sup>45</sup>.

The popular model in terms of the content of the Jahiliya qasida according to Ibn Qutaiba consist of a nostalgic prelude or 'nasib' leading through 'takhalus' or release to a 'rihla' or journey and ending with the core theme of the qasida which could either be a "fakhr" or praise of a tribal achievements, 'hija' or satire or lampooning the enemy or rival tribal or 'hikam' or moral aphorisms<sup>46</sup>. There are however some odes which do not go strictly by above formula, some odes do not have the erotic prelude especially elegies, some odes also begin with description of the poet's horse or camel, detailing its speed, endurance and strength. Others start by describing how a slave woman serves drinks at a drinking spot. Generally however, the poets of the Qasida incorporates into their art practically the entire repertory of subjects of the older poetry with single exception of elegy, the traditional qasida has therefore a sequential arrangement, beginning with the *nasib*, then *rihlah*, followed by the *madih or fakhr*. The qasida, once

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<sup>45</sup> Gibb, H.A.R. 'Arabic Literature: An Introduction' 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963 pp 15

<sup>46</sup> Ibn Kutaiba 'Kitabu'l' Shi'r wa-'l-Shu'ara p.14 v.I quoted from Nicholson, R. A Literary History of the Arabs, pp 77-78

established as the acme of poetic genius, became the standard by which the quality of a poet was judged.<sup>47</sup>

### **The Mu'allaqat: An Overview**

Generally, the Mu'allaqat represents the standard type of pre-Islamic Qasida. It is believed that they were selected as the best poems at the literary fair held at *Ukaz* near Mecca where the pre-Islamic Arabian poets assemble to engage in poetic recital competition. The best poems were selected by some eminent judges and were written in golden letters and suspended on the *Ka'ba*, and hence the title 'Mu'allaqa' which could literally mean to suspend or to hang. Basically the actual number of the Mu'allaqat is seven; however there were disagreements among critics and analysts as to which odes constitute the seven. This led to three more odes added to make the number ten. The seven are the Mu'allaqat of Imru' al-Qais, Labid, Zuhair, Antara, Amr ibn Kulthum, Tarafa ibn al-Abd and El-Harith ibn Hilzza. The additional three are the Qasida of al-A'sha, an-Nabigah al-Zubayni and Abeer ibn al-Abras.

The controversy as to which ones constituted the seven creates some problems among some western as well as Arab critics to extent some of the oriental critics doubt and reject the story of suspending the Mu'allaqat poems on the *Ka'ba*, they regarded it as fiction and historically untruth.

In this regard, Beeston et al emphasize that: 'Mu'allaqat present two problems, one relating to the name itself, the other to the extent and contents of the group, the tale of the custom in pre-Islamic Mecca for the prize-winning poems in poetical competitions held at the fair of Ukaz to be written down and hung up in the Ka'bah is certainly a fable, invented in order to explain the name on the basis of the commonest sense of the word. As Noldeke and others have pointed out, there are many early authorities who have provided us with extremely detailed

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<sup>47</sup> Gibb, H.A.R. 'Arabic Literature: An Introduction.pp18

description of life in Mecca during the prophet's youth, yet no one of them contains the slightest allusion to a custom of this sort.' Furthermore, the name itself is wholly unattested before the turn of the 3<sup>rd</sup>- 4<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> Century, when it makes its appearance for the first time in an anthology entitled *Jamharat ash'ar al-Arab*, containing forty-nine qassidas arranged in seven groups. The first group is designated '*al-Mu'allaqat*' it is shortly after this that the commentator Ali ibn Mohammad al-Nahhas provides us with the earliest allusion on the story of these poems being suspended in the Ka'bah, yet at the same time he adds that the story is a fabrication devoid of ancient authority. The most likely meaning of the term Mu'allaqa is 'esteemed precious' and is a derivative of the noun 'ilq' a precious commodity. Writers earlier than the 'Jamharat' refer to this group of poems simply as 'the Seven'.<sup>48</sup>

Nicholson adds: 'In the course of time the exact signification of Mu'allaqa was forgotten, and it became necessary to find a plausible explanation. Hence arose the legend, which frequent repetition has made familiar, that the 'suspended poems' were so called from having been hung up in the Ka'ba on the account of their merit; that this distinction was awarded by the judges at the fair of Ukaz, near Mecca, where poets met in rivalry and recited their choicest productions; and that the successful compositions, before being affixed to the door of the Ka'ba, were transcribed in letters of gold upon pieces of fine Egyptians line. Were these statements true, we should expect them to be confirmed by some allusion in the early literature. But as matter of fact nothing of the kind is mentioned in the Koran or in religious tradition, in the ancient histories of Mecca or in such works as *Kitabu'l-Aghani*, which draw their information from old and trustworthy sources. Almost the first authority who refers to the legend is the grammarian Ahmed al-Nahass and by him it is stigmatized as entirely groundless.<sup>49</sup>

Lastly but not least, Hengstenberg, in the prolegomena to his edition of the Mu'allaqa of Imru'al-Qais asks some pertinent questions: Who were the judges? And how were they appointed? Why were only these seven poems thus distinguished? His further objection was that the art of writing was at that time a rare accomplishment, does not carry so much weight as he attached to it but the story is sufficiently refuted by what we know of the character and customs of the Arabs in the sixth century and afterwards. Is it conceivable that the proud sons of the desert could have submitted a matter so nearly touching their tribal honor of which they were jealous above all things, to external arbitration, or meekly acquiesced in the partial verdict of a court sitting in the

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<sup>48</sup> Beeston, T.M. et.al, ed. 'Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press 1983 pp 111-112

<sup>49</sup> Nicholson, R. A Literary History of the Arabs, pp 101-102

neighborhood of Mecca, which would certainly have shown scant consideration for competitors belonging to distant clans?<sup>50</sup>

Nonetheless, the Mu'allaqat are the masters of pre-Islamic poetry and each is regarded as its author's masterpiece,<sup>51</sup> they contain much that only a full commentary of the Arabic verse can make intelligible to an European reader because translation alone would not contain the holistic ideas of the Arabic, they give finest pictures of Bedouin life and manners often appear uncouth or grotesque, because without an intimate knowledge of the land and people it is impossible for us to see what the poet intended to convey or to appreciate the truth and beauty of its expression; while the artificial framework, the narrow range of subject as well as treatment and the frank realism of the whole strike us at once.<sup>52</sup>

All the Mu'allaqat have their distinctive qualities and characteristics, but opinions of many critics hold that, the Mu'allaqa of Imru'al-Qais, the wandering and vagabond prince of Kanda, is the most outstanding; His Mu'allaqa is entirely self-centered, and noted for its natural descriptions, including a fine picture of a thunderstorm, as well as for the frankness of his amatory passage. His Mu'allaqa depicts poems of unhappy prince faithfully reflecting the event of his adventurous life. In singing his wanderings, he had ample opportunities to display his talent for depicting natural phenomena and narrating his love in delicate tones. Imru'al-Qais is reputed to have been the most prominent representative of Jahilliya poetry.<sup>53</sup> Both western and Eastern critics have vied with each other in praising the exquisite diction and splendid images,

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid pp102

<sup>51</sup> Gibb, H.A.R. 'Arabic Literature: An Introduction, pp22

<sup>52</sup> Nicholson, R. A Literary History of the Arabs, pp 103

<sup>53</sup> Desomogyi, J. 'A Short History of Classical Arabic Literature. 1966 pp 22

the sweet flow of the verse, the charm and variety of the painting and above all the feeling by which the Mu'allaqa of Imru'al-Qais inspires of the joy and glory of youth.<sup>54</sup>

The Zuhair's Mu'allaqa is an outright panegyric devoted to praises of the two chiefs for compromising a fratricidal feud, and who, with the wisdom of age, stands out as the mouthpiece of the pessimistic ethics of the desert.<sup>55</sup> It celebrates an act of private munificence which brought about the conclusion of peace, by the self-sacrificing intervention of two noble members of Zubyan, Harith ibn Sinan and Harith ibn Aus who took upon themselves the payment of all the blood money to which the tribe of Abs laid claim in return for their members killed in the war. It was only by means of this sacrifice that an end to the bloodshed was possible and peace could be concluded between the hostile tribes. Zuhair's Mu'allaqa praises the bounty of the distinguished persons concerned. Indeed his Mu'allaqa ranks among the most celebrated poem in the world.<sup>56</sup>

Two of the Mu'allaqat, that of Amr ibn Kulthum and his rival El-Harith ibn Hilzzah are addressed to the king of Hira, each being the representative of their tribes Taglib and Bakr. The Qasida of Amr is mostly uncompromising expressions of tribal pride and defiance, whereas that of his opponent Harith is combinations of boasting and satire and patronizingly panegyric towards King Amr ibn Hind. The distinguishing mark of these two is the abnormal space devoted to the main subject, which leaves little room for the subsidiary motives<sup>57</sup>. Amr's Mu'allaqa is also characterizes the display of the acme of the vainglory- '*al-mufakhara*' of the Arab tribe. Amr is fond of wine that the 'akhbar' has it that he fell a victim to winebibbery, he gloried his favorite drink in a famous poem.<sup>58</sup> Harith on the other hand, was engrossed in praising his own tribe

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<sup>54</sup> Nicholson, R. A Literary History of the Arabs, pp 105

<sup>55</sup> Gibb, H.A.R. 'Arabic Literature: An Introduction, pp22

<sup>56</sup> Desomogyi, J. 'A Short History of Classical Arabic Literature, Berlin: Hildesheim. 1966. Pp 16-17

<sup>57</sup> Nicholson, R. A Literary History of the Arabs, pp 109

<sup>58</sup> Desomogyi, J. 'A Short History of Classical Arabic Literature, Berlin: Hildesheim. 1966, pp 19



against the tribe of *Taglib*. He set himself the aim of defending the honor of his tribe against the enemy who, in concert with the King of Hira, kept on slandering the tribe of Bakr. Harith earnestly admonished the tribe of Taglib faithfully to the peace that put an end to the war of *Baus*.<sup>59</sup>

The remaining Mu'allaqat is somewhat self-praise odes. The self-centeredness is found in the Mu'allaqat of Antara, a son of black slave woman and hero of the tribe of Abs. The proud of their pure descent, call some of their heroes of antiquity, those descended from an Arab father and Black slave mother from Ethiopia as '*aghribat al-arab*'- the Ravens of the Arabs because of their dark complexion inherited from their Mothers. Antara ranks among the famous of the Ravens of the Arabs. He lived in the time of the fights of Dahis and Ghabra' which the *akhbar* says it lasted for about eleven years. Antara participated in this war and fought in the rank of his paternal tribe of Abs and won glory for his kinsmen by his valor although he was the son of slave woman, and as such, not acknowledged by his proud tribesmen as their equal: for which an act of individual emancipation would have been necessary, and this was denied him, as well as his adverse niece by name *Abla*.

Arab culture has it that, he could have asked for the hands of his niece Abla but he was denied this because a free daughter of a tribe could not marry the son of a slave, since in the view of the Arabs the husband was expected to be at least of the same rank as his wife. This development greatly affected Antara who had saved his tribe from many dangers. When his service was once again needed in another battle, he refused them, telling them 'the slave is not for fighting but for milking the camels tying their udders. It was there and then he earned recognition by his father

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

and was declared a free son.<sup>60</sup> The Mu'allaqa of Antara is thus mixed with description of his fight, his vicissitudes and love for *Abla* which are regarded by the Arabs as the pearls of their poetry. In fact his ode is an example of a finest pagan Arab poetry characterized with heroism and boasting. In other words, Antara in his Mu'allaqa boasts of the heroic feats he did for his tribe and relates his love for *Abla* in the most sentimental manner.<sup>61</sup>

Tarafa's Mu'allaqa has the best description of a she-camel. Tarafa left his country and repaired to the court of Hira to be hospitably received by King Amr ibn Hind. His Mu'allaqa is marvelous poems which he recited at the time he was living with his people before he travelled to Hira. The Mu'allaqa receives the benevolence of his tribesmen. In the Qasida he has drawn a spirited portrait of himself. The most striking feature of the poem, apart from a long and, is its insistence on sensual enjoyment as the sole business of life<sup>62</sup>.

Labid is professional troubadour belonging to the last generation of Islamic poet and shows sign of growing standardization of technique and themes. Thus he is the youngest of the seven poets and specializes in scenes of Animal life<sup>63</sup>. He is reputed to have composed poems in the Jahilliya which could be considered as prototypes of the *Qur'anic* revelation His Mu'allaqa is the most perfect specimen of the Qassida with its varied content and it is splitting up into episodes<sup>64</sup>. All Labid's odes were recited in Jahilliya even though he is considered as '*Muhadrim*' - a poet who lived in both Jahilliya and Islamic era. When Islam emerged, he embarrassed Islam, having heard the Qur'an, he promised not to compose ode anymore<sup>65</sup>. His Mu'allaqa, with its charmingly

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp14

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, pp15

<sup>62</sup> Nicholson, R. A Literary History of the Arabs, pp108

<sup>63</sup> Gibb, H.A.R. 'Arabic Literature: An Introduction. pp22

<sup>64</sup> Desomogyi, J. 'A Short History of Classical Arabic Literature. 1966 pp 22

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

fresh pictures of desert life and scenery, must be considered one of the finest examples of the Jahilliya Qasida.<sup>66</sup>

One other important characteristic of the Mu'allaqat poets is categorizing them in terms of Desert and Court poets. The desert poets represent typical representatives of the Bedouin mentality as untouched by civilization and these include Antara and Zuhair. The Court poets were although typical Jahilliya poets but did not entirely spend their lives in the atmosphere of Arabian Desert and did not obtain the themes of their qasida exclusively from the conditions of Bedouin life and their violent psychic impulses. These poets hailed from a more civilized and had a higher standard of living at the princely courts of Syria and Iraq where they sought to ingratiate themselves and by whose patronage they benefited. The court poets too were wandering poets but they did not go in search of adventures and forays; instead they made acquaintance of princes, in whose presence they could display their art of poetry. It should be cleared here that, the difference between the desert and court poets does not imply a similar difference in their ideals, both were imbued with the genuine Arab view of life and morals,<sup>67</sup> Imru'al-Qais, Tarafa, Amr ibn Kulthum and El-Harith belong to this category.

### **Dynamics of the Concept of Image.**

The term 'image' is very difficult to define because of its divergent connotations and meanings in different disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, physics, Art history, religion and literature. Basically, an image is a representation as in a statue or effigy, and is sometimes regarded as an object of worship, thus an idol or statue may both be regarded as images, just as it

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<sup>66</sup> Nicholson, R. A Literary History of the Arabs, pp 119

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, pp17

could be used to represent a worshiped deity and such as a wooden idol. The term may be also used figuratively to denote to other things like literal expressing of one's self.

On the otherhand, the nature of literary image and its aesthetic function is one of the complicated and confounded problems of contemporary literary theory. The term is a theoretical bone of contention that has its source in the imagist movement of the world war I decade and much of the semantic confusion that surround the term can be traced to the imagist usage, although the root of the problem reach much further back.<sup>68</sup>

Image from literary perspective or better put in poetics is defined not as pictorial reproduction, but as unification of disparate ideas and emotions into a complex presented spatially in an instant of time. Such a complex, according to the law of language, is not to proceed discursively, but rather to strike the reader's sensibility with an instantaneous impact.<sup>69</sup> To vividly understand the poetic implication of the concept of image, one has to recognize the first of the three principle of imagism, that is 'direct treatment of the 'thing' whether subjective or objective. The principle suggests an objectivist idea of a 'pure' poetry in which the poet is concerned with rendering the sensuous particularity of his experience. Thus the concept of image involves acknowledgement of the idea of the image as presenting 'disparate ideas and emotions which are more concerned with idea an instantaneous presentations which provides freedom from 'time limit' and 'space limit', because this concept is essential to spatial theory.<sup>70</sup> The conception of Image as a 'unification of disparate ideas and emotions' however raises some questions which suggests difficulties for special theory of disparate images juxtaposed in space and apprehended in an

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<sup>68</sup> Sutton W, 'The Literary Image and the Reader: A consideration of Theory of Spatial form' in 'The Journal of Aesthetic and Art criticisms Vol. 16, No. 1, Sep., 1957 pp. 112-123

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.,pp 113

<sup>70</sup> Ibid,pp 114.

instant of time, nonetheless, it is one of the recognized contemporary definition for the term and is used in the literary and poetic fields.

In defining image, Eliot emphasizes upon the poetic sensibility's 'capacity to form new wholes, to fuse seemingly disparate experiences into an organic unity'. However this view raises the very pertinent of whether the integrity of the single image is compatible with integrity of the poetry work as a whole. The chief value of it is its capacity to present an intellectual and emotional complex simultaneously; linking up images in a sequence would clearly destroy most of their efficacy. To appear well presented in an ode or a poem, representing image is also supposed to be one vast image whose individual components are to be apprehended as unity <sup>71</sup>

W.J. Mitchell laments that 'the question of the nature of imagery has been second to the problem of language in the evolutions of the modern criticism..... the commonplace of modern studies of images, in fact is that they must be understood as a kind of language, instead of providing a transparent window on the world, images are now regarded as the sort of sign that presents a deceptive appearance of naturalness and transparence concealing an opaque, distorting arbitrary mechanism of representation, a process of ideological mystification. For Mitchell, Images are not just a particular kind of sign, but something like actor on the historical stage, a presence or character endowed with legendary status, a history that parallels and participates in the stories we tell ourselves about our own evolution from creatures 'made in the image' of a creator to creatures who make themselves and their world in their own image.<sup>72</sup> An image in simple terms is the general notion, ramified in various specific similitudes that hold the world

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid

<sup>72</sup> Mitchell, W.J.T 'Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology' Chicago; University of Chicago Press. 1987 pp8

together with ‘figures of knowledge’ presiding over all the special case of imagery, it is a phenomenon whose appropriate institutional discourses are philosophy and theology.<sup>73</sup>

However, discussion of poetic imagery rely generally on a theory of mental image improvised out of the shreds of 17<sup>th</sup> century notions of the mind; discussion of mental imagery depended in turn upon rather limited acquaintance with graphic imagery, often proceeding on the questionable assumption that there are certain kinds of images that provide a direct, unmediated copy of what they represent.<sup>74</sup> It should be understood at this juncture that, images are not stable, static or permanent in any metaphysical sense, they are not perceived in the same way by viewers any more than are dream images; and they are not exclusively visual in any important way, but involve multisensory apprehension and interpretation.

According to Ali al-Batal, the historical development of the concept of Image has two main connotations; ancient and modern. The ancient, he reiterates, is confined to the rhetorical images or patterns in direct and figurative comparison. The modern, in addition to rhetorical images, encompasses two other types which are the mental images and symbolic images. Each of these three types represents a distinct and independent perspective in modern literary studies.<sup>75</sup>

Ali al-Batal emphasizes the word ‘Image’ is understood by the Arab from its philosophical implication that came down to them through Greek philosophy particularly from Aristotelian philosophy, in which Image and imagination has been separated and differentiated. The conviction of this philosophy is that, there is a distinction between a word and its meaning, and quickly this idea was adopted in the field of poetry, where poetic expression was equated with

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.,pp9

<sup>74</sup> Ibid,p[ 12

<sup>75</sup> على البطل، الصورة في الشعر العربي، دار الأندلس 1981 صفحة 15

other expressions just as the art of poetry was also equated with Art and craft.<sup>76</sup> Ali al-Batal summarizes that images are symbolic representation of mental pictures or simply put, images are nothing but symbols more especially when they repeatedly recur in a poet's work in a continuous manner to be identified as a form or pattern to a particular feature of poet or a group of poets, such that as soon as one of such pattern is identified the remaining associated features of the pattern or images quickly comes to mind.<sup>77</sup>

Norman Friedman on the other hand defines a 'symbol' as a phrase with dual connotations: "symbols may derive from literal or figurative language which is represented, by virtue of some semblance, suggestion or association means something more or something else."<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, "Symbolism resembles figures of speech in having a basic doublings in meaning between what is meant and what is said, but it differs in that what is said also what is meant."<sup>79</sup> Therefore symbols and for that matter Images do offer the possibility of transforming words into something greater, embellishing them with a variety of meanings and implications. They are used in poetry, particularly in pre-Islamic Qasida to symbolize the poet's mental imagination. next chapter will expatiate on the concept of Image in more details.

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid,pp 15-16

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, pp 29

<sup>78</sup> Friedman, M "Symbol," in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, eds. A. Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993,pp 1252  
Ibid, pp. 1253

## 2 Depiction of Woman in the Prelude of Qasida

### The Image of woman in the ‘*Nasib*’ of the Mu’allaqat

The previous chapter provides introductory overview of the pre-Islamic Qasida and general background information to the seven Mu’allaqat. It also discusses the concept of ‘image’ from the view point of poetic and literary studies. This chapter will address how the *nasib* of the Seven Mu’allaqat odes portray the image of woman. The focus of this chapter is to offer literal analysis of woman portrayal in the odes as well as figurative and the metaphorical implications of that portrayal.

To start with, Imru’al-Qais’ Mu’allaqa is typical Jahilliya ode that thoroughly discusses and depicts a lot of women. His *nasib* begins by the asking his companions to halt and help him in yearning over the ‘*atlat*’ (abode and ruin) of his beloved which constitute the first six verses of the poem. Verses 6 to 43 constitute *ghazal* or the erotic lyricism about women from which we shall trace the poet’s depiction of women.

Imru al-Qais says:<sup>80</sup>

1. Halt, two friends and we will weep for the memory of one beloved  
And an abode at Siqt al-Liwa between al-Dakhul and then Hawmal
2. Then Tudith then Mirqat, whose trace was not effaced  
By the two winds weaving over it from south and north
3. You see the droppings of white antelope,  
Scattered on its outer grounds and lowlands like peppercorns
4. As if I, on the morning, that they loaded up their beats,

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<sup>80</sup> The English translation of Imru’ al-Qais’ Mu’allaqa is extracted from Stetkevych, S.P. ‘The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual, New York: Cornell Univ. Press. 1993. pp 249-259.



- Before the tribe's acacia trees, were splitting colocynth
5. My companions, halting there their mounts for me,  
Say, Do not perish out of grief, Control yourself!
6. Sure my cure is tears poured forth;  
Then at a worn-out trace is there a place for weeping?
7. 'Console yourself' As was your wont before her with Umm al-Huwayrith  
And her neighbor at Mount Ma'sal, Umm al-Rabab!
8. When they arose there wafted from them musk as redolent  
As the east breeze when it bears the scent of clove.
9. Then my eyes out of ardent love, sent down a flood of tears upon my neck  
Till my sword belt was soaked in tears,
10. Did you not have many a fine day from them?  
And best of all of all the day at Darat Juljul?
11. And the day when, for virgins, I hocked my mount,  
When an amazing sight! They made off with her saddle and its gear!
12. Then through the day the virgins tossed her meat,  
And her fat like twisted fringes of white Damascus silk.
13. And the day I entered the howdah, 'Unayzah's howdah'  
Then she said, Woe to you! You'll make me go on foot.
14. She kept saying when the high-sided saddle listed with our weight,  
You have hocked my camel, O Imru'al-Qais, so get down!
15. Keep going I said to her, slacken his reins,  
But don't drive me away from your twice-to- tasted fruit!
16. Then Many a woman like you, pregnant and nursing have I visited by night.  
And distracted from her emulated one-year-old
17. When he cried from behind her, she turned her upper half toward him,  
But the half that was beneath me did not budge.
18. And one day on a sand dune's back she rebuffed me,  
And swore an oath never to be broken

19. O Fatimah, don't try me with your teasing  
 Or if you have resolved to cut me off, then do it gently
20. Are you deluded about me because your love is my slayer  
 And whatever you command my heart it does?
21. If something of my character has hurt you,  
 Then, pull my clothes away from yours, they will slip off
22. Your eyes do not shed tears but pierce with your tow shafts those pieces of my slaughtered heart.
23. Many an 'egg' of the curtained quarters, whose tent none dares to seek,  
 I took my pleasure with her, unhurried
24. I stole past guards to get her, past clansmen Eager,  
 could they conceal it, to slay me.
25. When the Pleiades spread out across the sky  
 Like a girdle's spread-out pleats, alternating gold and gems,
26. I came when she, before the tent curtain, had shed her clothes for sleep,  
 And was clad in nothing but an untied shift.
27. She said, God's oath! There is no way to dissuade you  
 And I don't see the veil lift from your error.
28. I led her forth from her tent, walking as she trailed  
 Over our tracks the train of gown of figured silk
29. Then when we had crossed the clan's enclosure  
 And made our way to a sandy hollow surrounded by long-winding dunes,
30. I drew her temples toward me, and she leaned over me,  
 With hollow waist, but plump the place that anklets ring
31. slender-waisted, white, not flabbly  
 Her collarbone shone like a polished mirror.
32. Now hiding, now baring a cheek long and wide,  
 She guards herself with the glance of a wild doe at Wajrah with fawn,
33. And a neck like the neck of the white antelope,  
 Not overly long when she raises it or lacking ornament.

34. A head of hair, jet-black, adorns her back,  
Luxuriant, as bunch of dates on a cluster-laden palm.
35. Some of its locks are secured on top  
While others strays between the plaited and the loose
36. A waist delicate, like a twisted bowstring, trim,  
A lower leg like the papyrus reed, well-watered, tender
37. In the forenoon crumbs of musk still deck her bed,  
And she, late morning sleeper, still is clad in sleeping gown, ungirded
38. She grasps with fingers, soft, uncalloused as if they were  
The worms of Zaby or the supple tooth sticks of the ishil tree.
39. When night falls she lights up the dark as if she were  
A lamp in the night cell of an anchorite.
40. At one like her staid man gazes with ardor  
When she stands in her full stature between woman's gown and maiden's shift,
41. like the first inviolate bloom white mixed with yellow,  
Nurtured on water limpid and unmuddied by alighting traveler
42. Grown men find consolation from the follies of their youth,  
But my heart refuses solace for its love for you.
43. How many an enemy, quarreling over you,  
Not neglectful of advice or of rebuke.

The above extract from the Mu'allaqa of Imru'al-Qais is where we can trace the poet's depiction of women. Suzanne Stetkevych however consider all the above 43 verses as constituting the *nasib* of the Mu'allaqa. It is clear that she did not differentiate between the *nasib* and *ghazal* and considers both sections as the *nasib* making it to appear the longest *nasib* of all the seven Mu'allaqat. Technically however *nasib* refers to the stage of halting and yearning over the abode whereas the *ghazal* deals with the poet's erotic lyricism about women or discussions of his various affairs with women.

Glaringly from the onset- from the first to the Ninth verse, we see the poet's preoccupation about a woman, his beloved, as he opens the ode with the traditional '*istiqaf*' or halting, imploring his companions to stop and weep at the traces of an abode where she once lived. 'The memory of the beloved and her abode suggest recollection of a lost mistress and her abode .....and conveys attempted revitalization through shedding of tears, through memory and recollection.'<sup>81</sup>

A possible explanation be given to this introduction is the poet's centrality and preoccupation about woman and the high esteem position she occupies in his mind. It could also be inferred from it the value of woman to entire pre-Islamic Arabian society for the fact it is a tradition for poets before and after Imru' al-Qais to begin their odes with the '*istiqaf*'. It is worthy of note that it was not Imru'al-Qais who invented the *istiqaf* style of opening a qasida, but all critics of pre-Islamic poetry agree that, it was him who standardized and prolonged it for other poets of his generation and later generations to mimic and imitate.

Imru'al-Qais identifies his beloved as a woman in verse 7, and from there to verse 43 he begins to narrate his amorous exploits and vividly describes his numerous love affairs and infatuations with many women from which we can deduce his portrayal of woman.

From that narration, we see Imru'al-Qais in verses 7 and 8 accounting for his affairs with Umm al-Huwayrith and her neighbor Umm al-Rabab at a place called Ma'sal. He introduces this incident in order to overcome the pains over his recollection and memory of first beloved, nonetheless, it was to no avail, he could not forget about her as he continues to share more tears.

He also narrates yet his another love experience and interaction with a group of young ladies,(verse 10-15) at Darat Juljul whom he had surprised at their bath by seizing their cloths

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<sup>81</sup> Stetkevych, S.P. The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual, pp. 259-260.

insisting not to give it back to them until they come out of pool naked; and finally he slaughters his camel for a grand party for them.

The story behind the Darat Juljul narrates A.J. Arberry,<sup>82</sup> (according to the *akhbar* of Imru'al-Qais) 'Imru'al-Qais fell in love with his cousin called Unaiza; he sought her company long time but was not successful in his approaches. Then one day the tribe loaded up their beasts and departed from their encampment, the men riding ahead while the women with the servants and the baggage lagged behind, observing that, Imru'al-Qais hung back also and hid in a hollow to wait for the women among them Unaiza to pass him, when they reached a pool called Darat Juljul they women decided to take a bathe, they alighted and undressed themselves completely and plunged into the pool, thereupon, Imru'al Qais stole up on them unawares seized their cloths and sat down on it telling them he will not give each her cloths until she comes out of the water naked and takes her cloths herself, that they refused to do until night falls, they at last came out one after another except Unaiza, she also finally yielded to his request. The women complain that he had punished them by keeping them and starving them in the water, and then he slaughtered his camel and threw a party for them. Imru' al-Qais entertained them with song and when it was time to go, the women each took some of his gear to carry for him except Unaiza. So to her he said 'You'll have to carry me!' She let him ride on the withers of her camel. Imru' al-Qais leaned toward her, stuck his head inside her howdah, and kissed her. When she pushed him away, her camel's load listed and cried, 'you have hocked my camel so get down!'" whence the poet's lines.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Arberry, A.J. 'The Seven Ode: The First Chapter in Arabic Literature' London: George Allen & Unwind Ltd, 1959 pp 33-34

<sup>83</sup> Stetkevych, S.P. 'The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual.pp264

In another scenario we see Imru'al-Qais boasting of having an affair with a pregnant and breastfeeding mother in (verses 16&17) and in verses 18 to 22 he elucidates on his bitter experience with Fatimah, a woman he truly lusts but she finally disappoints him by rejecting him and refuse to adhere to his seductions and sexual advances. Imru'al-Qais also proudly narrates another incident of his dangerous experience with another woman, when he schemes at midnight through her tent, which was under a tight security guide of a hostile tribe, the poet risks his life by taking her away while she wipes over their footsteps with her long robe.

In (verses 24- 43), the poet describes with all details his experience with this woman, describing her beautiful hair, as luxuriant as a bunch of date and her waist as delicate as a twisted bowstring and trim while describing her lower leg like the papyrus reed, well watered like tender. One significant worth noting point here is that, this woman is not an ordinary woman, she is very eminent and occupies high social position in the sense that, he describes her in verse 37 as a late morning sleeper a characteristics of eminent Jahilliya woman who has many slaves at her services while she enjoys the morning sleep.<sup>84</sup> Besides, because of her higher social position, her tent was under the surveillance of security guide, yet Imru'al-Qais was able maneuver to get in and took her out.

Stetkevych breaks up Imru'al-Qais' numerous erotic sections into five episodes, all of which express the concept of illicit, liminal sexuality<sup>85</sup>. The first episode is with Umm al-Huwayrith and her neighbor Umm al-Rabab. Verse 7 disabuses the notion that, the poet is naïve and love-struck, hopelessly infatuated with his first love. To the contrary, he has had at least two mistresses before, and it would seem, simultaneously. Hardly cases of innocent infatuation, they

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid, pp 252-253

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, pp261

consist rather of fornication with adulteresses, married women who have borne children (Umm means mother of), presumably to legal husbands and not the poet.<sup>86</sup> The second episode is the slaughter of the poet's she-camel at Darat Juljul. The companions describe it as 'a good day' that the poet had from the women and the scene is indeed one of delightful abandon: the poet has hocked him mount for the virgins in preparation for slaughtering it and they carry of his saddle and gear. Imru'al-Qais' slaughter of his she-camel in the *nasib* for the virgins appear to be a metaphor for premature sacrifice, immature sexuality.....the poet's relationship with the virgins is thus immature and unconsummated as the sacrificial meat is uncooked and unconsumed<sup>87</sup>.

'The third episode is comical one of seduction, or attempted seduction that takes place in the howdah of Unaiza. The use of the phrase '*dakhaltu al-khidra*' (meaning 'I entered the women's quarters) here applies to Unaiza's enclosed howdah and suggests the success of the poet's venture 'that is, sexual penetration, violation'..... and 'Unaiza's cursing him for making her go on foot conveys the same message as his slaughtering of his camel at *Darat Juljuli*: that the illicit relationship is impeding , the time , her due course of progress. 'Unaiza seem to have sacrificed her virginity prematurely and illicitly to the poet rather than at marriage.'<sup>88</sup>

'The most explicit depiction of an illicit relationship that diverts its participants from their proper social role', Stetkevych remarks, 'is that of verses 16 and 17, considered among the most scandalous in the classical poetic canon'. Here Imru'al-Qais goes by night to a pregnant woman with a one year old nursling from whom he diverts her, suggesting as in the other erotic episodes, the non-seriousness and frivolity of the relationship. Just how diverted this woman is from her maternal duties, how divided she is in her loyalties is made clear in verse 17: when, in the middle

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, pp 262

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. pp263

<sup>88</sup> Ibid,pp265

of their tryst, her one year old cries from behind her, she turns only the upper half of the body toward him to nurse him, while her lower half stays put beneath the poet. In the light of pre-Islamic belief that sexual intercourse with a nursing mother is harmful to the nursling, she is endangering her children born and unborn as well as betraying her husband, the father of the nursling and unborn child. These details enhance the illicit and antisocial aspect of the liminal erotic encounter<sup>89</sup>.

‘The fifth episode is with Fatimah, the concept that illicit infatuation is ultimately barren and short-lived is expressed here. Fatimah swears an oath to reject Imru’al-Qais’ paramour and it appears she has abandoned frivolity for seriousness; and it is ironic that, the poet’s own lack of seriousness skews his perception of Fatimah, for in his infatuation he imagines that her seriousness is a jest, mere coquetry (verse 19). He then declares that despite his apparent abject dependence upon her, he will not make their separation difficult, she need only to withdraw her affection from him gently as if pulling her garments from his. The clothes here Stetkevych stresses, serve as the conventional metaphor for the soul and self. Fatimah’s oath is fulfilled with the figurative ‘slaying’ of the poet or as we would say ‘breaking his heart’..... The expression used that ‘two shafts’ of her eyes pierce is carefully crafted, the two arrows or shafts can then be taken to be the two ‘*maysir*’ arrows that between them win all ten cuts of the *jazur*’<sup>90</sup>.

The last and longest of the episodes of Imru’al-Qais’ depiction of woman is his description of an egg of the curtained quarters, ‘*baydati khidrin*’ and likened it to his beloved. The epithet ‘an egg of the curtained quarters is an expression of delicacy and purity. It is a metaphor for another sort of incubation, the custom of confining pubescent girls until they are ready for marriage’<sup>91</sup>. Verses

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid,pp

<sup>90</sup> Ibid,pp266

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, pp267



30-36 give an extended description of this 'egg' - (the woman) of curtained quarters, her waist is hallow, her ankle is ankle is plump, a word used to describe a tender, well watered green branch. She is further described in terms of feminine perfection; slender, fair-skinned, her collarbone like a polished mirror, the coquettish baring and covering of the her cheek, her glance like that of the newly fawned doe at Wajrah, her long neck like that of the white antelope, except adorned with jewels. Stetkevych emphasizes that, these description are well-known motifs of *nasib*, thus to the floral similes of well-watered tenderness, purity and fertility are added likeness to the fecund fauna of the *nasib*. The image of fructification and vegetable abundance continues in verses 34—36, her luxuriant hair, its locks and braids in lascivious disarray, is likened to bunches of dates, her waist to a slender bowstring, her lower leg to papyrus reed, well-watered, tender<sup>92</sup>.

The 'egg' which is likened to the beloved is further described by Imru' al-Qais in verse 36 'as the sort of pubescent beauty that stirs infatuation and erotic fantasy. 'She offers the deductive eroticism of Aphrodite: her bed is strewn with crumbs of musk, an expression of seduction and eroticism. She sleeps late into the forenoon, not rising or girding herself for work' her voluptuous indolence is further detailed in verse 38 in the description of her fingers, soft as the sandworms of '*Zaby*', smooth and slender like the supple twigs of the '*ishil*' tree, not calloused or roughened by work. Her luminous complexion is compared to a monk's lamp illuminating the darkness, her sensual radiance to his radiant spirituality. So striking is the beauty of this woman who has reached full height but not full figure captured her in the fleeting instant when the blossom has just barely bloomed and not yet begun to fade. How then can Imru'al-Qais, so fickle and immature, overly susceptible to adolescent fancies and infatuations resist such a woman?!<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid,pp268-269

<sup>93</sup> Ibid,pp 269

The final description of the egg of the curtained quarters or the woman is richly polysemous, combining several semantic possibilities, all of which are metaphorical expression for a single concept of feminine purity as sexuality/fertility, for *'bikr'* denotes equally the first-laid egg of an ostrich, an unbored pearl, the blossom of the nenuphar i.e. water lily. The 'egg' as already highlighted symbolizes feminine purity and fertility; the unbored pearl is a traditional Arabic expression for a virgin, as is the lily, the unpluck blossom<sup>94</sup>. Pictorially, all the three, as al-Anbari points out, the egg, the pearl and the lily, have in common the ideal hue of the feminine complexion, which, in the Arabic aesthetic canon, is white mixed with yellow.<sup>95</sup> In addition, all three are described as nurtured by limpid water, unmuddied by alighting travelers- muddied water being a traditional expression for sullied female virtue.<sup>96</sup> Verses 42 and 43 of Imru'al-Qais' ode succinctly convey the poet's sense of his own arrested development, his heart remains bound to puerile passion, antagonizing those who censure him and offer sound and sincere advice, thus, the nasib of Imru'al-Qais' Mu'allaqa ends as it began, with the poet disconsolate and weeping over the memory of the beloved with no suggestion of departure or of resolve to depart.<sup>97</sup>

From the above analyzed Imru'al-Qais' depiction of women in his Mu'allaqa, two types of women are identified, indecent and promiscuous women, with whom the poet satisfies his infatuations. Some of the women in this category were women of high esteem *'sayyidaat'* and of higher social status, while others were young virgins and unmarried others were married or even pregnant and at the same time nursing mothers. The second category of women the poet represents in the character of Fatimah was decent, upright *and* rectitude woman who denied the

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Al-Anbari, Sharh al-Qassa'id al-Sab' pp70-72 extracted from Ibid, pp. 269-270

<sup>96</sup> Stetkevych, S.P. The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual. pp. 270

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

poet to chance satisfy his lust on her. The poet likened her with the 'egg' of the curtained quarters; this woman breaks the poet's heart by rejecting his seductive advances. The entire women Imru'al-Qais described in his ode do appear to free women and not to be slaves.

It must be emphasized here that of the image depicted of woman in the Mu'allaqat is mainly drawn by either describing or comparing her with other physical or abstract images, therefor to appreciate her true depiction it is required for a critical and rigorous examination of the similes and resemblances to which the 'beloved woman' is compared to. In this regard, Michael A. Sells explains that 'the poetic language of the classical Arabic is descriptive in the purely conventional sense used by the commentators who discuss certain sections of the poem as *'wasf'*- description and *'nat'*- characterization, the simile or resemblance function in a manner far too complex to be reduced to mere description of the beloved. He empathizes that 'the simile sets up an expectation that the beloved will be described and then goes on to evoke the beloved. But what is presented in the simile is not in fact the beloved as an object of description but the mythopoeic world of the lost garden or meadow.'<sup>98</sup> Sells notes that, in the nasib of the Qasida, the metaphors and similes that are engendered by the mention of the beloved functions on the metaphorical level, the level of similarity: the curl of the beloved's hair is like the curl of the grapevine, her mouth is like a draught of wine, her fragrance is like the fragrance of musk. In most cases, Sells laments, the original metaphor or simile touches off a chain of additional smiles, because the original simile was directly linked to a feature of the beloved, the reasonable expectation results that the entire chain of similes will be descriptive of the beloved. In fact, the similes seem to extend, either through the elaboration of simile or through a chain of simple similes far beyond the original

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<sup>98</sup>Sells, M.A 'Guises of the Ghul: Dissembling Simile and Semantic Overview in the Classical Arabic Nasid' in Stetkevych S.P. ed. *Reorientations/ Arabic and Persian Poetry*, Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press 1994. Pp. 130

point of comparison.<sup>99</sup> The primary referent of the similes found in nasib of Mu'allaqat is not the beloved but a symbolic analogue of the beloved the lost paradise. It therefore becomes apparent that, the description of the beloved in the nasib is not self-contained as an isolated and stylized convention, rather, its underlying symbolic associations that are tied into the entire nasib of a qasida.<sup>100</sup>

The Mu'allaqa of Antara takes off as usual by the poet's stop at the abode where his beloved had once dwelt, he yearned over it recollecting those moments and describing the scene of her departure from the old abode to new one located far away from where he lives, as the a standard Jahiliya Qasida requires. The nasib of his Mu'allaqa constitutes verse 1-9 below:<sup>101</sup>

1. Have the poets left a single spot for a patch to be sown?  
Or did you recognize the abode after long meditation
2. O abode of Abla at El-Jawa let me hear you speak;  
I give you good morning, abode of Abla and greetings to you
3. For there, I halted my she-camel, huge-bodied as a castle  
That I might satisfy the hankering and lingerer
4. While Abla lodged at El-Jawa and our folk dwelt  
At El-Hazn and Es-Samman and El-Mutathallim
5. All hail to you, ruins of a time long since gone by,  
Empty and desolate since the day Umm el- Haytham parted
6. She alight in the land of the bellows and it has become  
Very hard for me to seek you out, daughter of Makhram
7. Casually I fell in love with her as I slew her folk  
By your father's life such a declaration is scarce opportune
8. And you have occupied in my heart, make no doubt of it

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid, pp.131

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> The translation of the verse is taken from: Arberry, A. J. The Seven Odes: The First Chapter in Arabic Literature. pp.179

That place of one dearly beloved and highly honored

9. But how visit her, now her people are in spring quarters

At Unaizatan, while ours are dwelling in El Ghailam?

10. Nothing disquieted me, but that her people burthen beats

Were champng khimklim- berries amid their habitation

11. Two and forty milch-camel among them all black

As the inner wring feathers of the sable raven

In the above nasib, (verses 1-9), and part of ghazal (verses 10-11) Antara explains how finally draught forced the family of his beloved to vacate their old abode for a new one where they can find water for survival. We can infer from the narration the indispensability of water and the priority always giving to womenfolk during draught season and period of war by taking them to safe and secure place where water is available and distance away from the war zone. The poet explains how worried he was because of the departure of the beloved since he has fallen in love with her.

We also find the poet's depiction of the beloved as a set of images constructed around the element of fragrance, water and lush vegetation which the poet introduces through a simile whose ostensible referent is the beloved<sup>102</sup>. The following verses of the Mu'allaha attest to that:

13. She takes your hear with the flash edge of her smile,

Her mouth, sweet to the kiss, sweet to the taste

14. As if a draft of must from a specimen's pouch

Announced the wet gleam of her inner teeth

15. Or an untouched meadow bloom and grass,

Sheltered in rain, untrodden, dung free hidden

16. Over it the white, first clouds of spring,

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<sup>102</sup> The translation of this section of Antara' Mu'allaha is extracted from Sells' article referred to above. pp. 135

Pour down, leaving small pools like silver dirhams.

17. Pouring and bursting, evening on evening,

Gushing over it in an endless stream

18. The fly has it all to himself, and is not about to leave,

Droning softly, like a wine drinker humming a tune,

19. The buzzing, elbow on elbow like a one-armed man,

Kindling a fire, bent down over the flint.

In projecting his beloved, Antara in verse 13 above made reference to the wet mouth of Abla, this reference yields to a simile pitting the visual against the olfactory. Verse 14 is directly related to a specific image of the beloved, her inner teeth '*awaaridaha*'- a word that brings forth sensual connotation of her open, wet mouth.<sup>103</sup> Sells reinstates that, the apparent description of the beloved has shown itself to be something quite other. The image of her wet mouth leads into chain of similes that extend through various aspect of the sensorium and outrun any logic of descriptive comparison. Yet one finds an underlying associative logic in the language used for the garden scene, the beloved vignette begins, as most do, in an erotic mode with reference her to the sweet taste of her wet mouth and the scent of musk that announced the gleam of her inner teeth. The language Antara uses to project Abla by comparing her with the garden changes from erotic description of woman to purification. His language describes the garden as untouched '*unuf*' and the clouds that water it are virgin '*bikr*'. Here the nasib is constructed around joining of the tribes at the spring encampments and their subsequent separation. Antara uses this phenomenon to depict the tragic mode and the relationship of his personal as well as his society to reflect the analogy between the flash edge of his sword and the smile of his beloved Abla. 'The union of the lover and the beloved, which is the point of

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid,pp. 136

departure for the nasib of Antara's Mu'allāqa is a microcosm of the union of the differing tribes, it is clear that, hiding behind the dissembling similes of the nasib is a logic of union and purification that functions both on the individual and communal levels'.<sup>104</sup>

The combination of poetic necessity and freedom of movement from the sense fulfillment to purification is also manifests in the Mu'allāqa of Tarafa. In the Qasida, the garden scene and the description of the beloved are intertwined in a particular strong fashion. Tarafa introduces his beloved and metaphorically compares to gazelle. This comparison, in which the beloved is likened to gazelle, is common in pre-Islamic poetry and gazelle symbolizes the beloved. Even though a metaphorical relationship is established between the beloved and gazelle in the Mu'allāqa it nevertheless appeared problematic as both the gazelle and beloved are described simultaneously, at some points the attributes given would be appropriate for either the beloved or the gazelle. In other words, it is not clear whether the attributes apply to the gazelle or the beloved. Another problem is a movement from the mouth of the beloved, to the lost garden to the language of purification.<sup>105</sup> In extending his comparison, Tarafa has also compared the howdah of his beloved to a ship; and said:

5. It cleaves the rippled waves, bow-breast submerged,

Like the hand of a child at play scooping through the soft soil.

6. Among the tribe is a gazelle, a wine-dark yearling,

Shaking down the Arak berries and draped string on string, with chrysolite and pearl.

7. She lags; from a dume thicket she watches the herd.

She pulls at the Arak branches until they clothe her

8. from a deep red mouth she smiles, a chamomile blossom,

Dew-moistened, breaking through a crest of pure sand

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid,pp137

<sup>105</sup> Ibid,pp. 141

9. Given a draught of the rays of the sun, except for the gums,

Darkened with antimony that hasn't yet worn away

10. As if the sun had loosed its rope upon her face,

Glowing, washed in light, smooth.<sup>106</sup>

The above verses compare movement of the camel that carries the beloved away with a sensual depiction of the ship's breast cleaving the bubbling waters, then yield to another simile 'like the hand of a child at a play or scooping through the soft soil. The simile is apparently based upon a physical analogy involving the parting of a malleable element. The introduction of the metaphor of the beloved as gazelle is used to heighten the erotic mode. The extension of the metaphor over the several remaining verses reveals a poetic that is far removed from the simple substitution of gazelle for beloved. The gazelle imagery and that of the beloved are developed synchronically. It becomes difficult to tell whether the object of description is the beloved or the gazelle because within the metaphor of beloved as gazelle the poet sustains depiction of gazelle with interior metaphors that reverse the tenor-vehicle direction: gazelle as beloved. This is however common in Arabic rhetoric under the simile called '*tashbih ad-Dimni*' where a comparison between two objects is made in such a way the two objects are depicted as one and the same and could not be differentiated. This simile is used to express a strong resemblance between two objects as if the two are one and the same. The above quoted verses from Tarafa's Mu'allaha end with a depiction of the face of the beloved as cloaked or veiled by the sun whose poetic power is partially due to the sense of oxymoron. Tarafa's *nasib* achieves a singular intensity that allows it to motivate the long and powerful Mu'allaha as a whole. Parallel to the complex interplay between

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<sup>106</sup> The English translation of this extract is copied from Ibid, pp. 142



tenor and vehicle and nature culture, is the interplay between sense fulfillment and purification<sup>107</sup>.

Verse 5 above underscores the erotic overtone of the poem when it turns to the mouth of woman or the beloved of the poet. The sexual suggestion is balanced by the language of purification, the chamomile is breaking through dew-soaked sand that is pure and later the sun loses its robe upon her face, a face that is pure of color. The purification is further linked with water, though in this case the water is brought metaphorically in reference to sunlight. yet, even in the purification language, there is embedded an extraordinarily intimate language of suggestion and union, the sun loosening its rope upon her face, that the most erotically intense passages will be also those that are purificatory in their explicit language is a phenomenon characterized by many of nasibs<sup>108</sup>.

In the nasib of Labid's Mu'allaqa which constitutes verses 1-11 below, the abode or the atlatl are depicted as barren which yields to the invocation of the rain upon them yet there is no depiction and portrayal of the beloved 'woman' in an explicit manner. The immediate reference to the atlatl 'May they be blessed' and of the description that follow is given a symbolic associations of the atlatl, there is no direct reference describing or pinpointing at the beloved.

The nasib of the Labid's Mu'allaqa reads<sup>109</sup>:

1. Effaced are the abodes, brief encampment and long-settled ones;

At Mina the wilderness has claimed Mount Ghawl and Mouth Rijam,

2. The torrent channels of Mount Rayyan, their tracings are laid bare.

Persevered as surely as inscriptions are preserved in rock,,

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid, pp. 143

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 114

<sup>109</sup> The translation of the nasib of Labid's Mu'allaqa is taken from Stetkevych S.P. 'The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual, New York: Cornell Univ. Press. 1993 pp. 9-18

3. Dung-darkened patches over which, since they were peopled, years elapsed,  
     Their profane months and sacred ones have passed away.
4. They were watered by the rain the spring stars bring,  
     And on them fell the rain of thunderclouds, downpour and drizzle.
5. From each night-faring rain cloud and early morning horizon-darkener  
     And cloud at forenoon with resounding rumble.
6. The 'ayhuqan' thrust up its shoots, and on the two sides of the valley Gazelles and ostriches have borne their young.
7. Wide-eyed Oryx cows, newly-calved, stand above their newborns, motionless,  
     While on the plain the yearlings in in clusters caper.
8. The torrents have exposed the ruins,  
     As if they writings whose text pens have inscribed anew
9. Or like the tattooer sprinkling lampblack again and yet again  
     Over hands on which tattoos appear
10. Then I stopped and questioned them, but how do we question,  
     Mute immortals whose speech is indistinct?
11. Stripped bare where once a folk had dwelled, then one morn departed;  
     Abandoned lay the trench that ran around the tents the human grass that plugged their holes
12. The clanswomen departing stirred your longing when they loaded up their gear,  
     Then climbed inside their howdah frames with squeaking tents
13. The howdah each enclosed with wooden frame, covered by a wooden carpet.  
     And shaded by fine veil and figured drape,
14. In clusters they departed, as if the howdahs bore the wild cows of Tudih  
     And while does of Wajrah tenderly inclining over their young.
15. They were urged on, and the mirage dissolved them till they were like  
     The windings of the riverbed of Bishah, its tamarisks and boulders
16. What then do you remember of Nawwar when she has gone far off?  
     And her bonds, both firm and frayed, are cut asunder?
17. A Murrite woman who alit in fayd, then dwelled nearby the people of Hijaz,  
     How then could you hope to meet with her again?

18. On the eastward slopes of Tayy's two mounts she alighted, or on Muhajjir's mount,

Then a lone peak contained her, and its foothills,

19. Then in Suwaiq if she headed toward the Yemen, so that by now

She is most likely in its Wihaf al-Qahr

20. Cut off your love from him whose bond is not secure

For the binder of affection's bond is he who breaks it

21. Be generous to him who treats you well, but only the cutting of bonds remains

When affection falters and its foundation fails

From the above verses of Labid's Mu'allāqa, the depiction the beloved "was revealed to base upon a series of dissembling similes that promised but never delivered a description of the beloved. They were shown to have been grounded in an associative logic based upon tension between sexual and purificatory *dhikr and sahw*, and in the last case, water imagery and sexual allusion followed by the idyl. Put differently the description of the beloved is not only made up of guises but also as an apparently self-standing and independent feature of the *nasib*, is itself a guise. It is the underlying tension and dynamic polarities that become the motivating force for the poem. The Mu'allāqa of Labid has no implicit section devoted to the description of the beloved but it has nevertheless achieve the essential poetic effect of her evocation by harnessing the deeper polarities within the idyl (hidden garden, well-watered, animals birthing or caring for their young) motif<sup>110</sup>

Sells stresses that 'as the conventional separating the description of the beloved from the rest of the *nasib* begins to fall away (in the Labid's Mu'allāqa) as the symbolic connection between the beloved and idyl emerges as central to the dissembling simile, the beloved –gazelle simile in the Mu'allāqa has shown clearly that corporeal characteristics and typical behavior represent only

<sup>110</sup> Sells, M.A. 'Guises of the Ghul: Dissembling Simile and Semantic Overflow in the Classical Arabic *Nasib*'. Pp152

the most superficial aspect of the simile. In the case of falling rains, it could be suggested that it connotes sexual union and climax or purification; fertility and growth or erosion and effacement, the poet through his tears, or his beloved, through her wet mouth. Indeed there are dynamic polarities of water within the *nasib* of Labid's *Mu'allaqat*.<sup>111</sup>

In a related analysis, Suzanne Stetkevych applies the concept of rite of passage - an anthropological non-narrative structural level paradigm - to explain Labid's *Mu'allaqat*, saying 'the *nasib* of the *Mu'allaqat* is characterized by the dialectical confrontation or opposition between culture and nature. She stresses the *nasib* develops this dialectical opposition through a reversal of attributes: culture is dehumanized feralized, whereas nature is described with the attributes of culture. In verses 1-3, & 4-7, the visible abandoned encampment in the *nasib* of the *Mu'allaqat* is darkened by the droppings of the animals of its inhabitants as days go by, is now sustained or watered by the rain clouds. Also the years of the human calendar, with their division into sacred and profane months, have elapsed, hence reinforcing the waning of all thing human, cultural. By the depletion of the human culture, time is now measured by natural phenomena: the human vernal encampments lie abandoned, but the rain-boding stars dwell in their spring abode. The sustenance of the ruin is not that which human society provides but that which the rain clouds bring. The days too are now measured not by human activity but the times at which the clouds let down their life-giving burdens.<sup>112</sup>

On metaphorical depiction of woman by likening her to the desert animals, Stetkevych laments that, the Gazelle does and Oryx cows are the conventional simile for Labid's beloved and the women of her tribe. It is therefore inevitable that we read into the description and comparison a

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<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, pp 156-157

<sup>112</sup> Stetkevych, S.P. *The Mute Immortals Speak* PP. 20

sublimation of the poet's yearning for lost love that failed. We also see in the parturition and nurturing of the gazelle does and Oryx cows a metaphor for what might have been, a subtle personification, perceptible only through a familiarity with the poetic convention. Thus emerges from the scene of the maternal serenity of the newly calved Oryx cows contrasted with the sprightly capering of their yearlings.<sup>113</sup>

Furthermore, Labid upon gazing at the desolate stones or the ruins, he quickly begins to remember the scene of Za'a'in or departure of his beloved and women of her tribe. Understandably, witnessing the loading of the camel stirred emotion in him, for he knew full well that he would probably never see her again<sup>114</sup>. It appears from Labid's description of Nawwar, his beloved that she is a woman of higher social status, highly respected and command highly dignified reverence like those eminent pre-Islamic women '*sayyadat*' who were always under security protection with a lot of slaves attending to their needs. Confirming this claim Raymond Farrin says 'From Labid's description, we learn that when Nawwar travels, she travels comfortably. The woman is most likely a sheikh's daughter, a proud and pampered beauty. In the midst of this evoked atmosphere of loss and melancholy, we encounter an image that may seem comic to us: Oryx does and gazelles riding in the camel litters. Comedy however, was surely not the original intent. The women (gorgeous ones we are to infer) are glancing back at him "the poet" in the campsite area like antelope turning to glance at their young. Such looks caused poets to melt<sup>115</sup>. We also realize the fixity of Nawwar's emotional grip on Labid after he remembered that it has been many years since her departure from Mina. With admirable manliness, he finally

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Farrin, R. *Abundance from the Desert: Classical Arabic Poetry*, New York: Syracuse Univ. Press, 2001pp.52

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

exhorts himself to cut her off once and for all and give his attention to one in whose tent he may still enjoy warmth and affection.<sup>116</sup>

Raymond elaborates, at point she was departing from Mina, she was young, beautiful and single. Doubtless, she had caught the eye of a paternal cousin, to say nothing of the impression she had made on the other men her tribe. Labid meanwhile was in all likelihood still an un-established, random young fellow, besides, (it is entirely possible, furthermore that aside from being an outsider, he may have belonged to a tribe considered hostile by Murrtes: the tribe of Nawwar. Nawwar's tribe may have decided to camp next to Labid and his kin only because they were arriving during the months of peace) therefore, however much he may have grown fond of her during their time together at Mina, and she may have been even of him, his chances of winning her hand were probably less.<sup>117</sup>

We notice from the above analysis one other relevant scenes in the Mu'allaqat in which woman depiction is telling is through '*Za'a'in* ( *za'n* singular ) which means the description of the departure scene of the poet's beloved mostly in the company of other women of her tribe. The *Za'a'in*, Ezz el-Din Hassan el-Banna explains 'is one of the dominant motif of the *nasib*, it consists primarily of the poet's description of the woman departing in their camel litters. The moment of description generally occurs after the poet has stopped at the ruined campsite, as we find in the Mu'allaqa of Zuhair, Tarafa. In other poems the poet may begin with a reference to the departure of neighboring tribe, (*khalit*), from which he proceeds to description of the departing women themselves'<sup>118</sup>.

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid,pp.55

<sup>118</sup> EZZ el-Din H. 'No Solace for the Heart: The Motif of the Departing Woman in the Pre-Islamic Battle Ode' in Stetkevych S.P. ed. *Reorientations/ Arabic and Persian Poetry*, Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press 1994.pp 166

Ezz el-Din observes that, the pre-Islamic *nasib* rarely encounters the verb '*Za'ana*' referring to the poet's own tribe or references to the land weeping, or ruins greeting the poet. Rather, one finds the tribe of the poet's beloved departing and the poet himself greeting and weeping over the deserted dwelling place. The inversion here seems to express bitter self-mockery and grief. Furthermore, Labid's use of the plural pronouns (verse 12) confirms that weeping in the *nasib* does not express a purely personal concern but, rather a communal one.<sup>119</sup>

Verses 12-15 in the *Mu'allaqa* of Labid, constitute the *Za'n*, the poet constructed the scene beautifully to describe the yearning that stirs his heart as the women load up their belongings and enter their *howdahs*, which signifies their enclosure and protection of women, another significant and paramount feature is highlighted by their curtaining in a variety of carpets veils and drapes. This image of the women is further likened to the Oryx cows of *Tudih* and the white antelope does with their fawns at *Wajrah*. As the poet completely loses the sight of the camel carrying his beloved as it vamooses into the desert, he begins to reflect upon the possible whereabouts of his beloved, behind the reflection reiterates *Stetkevych*, lie the motif of cutting of bonds, the motional cutting of ties with his beloved *Nawwar*. The poet's mind begins to contemplate where she might have encamped, is it *Fayd*? *Hijaz*? *Mount Muhajjir*? *Suwa'iq*? *Wihaf al-Qahr*? or *Tikham*?. She seems, in his imagination to be everywhere and nowhere, this confusion expresses the deeper worries of the poet by losing this woman and explains the important position she occupied in his heart.<sup>120</sup>

The *Mu'allaqa* of *Zuhair* as explained in the previous chapter was said in commemoration of the two noble chieftains of the tribe of *Abs* and *Zubyan* for their role in negotiating the peace

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<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, pp.171

<sup>120</sup> *Stetkevych*, S.P. 'The Mute Immortals Speak. pp. 25

agreement which ended the 40 year war between the two brotherly tribes. Zuhair was supposed to be travelling with a friend in the desert and recognized the place where the tent of his beloved has been pitched 20 years before. He finds it wild and desolate; but his imagination is so warmed by associated ideas of former happiness, that he seems to discern a company of damsels, with his favorite in the midst of them, of whose appearance and journey he gives a very lively picture, before proceeding to praise the noble chieftains.<sup>121</sup> The nasib of Zuhair's Mu'allaqa constitutes verses 1- 6, verses 7-16 depicts the Za'a'in, it reads:<sup>122</sup>

1. Are there still blackened orts in the stone-waste of the Ed-Darraj  
And El-Mutathallam, mute witness to where Umm Aufa once dwelt?
2. A lodging where she abode in Er-Rakmatan, that appears  
Like crisscross tattooing upon the sinews of a wrist-
3. There the wild cows and white antelopes wander, herd upon herd.  
And their young ones spring up out of their several couches
4. There it was I stood after twenty livelong years,  
Hard put to it to recognize the lodging, deeply as I meditated:
5. Blacking stones marking the spot where the cauldron was slung  
And a trench like debris of a cistern still unbleached.
6. When I recognized the abode, I said to that lodging –place,  
Good morning to you, lodging-place: well may you fare!
7. Look well my friend- do you see any litter-borne ladies?  
Traveling along high land above the water of Jarthem?
8. They will have passed El-Karan to the right and the rough grounds thereabout  
(And in El-Karan how many foes, aye and friends are dwelling
9. Their howdahs hung with costly cloths, and fine spun veils.  
Whose fingers are rose-red, the very hue of dragon's bloods
10. Issuing from Es-Sooban, they have threaded its twisting course

<sup>121</sup> Arberry, A.J. 'The Seven Odes: The First Chapter in Arabic Literature pp.108

<sup>122</sup> This translation is by Arberry taken from Ibid, pp.114-115



- Mounted on Kainite camels sleek and excellently nourished
11. Swerved through hollow Es-Sooban, ascended its rugged ridge  
Wearing the sweet coyness of the luxuriously nurtured:
12. It is as though the thrums of dyed wool littering every spot  
Where they alighted were uncrushed berries of the red fana
13. With the dawn they arose, and sunrise saw their stirring  
Then into wadi Er-Rass they plunged like land into mouth
14. And when came to the waters blue in the brimming well  
They cast down their sticks, as one who pitches his tent to stay;
15. A sweet diversion are they to the gentle a pretty sight  
Well worth the scrutiny of those who like looking a beauty

The above verses of Zuhair's ode make reference to woman. Unlike the Mu'allaqat of Imru al-Qais where there are a lot references to many women, Zuhair only depicted woman in the above verses alone. The reason for this may be due to the fact that, the poet was preoccupied with the matters of war and reconciliation between the two warring tribes, and did bother to discuss women apart from going by the normal poetic format of mentioning them in the nasib of the Qasida<sup>123</sup>.

Zuhair depicts two images of woman in his nasib; the first one is the description of Umm Afa, and the ruin of her abode which normally characterized most Jahiliya Qasida, he does that beautifully in verses 1-7. Verses 2&3, and 5&6 describe the ruin of the abode where the beloved Ummu Afa once lived. Verses 1 & 4 describe the beloved herself. The choice of words in which the poet selects to describe the beloved and her abode makes one guesses how important and unique she is to the poet. It also shows the genius of the poet in giving pictorial description of the place, to the extent that, you can feel and visualize the surrounding of the site as if a picture of it

<sup>123</sup> عبد المنعم احمد يونس، صورة المرأة العربية في السبع الطوال 1985 ص125

is placed before you: You can imagine the wild desert animals loitering here and there; you figure out the remnants of black stones, and see the poet addressing and greeting them as if there is someone there to respond to him. All these details bring out the poet's expertise in carrying the reader's along with his vivid description and makes one imagines anguish he was going through as result of the loss of his beloved.<sup>124</sup>.

The second depiction of the woman in Zuhair's Mu'allaqa is the Za'a'in or the departing women, as the poet salutes the abode and remembers his good old days he lived or spent there with the beloved, he begins to think of the day she was vacating the place, and narrates the incident to his companion as if he is there witnessing the scene. The significance of Zuhair's vivid account of Za'a'in or the departure of his beloved together with other ladies of her tribe, from their original abode to the safe place where they found abundant of water to sustain their livelihood is that, the Arabs always want to first and foremost ensure the security and safety of their womenfolk. We realize Zuhair's Mu'allaqa was said at a time of war, and for security reason, the women have to be taken far from the vicinity of war to a safe place where security and livelihood could be guaranteed. There is no better place in the desert of Arabia to ensure the safety of the women at that critical moment of war than to take them to a place far from the battle field and where is abundant of water is available.<sup>125</sup>

Similarly, the nasib of Amr Ibn Kulthum's Mu'allaqa demonstrates the Za'a'in scenery, but unlike the other Mu'allaqat, his ode did not begin with halting and yearning over the abode of the

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid, pp.126

<sup>125</sup> Ibid,pp 138

beloved but rather with praises for the wine. The first eight verses of the Mu'allaqa Amr reads:<sup>126</sup>

1. Up maiden! Fetch the morning-drink and spare not,  
The wine of Andrain
2. Clean wine that takes a saffron hue when water  
is mingled warm therein.
3. The lover tasting it forget his passion,  
His heart is eased of pain,
4. The stingy miser, as he lifts the goblet,  
Regardeth not his gain
5. Pass round from left to right! Why let of thou, maiden,  
Me and my comrades thirst?
6. Yet am I, whom thou wilt, not serve this morning,  
Of us three not the worst!
7. Many a cup in Ba'alabac and Damascus  
And Qasirin I drained
8. Howbeit we ordained to death, shall one day  
Meet death, to us ordained!

The sharp deviation of these opening verses of Amr's Mu'allaqa made some western critics to doubt its authenticity. In fact they believed they were not part and parcel of the original Mu'allaqa of Amr Ibn Kulthum, they argued they were later addition by the compilers of the Mu'allaqa. Arberry argues 'The perfectly Anacreontic strain' of the opening (of Amr's Mu'allaqa) is a violent departure from the conventional curtain-raiser, the halt at the deserted encampment of the beloved of ancient Arab poets. For this reason the higher critics have

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<sup>126</sup> Translation of this part is by Nicholson, extracted from Arberry's *The Seven Ode* pp. 202

proposed that the first eight or nine couplets of Amr's ode are later accretion and that the poem originally commenced with the rhymed couplet;

Pause yet before the parting litter-bone lady  
and well declare you the truth, and you'll declare it

However, all the ancient writers accept the bacchanalian prelude as authentic, and it was taken as a model by certain later poets weary of the usual routine.<sup>127</sup>

Dissimilar to Labid's Mu'allaqa, Amr's ode has two different descriptions of Za'a'in, the first one constitutes verses 8-12 and it reads<sup>128</sup>:

8. And surely death will seize us;

It is fated to us; we to it

9. So halt, departing woman, before the separation,

That we may tell you the truth and you may do the same

10. Halt, that we may ask you;

'Have you cut us off to hasten the separation, or have deceived a trusted one?

11. On a day of war, of striking and thrusting,

Pleasing to your cousins

12. For truly today, tomorrow, and the day after

Are pledges to what you know not.

Following the controversial opening praise of the wine, Amr beseeches the departing women to wait so that he may tell them of the battles and impending death and of their uncertain future due to the warring tribe. Amr in the above verses addresses the Za'a'in, the departing woman, in an

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<sup>127</sup> Arberry, A. J. *The Seven Odes: The First Chapter in Arabic Literature*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1959 pp.197-198

<sup>128</sup> Translation by A. J. Arberry

explicit manner by calling into question any future relationship between him and his beloved; war causes rapture between them and the forced flight of the womenfolk.<sup>129</sup>

13. She shows you, when you enter privacy with her,  
And she's secure from the eye of the hateful foemen,
14. Arm of a long-necked she-camel, white and youthful  
Fresh from the spring-pastures of sand and stone-land,
15. A soft breast like a casket of ivory  
Chastely guarded from adventurous fingers
16. The flanks of a lithe, long, tender body,  
Buttocks oppressed by their ponderous cargo
17. I called to mind my youth, and was filled with yearning  
When I held her camel urged on at evenings
18. Yamamah hove insight, and towered above us  
Like swords lifted in the hands of the unsheathes
19. And no she-camel that's lost its foal, and quavers  
The cry of longing, ever grieved as I grieved
20. Nor any grey-haired mother, whose evil fortune  
Left her, of nine sons, not one unburied
21. Truly today and tomorrow and after tomorrow  
Are pledgings of a destiny you know naught of

In verse 13-20, above, the poet describes his beloved, intensifying the sense of separation and loss, which again shows how important she is to him. The poet compares her with pure white virgin she-camel, while the grief-stricken poet is like a she camel that has lost her foal, like a grey-haired woman who has buried her nine sons<sup>130</sup>. From the verses we also see the occurrence of Za'n as a motif of the nasib of Mu'allaqa; this is not accidental but an embodiment which

<sup>129</sup> EZZ el-Din H. 'No Solace for the Heart: The Motif of the Departing Woman in the Pre-Islamic Battle Ode'.pp 174.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

offers a significant description of woman and thereby very significant section of helping us to explore the depiction of the beloved. The appearance of Za'a'in reveals the presence of a highly organized poetic structuring of motifs and themes in the Jahilliya Qassida<sup>131</sup>. The second diction of the Za'a'in constitute verses 21- 24 and it will be analyzed in the appropriate section in next chapter.

The depiction of woman in the nasib of the el-Harith's Mu'allaqa was a straightforward one. Unlike the other six Mu'allaqat it is characterized with a very brief description of the beloved and yearning over the abode, but with very detail account of a lot of geographical sites.

The Mu'allaqa of El- Harith being a piece of special pleading on a political subject makes it the least generally interesting of the seven. It is almost unadorned with those wild natural descriptions of beast and birds and trees, which make the chief charm of the others Mu'allaqat, besides it lacks originality or passion in its opening ghazal or love-verses. They are introduced clearly as a matter of convention, and were in all probability borrowed in old age for the occasion from the poetry of his younger time.'<sup>132</sup>

El-Harith depiction of woman and abode constitutes the first eight verses of his Mu'allaqa and it reads<sup>133</sup>:

1. Asma announced to us she would soon be parting  
     Many's the tarrier who tarrying grows wearisome
2. After she dwelt with us in the rough land of Shamma,  
     Then her nearest habitation El-Khalsa
3. Then her El-Muhaaiyal, Es Sifah and the heights of

<sup>131</sup> EZZ el-Din H. 'No Solace for the Heart,pp.176

<sup>132</sup> Arberry, A. J. The Seven Ode: The First Chapter in Arabic Literature. Pp217.

<sup>133</sup> Translation of this verses is by Arberry extracted from Ibid, pp 222

Dul Fitak and Adhib and El-Wafa

4. Then the meadows of El-Kata, the valley of Esh-Shurbub, Esh-Shu'batan and Abla
5. I see no more her I dwelt with there, and today I  
Weep crazily and what profit is in weeping?
6. Before your very eyes Hind, kindled at evening  
The fire that the highland raised up flickering;
7. She kindled in between El-Akeek and Shakhsan  
With aloe-wood, shining as clear as daylight
8. Find you beheld her fire from a far distance  
At Khazaz- how remote its wrath was from you!

From above verses, El-Harith presents to us two different women, , Asma, (verse 1-5) the first woman that he loved so much but eventually had to leave him to settle in another camp far away from where he lives. We read from verse 1, that it was Asma, who terminated the relationship and decided to leave the neighborhood of the poet in the broad day tight for another camp. Her boldness is telling the same verse when she come to announce her departure to the poet. Perhaps, the relationship between El-Harith and Asma was not official, and furthermore she might have realized keeping the relationship was of any benefit to her and therefore decided to quit and to change location so as to leave the memory of her affairs with the poet behind, and to get in touch with others people who may be more beneficial to her than living closer to the poet<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> عبد المنعم احمد يونس، صورة المرأة العربية في السبع الطوال 1985 ص 208

It can be deduced from the above analysis that, women in the pre-Islamic era enjoy absolute right in marriage and cohabiting with their male counterparts; to the extent they can revoke the relationship without any hindrance or social barriers. This perhaps explains the total freedom a Jahilliya Arabian woman enjoys, as far as marital relationship was concerned.

El-Harith can be taken on for not accounting on Za'n or the departure of Asma in the nasib. Having been approached in broad daylight, to be informed of this sad departure and end of his relation with the beloved, it would have been very appropriate for the poet to at least describe her painful departure, as most poets of Jahilliya era do.

Perhaps the poet substituted for the description of the Za'a'in with introduction of names of places he used to meet his beloved as indicated in verses 2-4 above. Recalling the names of these places and recollecting the sweet moments he and the beloved enjoyed there add to his pain and feeling of loss. It also tells us the extent the poet cherishes and loves Asma, which I think it is appropriate substitution in its own right, because some critics take him on for over emphasis on the names of many places in the nasib.

The poet recalled the names of those places to express his anguish and worries which his beloved decision to depart has caused him. It appears they lived and passed some wonderful times together for quite a long period, perhaps he mentions those places; where they use to pass some leisure. By so doing, she will recollect those memorable, fantastic and untiring moments; hand, the poet seemed to be taken by surprise by this unexpected announcement but there was so that she might change her decision to leave him.<sup>135</sup> nothing he could do but accept the decision in good faith, in anguish and in pain for the shocking news of end of the relation and of her departure. When the poet remembers about Asma, his verses 6-8 depict the second woman Hana, the woman who handles the alo tree as touch to guide the poet to her tent. Perhaps the poet brought her in to ease his pains about Asma's pains intensify and nothing will ease his situation but weeping and crying.

<sup>135</sup> عبد المنعم احمد يونس، صورة المرأة العربية في السبع الطوال 1985 ص 209



departure, and for him to tell us if Asma insist on going, there is Hind who loves him and always want to be close to him, to the extent she lights the touch from aloe tree to guide him to her abode. The significant of using aloe tree as a touch indicates the caliber of Hind; she is not an ordinary or common woman, nor slave or woman from poor background. For she does not use ordinary firewood to kindle the touch as ordinary women of tribes do, but she uses very rare expensive, and very good smelling tree which she does that as a way to attract the poet and as a strategy strengthen their love. The aloe tree symbolizes eroticism and true love.<sup>136</sup>

### **Symbolic Implications of Mentioning Woman in the *Nasib***

The previous section confines to literary explanation of woman's depiction in the *nasib* of the Mu'allaqat, This section will offer an alternative explanation of woman's depiction in the *nasib* of the Mu'allaqat: what may be referred to as symbolic interpretation.

To begin with, Wahab Rumiyyah in his study entitled 'The Rihlah in the Jahilliya Qasida' sees Za'n or the description of movement of the beloved howdah, be it in the prelude of the ode or within it, as a hyperbolic representation of the beloved. He indicates that hardly will a poet describe the movement of howdah without describing and talking about the beloved.<sup>137</sup>

On the other hand, in his analysis of the prelude of Zuhair's Mu'allaq El-Sayyed Fadl calls for the need to re-examine why the poet links the abode to the beloved, and whether it is possible for the abode to be so wide to cover the two places indicated by the poet, he considered it to be impossible, for that matter he emphasizes that these questions need a critical exegesis, for perhaps the poet either is describing imaginary abode or a realistic abode with magical fantasies,

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, pp.211-212

<sup>137</sup> وهب رومية ، الرحلة في القصيدة الجاهلية ، بيروت: مؤسسة الرسالة، 1979 ص42

this is because analysts explain that Er-Ralmatan: Ed –Darraj is closer to Medina while El-Mutathallam is closer to Basra how then could the poet halt at these two different places at the same time to yearn the beloved.<sup>138</sup>

The first two verse of the prelude of Zuhair's Mullaqa reads<sup>139</sup>

1. Are there still blacked orts in the stone-waste of Ed-Darraj

And El-Mutathallam, mute witness to where umm Afa once dwelt?

2. A lodging where she abode in Er-Rakmatan, that appears

Like crisscross tattooing upon the sinews of wrist

A critical examination of the above verse and other similes likened to the beloved in preludes or the nasibs of the remaining Mu'allaqat indicate that, the poets most of the time are talking in hyperbole and figurative language to describe their beloved.

El-Sayyed Fadl indicates further that, the Arab poet is fond of mentioning stars, sun, tornados and rains in his poem, just as he sometimes refers to verities of seeds in his ode. To limit the interpretations of that trend to only similes do not give sufficient, accurate and appropriate explanation of the verses<sup>140</sup>. In the case of the verse 10 of the Mu'allaqa of Tarafa in which the poet compares the face of his beloved to a sun when its mantle is reduced. Fadl stresses, when a woman is frequently being compared to a sun, a poetic form emerges out of the comparison and therefore, an urgent need to go beyond literal interpretation for a symbolic implication of this form is mandatory. Tarafa's verse 10 reads:<sup>141</sup>

A face as though the sun had loosed his mantle upon it,

<sup>138</sup> السيد فضل، الشعر الجاهلي وقضية التفسير، القاهرة: مكتبة الأنجلو المصرية 1989 ص23

<sup>139</sup> The translation of the verse is taken from: Arberry, A. J. The Seven Odes: The First Chapter in Arabic Literature. pp.114

<sup>140</sup> السيد فضل، الشعر الجاهلي وقضية التفسير، القاهرة: مكتبة الأنجلو المصرية 1989 ص 24

<sup>141</sup> The translation of the verse is taken from: Arberry, A. J. The Seven Odes: The First Chapter in Arabic Literature. pp. 83

Pure of a hue, with not a wrinkle to mar it

Buttressing this claim El-Sayyed Fadl, explains the implication of this comparison is that the Sun, stars and moon in the Jahilliya era were considered deities and were being worshiped just as 'fertile' woman was also regarded as goddess and symbol of worship. Thus the simile and the comparison is in the above verse is figurative. The convention of yearning over the beloved in the prelude of the Qasida is symbolic; it is a form of invoking the goddess, an object considered a deity.<sup>142</sup>

To confirm Fadl's claim, Ali al-Batal's<sup>143</sup> point of departure was Brandon's contention that 'man in the stone Ages, was confronted with three major problems; birth, death and search for food (agriculture), and he was able solve these miseries by the means of their magic or religion'.<sup>144</sup> Ali Batal validates the Brandon statement and argues that Arabs in the Jahiliya era have also confronted with the first problem- the birth. The ancient Arabian belief was linked with reproduction. When they found reproduction as a secret connected to woman they began to reverend her and represent their deities in a woman form. They also link the woman reproduction with the land fertility particularly the cultivation or farming societies. Land and woman were therefore worshiped as 'mothers' were represented in the ancient religion as deities. In other words, motherhood to them means the worshiped one.<sup>145</sup>

<sup>142</sup> السيد فضل، الشعر الجاهلي وقضية التفسير، القاهرة: مكتبة الأنجلو المصرية 1989 ص 24-27

<sup>143</sup> In his book entitled ' The Image in Arabic Poetry. Daru al-Andalus 1981 chapter 2.

<sup>144</sup> Brandon, S. G.F. Region in Ancient History, pp3

<sup>145</sup> على البطل، الصورة في الشعر العربي، دار الأندلس ص 1981 ص 55

images for this 'motherhood' which includes Gazelle, horse, and date-tree, some seeds and woman among the human species, the holiest of all these images is the mother Sun. It is thus due to the influences of these ancient religious beliefs that Jahiliya poets adopt the artistic form of yearning over this Ideal woman, in the prelude of their Qasida. <sup>146</sup>

In net shell, Ali al-Batal identifies two types of women in the Arabic poetry, first the ideal woman, the fertile and reproductive woman, a deity worshiped in the ancient religion, which the Jahiliya poets make her invocation in the nasib of the qasida a form of artistic format and requirement. The second woman is the real woman normally described by the poets within the body of the qasida with whom the poets might have had a real life experiences. The characteristic of the ideal reproductive woman is stoutness, a quality related to her body, and all other attributes that make her reproductive function very telling. This idea remained very paramount and fixed in the mentality of the ancient man for quite a long time. For the image of this ideal worshiped woman to be regarded as perfect, it has to be identified with all the features that will make her honor the responsibility for which she is worshiped, this conviction was held for a long time and was passed from generation to generation until it ended up in the poetic work of the Jahiliya poets<sup>147</sup>

An example of this of this image is what Tarafa describes in the verse 10 of his Mu'allaga as <sup>Although the Arabian communities</sup> analyzed above. A second close look at the prelude of his Mu'allaga points to the fact that, the could not be described honestly d as cultivating or farming society, perhaps that might be the description of the beloved totally befits the ideal fertile woman despite the fact that he named her reason why they worship sun instead of land, and attributed to it all idea of "the motherhood", Hawlah. Another reference to the image of this ideal fertile woman is verses 1-9 of the nasib of because it is the glaring object they see in their desert life. Arabs have a collection of different Imru'al-Qais Mu'allaga which constitute the actual nasib in which he made reference to Umm al-

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid ,pp57

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

Huwayrith and her neighbor Umm al Rabab. Here Imru al-Qais does not refer to a specific woman, and no wonder he gave both the title 'umm' which means mother which can be inferred to be a reference the fertile ideal mother which in the ancient religious practices is linked to the mother sun. It is to her Imru'al-Qais was yearning at, and it is to the ruin of her abode he made reference to in verses 1-9 of his Qasida.

Ali al-Batal says 'the worship of fertile and reproductive woman, and linking it with the worship of the mother sun have been replicated and represented with other symbols such the bull, gazelle, date tree and what have you. All together, these images collectively left behind an image we can simple call the ideal woman, which does not refer to a specific woman per se, even though she may be called with many different names. Do you not see the description attributed to her by the poets? Her face is like sun which does away with darkness? She has eyes like the eyes of bull, long neck like that Fawn; the brightness of her teeth is likened to lightning, she is statue, and idol and so on and so forth, all these attributes are repetitive in the prelude of Jahiliya poetry and they all point to the ancient religious belief in which the mother sun and her other symbols are reverend and worshiped'.<sup>148</sup>

El-Sayyed Fadl reiterates 'If we shall be realistic when analyzing the Jahiliya poetry that we have before us a form of poetry then it will be easy for us to look at it from a poetic perspective, the woman (in the prelude of the Qassida) is poetic woman, the abode and all that is connected to it are poetic abodes, the Za'a'in or the departing woman and its associates are also poetic. The poet when saying his poems is indeed aware of these facts, he thus remembers something that is connected to the past, except that he does so in poetic way, not because of worries about a loss of anything or anybody whatsoever, but because it is a form of celebration of what he intends to

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid, pp.70

say'<sup>149</sup> El-Sayyed Fadl laments further that, Jahiliya poetry has been wrongly interpreted by the classical analysts and calls for re-examination of the content and context of the pre-Islamic poetry with new lens in order to arrive at the actual intent of the poets. it is only by doing so all the obscurities and negativities attributed to Jahilliya poetry could explained. The description of the journey in the nasib of the Mu'allaqat is therefore a figurative or symbolic description not realistic one; a reader of the description of *Za'n* or the journey in the nasib will realize there are no men, guide or associates among the departing women and there is no mentioned of them being encounter any danger or attacked by desert vagabonds, all these point up to the fact that, reference is not given to a real woman and therefore the image of woman in the nasib of the Mu'allaqat is symbolic depiction.<sup>150</sup>

The second type of woman in the pre-Islamic poetry is the real woman, the wife, mother as well as the daughter of the Jahiliya male counterparts. She is a partner of the male in establishing the pre-Islamic Jahiliya community.

After closed reading and perusal of the Mu'allaqat and its various exegesis I have to agreement with the stand taken by Ali al-Batal and El-Sayyed Fadl that the woman depicted in the nasib and erotic ghazal sections of the Mu'allaqa is not the same as the beloved the depicted in the body of the odes with whom the poets have had a real love affairs.

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السيد فضل، الشعر الجاهلي وقضية التفسير، القاهرة: مكتبة الأنجلو المصرية 1989 ص 36<sup>149</sup>

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, pp41

### 3 The Other Type of Woman in the Qasida

#### **The Image of Woman in the Body of the Mu'allaqat**

In the previous chapter, we noticed depiction of two types of women in the Mu'allaqat, the ideal Woman, who because of her fertility and reproductive function was deified and linked to the mother sun in worship, whose invocation in the prelude of Jahiliya Qasida becomes a conventional requirement for beginning an ode.

This chapter will concentrate on analyzing the representation of the second type of women in the Mu'allaqat. To set the ball rolling, besides the image of the ideal fertile Woman, there is a second image of another Woman described and talked about by the Jahiliya poets who unlike the ideal perfect woman is a real Woman who the Dr. Ali al-Batal referred to as. (المرأة الواقعية) *'al-mar'a al-waaki'iyah'*

The depiction of this type of woman in the Mu'allaqat of Imru'al-Qais include the women referred to at Darat Juljul and Fatimah. Again, in the Mu'allaqa of Tarafa, the slave attendant lady at the drinking spot as well as the second description of the women of Za'a'in in the Amr ibn Kulthum's Mu'allaqa, not excluding 'Abla' the woman Antara describes and dedicates his Mu'allaqa to by recounting to her his heroism and knighthood in the battle are another all examples of various depiction of this real woman.

The depiction of this real woman in Imru'al-Qais' Mu'allaqat, has already been analyzed in the in the previous chapter. What needs to be clarified here is that verses 10-34 of the extract of his Mu'allaqa quoted above constitute his discussion of numerous real women. Raymond Farrin describes this section of Imru'al-Qais' Mu'allaqa as a continuation for his nasib or amatory

prelude which begins to reveals the poet's strategy for dealing with pain (pains for the ideal woman). The poet responds to sadness by remembering previous instance of happiness and of overcoming adversity. The memory signifies that he has previously enjoyed the company of various (real) women; therefore he may logically expect another lady to take the place of the ideal beloved. By the same token, he loved some of these women intensely, and evidently they no longer concern him. Likewise, he may expect to get over his current obsession.<sup>151</sup>

What can be deduced from the Imru'al-Qais' account about his numerous illicit affairs with different real women especially the nursing and pregnant woman who allowed the poet to have an affair with behind her husband, at the time her child needed her maximum attention is that, like any society or generation there are women (as well as men) who cheat on their matrimonial partners, even though society and generation may set ethical values and punishment that should regulate the society's moral conduct, nevertheless they would be some recalcitrant characters who will by-pass these moral standards in pursuit of their passions and infatuations. We observe from Imru'al-Qais testimony that most of his concubines belong to this type of women.

In verse 23-41 Imru'al-Qais' gives his longest and most detailed of the erotic depiction of the real woman. That depiction projects a fair, secluded lady represents the many of her kind with whom the poet has dallied. He compares her to an egg, suggesting her creamy complexion and delicacy. Through the simile he also suggests that she is inviolate. Nevertheless, the determined Imru'al-Qais has disregarded danger and made his way at night into her private tent, after overpowering her, she too has taken risk and went with him to a secluded location. Based on close observation that night, he provides a details description of her enlivened with comparisons to desert flora and fauna. She is a dark-haired, shapely, soft, and languorous. That she wears

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<sup>151</sup> Farrin, R. 'Abundance from the Desert: Classical Arabic Poetry, New York: Syracuse Univ. Press, 2001 pp.9



jewelry and need not rise early to work betokens affluences; instead of toiling, she spends her time lounging and looking beautiful in her tent<sup>152</sup>.

The vivid description of this woman depicts a woman of high esteem, respected or even a wife or daughter a tribal sheikh. Until those at Darat Juljul who appear to be either ordinary women or servants. Thus in the poet promiscuous relationship with many women he does it with different social class, servant, slave and high level social class women.

Ali al-Batal highlights further that, the real woman mostly described in Jahiliya poetry is a slave, singer or dancer, who offers services to drinking bar attendants. Besides, she may be an abandon woman from the enemy's clan or she can be in the final analysis, a wife with bad character.<sup>153</sup>

One distinguishing feature of the real woman in the Jahiliya poetry is that when the poet depicts her he does not give detail description of her body or attributes of her physiological stature, as they do when describing the ideal fertile holy woman. The poet rather describes her movement and the activities and services she provides<sup>154</sup>.

All said and done, the real woman in the Mu'allaha must not necessarily be a slave or bad wife or an outcast, the most important worth noting feature of her is she is not regarded as goddess or being reverend as a form a ritual or incantation. She is natural human being a wife or concubine of the poet, and a source of his happiness regardless of the fact she is a slave or an outcast.

In Antara's Mu'allaha the depiction of real woman appears a bit disorganized and unstructured in the sense that, the analysts and critics find it difficult to distinguish at one hand, between the ideal woman and real woman, and at other hand the logical connectives among verses describing

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid, pp.10-11

<sup>153</sup> علي البطل، الصورة في الشعر العربي، دار الأندلس 1981 ص85

<sup>154</sup> Ibid pp.92

the women is haphazardly presented. To explain the reason for this anomaly Abdul Mun'im said, 'Antara was not part of poets who refine their poems before delivery, rather he belong to the category who say their poems extempore consequently his poetic work is far away from editing, rearrangement and refinement. As a result his ode is characterized with absence of cohesion and logical flow <sup>155</sup>.

If the *Akhbar* <sup>156</sup> on Antara's poetic collection particularly his Mu'allaqa is anything to go by, then we can say the personality or the persona of Abla -Antara's beloved is haphazardly posited in the nasib of the Mu'allaqa, the Akhbar tells us that Abla is real woman but she is presented in nasib of the Mu'allaqa as if she is the ideal fertile reproductive woman despite the fact that she was not vividly described as the other poets describe the ideal woman in the nasib. Let us examine the nasib of Antara's Mu'allaqa once again:

1. Have the poets left a single spot for a patch to be sown?  
-Or did you recognize the abode after long meditation
2. O abode of Abla at El-Jawa let me hear you speak;  
I give you good morning, abode of Abla and greetings to you
3. For there I halted my she-camel, huge-bodied as a castle  
That I might satisfy the hankering and lingerer
4. While Abla lodged at El-Jawa and our folk dwelt  
At El-Hazn and Es-Samman and El-Mutathallim

One will be tempted to conclude following this anomaly either Antara was so confused or preoccupied with the love of Abla to the extent that he reverends and worships her thereby

<sup>155</sup> عبد المنعم احمد يونس، صورة المرأة العربية في السبع الطوال 1985 ص 146

<sup>156</sup> The Akhbar refers to the historical records of the life story of the pre-Islamic poet and his poetics

elevates her to the position of the ideal deified woman and therefore posits her in the nasib as such, or we may be forced to conclude the nasib was not properly arranged.

5. All hail to you, ruins of a time long since gone by

Empty and desolate since the day Umm el- Haytham parted

6. She alight in the land of the bellows and it has become

Very hard for me to seek you out, daughter of Makhram

Antara in verse 5 above tells us the woman who once dwelt in abode he is yearning at was Umm El-Haytham which is a nick name of Abla. (Mother of Haytham) the explanation that could be ascribed to this incident is the poet has remembered the capacity in which he was, that he was in the poetic situation required of him to address the ideal woman by calling 'Umm' (mother of) a characteristic of delivery and giving birth for which a woman was deified in the ancient religious conviction which the Jahiliya poets adopt as format to begin a Qasida with. We remember that Imru'al-Qais refers to the two women in his nasib as 'Umm al-Huwayrith and, Umm al-Rabab' while Zuhair refers to her as 'Umm Afa' attributing to them the function of giving birth. Thus by Antara calling his beloved Abla by her nickname Ummu Haytham he is giving her the attribute of the ideal Woman, therefore it is not an overstatement to say that Antara has blindly elevated the status of Abla from real woman to Ideal woman.

It is once again obvious from both the Akhbar as well as the available interpretations of Antara's Mu'allaqa that Abla and Antara belong to different social group. He is a slave and she a free woman and the status co did permit him to marry her. It is therefore not far from truth to say that the father of Abla might have decided to vacate their first abode to the new one in order to distance Abla away from the poet. As glaringly, it is the time of war and we learn from the Mu'allaqa that the family of the poet's beloved is in the enemy camp, her father entertaining

fears decided to move to another location because he would not allow a marital relationship to be consummated between a black slave and free daughter and he also would not wait for Antara the hero and a great knight to concur his tribe and capture his daughter. Narrating this incident Antara tells in verses 64-67 how Abla's father has put her under tight security surveillance at their new camp so as to deny him access to her. After the poet has compared Abla to fawn in verse 64 he tells us in verse 65 how he sent his slave to spy over his beloved at their new camp and find out whether there is a possibility of him to see her. We learn from this narration how the Jahiliya society value their womenfolk and try always to protect them against insecurity be it of shortage water, war or against any act that will bring dishonor to the family or tribe.

Antara says<sup>157</sup>:

64. O lovely fawn, hutable indeed for those who may enjoy her

But to me denied- and would to God she were lawful to me

65. I sent my slave girl to her, telling her, off with you now

Scout out new of her for me and tell me truly

66. She said, I saw the enemy were off their guard

And the fawn was attainable to any good marksman

67. As she turned, her throat was like a young antelope's

The throat of a tender gazelle fawn with spotted lip.

The poet here compares the beloved to a free prey, who any good hunter except him can hunt; he was denied the opportunity to catch the hunt by taking her far away from his camp due to his social status as a son of slave woman. Antara also compares Abla to antelope and gazelle, these animals symbolize the extent of beauty and in many pre-Islamic qasida beautiful women are compared with these and other animal. Nevertheless, we notice the comparison of woman with

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<sup>157</sup> The translation of the verses is taken from: Arberry, A. J. The Seven Odes pp.180

these animals are attributes of the ideal reproductive woman the goddess and is usually posited in the *nasib* of the *Qasida* but here is Antara embellishing his beloved Abla with these qualities, which some critics see as flaw. Again, the poet, instead of treating it in the *nasib* decided to fix it in the middle of his *Mu'allaqa*.

The image of real woman in Amr Ibn Kulthum's *Mu'allaqa* is represented in the woman who serves the wine in the bar despite the fact her depiction was made in the beginning of the poet. I have already analyzed the controversy around this prelude in chapter 3, nevertheless, from the distinction Ali Batal's made between ideal and real woman in the *Jahiliya Qasida*, it glaring this lady which serves the wine is real woman and we can comfortably say she was slave, as most of the bar attendants in Arabia at that era were slaves and those bars were mostly owned by Jews.

Secondly in the very first verse the poet uses the commanding verbs '*hubi*' and '*la tubqi*' asking her to fetch them the wine and commanding her not deny him the wine of Andrain.

The second depiction of the *Za'n* in Amr ibn Kulthum's *Mu'allaqa* (verses 21- 24) which made reference to war and battle also posits the real women:<sup>158</sup>

21. And I remembered youth and yearned

When I saw her camel urged on in the evening

22. Then Yamamah arose towered above us

Like swords in the hand of the unsheathes

23. Father of Hind, don't be hasty with us,

Give us a moment to tell you the truth,

24. Of how we take battle white banners

And bring them back saturated crimson!

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<sup>158</sup> A.J. Arberry's translation

The above verses and those following them depict real women and explain their role in the battle field. The poet describes their role in the battle field when the two factions assemble. He explains the women stays behind the men so as to encourage the men to advance and not turn back. Their other peculiar role at battle field is nursing the injured and the injured horses, they also prepare food for battalion and the horses. In fact of all the Mu'allaqat, it is Amr Mu'allaqa that describes the women role in the war field. Although Antara also talks about war in his Mu'allaqa but he did not account for the women participation in the battle directly or indirectly, rather he was preoccupied with Abla and showing his knighthood and heroism in the war.

The reference made to Hind in verses 6-8 of El-Harith's Mu'allaqa is another example of reference to the real woman. This woman kindles the aloe tree as touch to guide the poet to her location. The poet introduces her into the scene as a way to ease his pains over the departure of Asma, who he is not likely to meet again. As the saying goes 'in absence of good bad is alright.' Since he could have no access to Asma again, here is Hind who takes her place. As explained in last chapter, the aloe tree which Hind touches to guide the poet to her camp signifies the caliber of woman she was; she is not a downtrodden woman, nor she is slave or woman from poor background. For she does not use ordinary firewood to kindle the touch as was the order of day at period but she uses a rare and valuable aloe tree that has good scent and symbolizes the high social status of Hind. It is worthy of note here that, the poet did not compare her to gazelle or ostrich nor did he give specific of her stature and therefore we can emphatically say she depicts a real woman and not the fertile ideal woman normally described in the erotic portion of the nasib of a Qasida.

## Conclusion and Findings

As indicated in the introduction, this study is intended to explore the depiction of woman in what is regarded as the best poetic collections of the pre-Islamic era known as the Mu'allaqat, with the aim of identifying the diversity of women's experiences and their contributions in the socio-political and cultural set up of the Jahiliya society through the poetic oration of the seven odes poets. In so doing, my point of departure was to give the reader a historical background to Jahiliya poetry, its origin, as well as the role of the poet in the Jahiliya period.

Since my focus was to confine my search to the Mu'allaqat odes, I offered a background account of poets of the Mu'allaqat and also highlighted on the structural characteristics of their odes before analyzing the depiction of woman in the poems. Generally as we observed, most Jahiliya poetry has a tripartite structure; the erotic prelude called the *nasib*, followed by *rihlah* or *rahil* section which describes the journey and departure of poet's beloved with much emphasis on the description of the poet's camel, horse or other wild desert beat and beds. The final section of the *qasida* is where actual motive of the poet is discussed; it could be 'madh' lampooning or other themes. Nevertheless, not all the Mu'allaqat adopt this structure, some of the poems may lack one element of the structure or another but it will still be considered a standard *Qasida* in its own right.

We noticed that, the depiction of women in all the Mu'allaqat are mostly discussed in the *nasib* and *ghazal* sections, where the poet stops at the abode of his departed beloved to yearn over it and begins to give a vivid description of her and the memory of his relation with her. The poet also focuses in the *nasib* on describing the *Za'a'* in which is the departure scene of his beloved, detailing reasons for her departure, which varies from draught, war, and insecurity as we

observed in the analyses. Some Mu'allaqat poets confine the discussion of women only in the nasib, for example Zuhair and El-Harith. Others like Amr Ibn Kulthum, Antara and Tarafa have depicted woman both in the nasib and within the body of the Mu'allaqa.

To make the study more simplified and systematized I decided to categorize my exploration of woman posit in the Mu'allaqat into two section, section dealing with how she is depicted in the nasib and another section on how she was portrayed in the body of the Mu'allaqa. This categorization is analyzed with dept in chapters two and three.

Form the illustrations two types of women are identified in the Mu'allaqat namely the ideal woman and the real woman. The ideal woman is generally described in the nasib of the Mu'allaqat in accordance to. Ali al-Batal and El-Sayyed Fadl's renditions this woman is not real woman. It is rather a poetic style adopted by the Jahiliya poets to invoke her memory in the prelude of the Qasida as a way of reviving the ancient belief of worshiping woman because of her reproductive function. Ali Batal and El-Sayyed Fadl theorized that, to understand why the Jahiliya poets yearn over the ideal woman and the ruin of her abode in the prelude of the Qasida, one needs to go beyond the literal and rhetorical analysis of the context of the Mu'allaqat and look for better explanation beyond the poetic and semantic wording of the poem. Ali Batal traces his interpretation from history of ancient religion and legends. He emphasizes that yearning and invoking woman in the nasib of pre-Islamic poetry is related the worship of woman in ancient religious practice as a result of her fertility and reproductive function as mother. It was the remnant of this conviction and legend that has been carried from generation to generation until it finds it ways in the poetic format of Jahiliya Poetry. Thus the Jahilliya poets normally invoke this woman in the prelude of the Qasida as form of reviving the ancient religious practice where



woman considered ideal and worshiped because of her biological role of giving birth, the tradition has come to be a standardized format of beginning a poem.

In this regards Fadl advises analysts of Jahiliya poetry to consider the poetry as poetry. In other words he says every episodes of the nasib of the Mu'allaqat is poetic and not real, the woman, the Za'a'in, the comparison and simile are all figurative and must be regarded as such.

The second woman depicted in the Mu'allaqat as I indicated in chapter three is the ordinary normal woman; she is real woman who is a wife, a concubine or servant or slave. Mostly she is the poet's beloved with whom the poet had had a real relationship. After the poet has invoked the ideal woman and painfully describes the scene of her departure as format of saying a poem requires, he will move to describing the real woman by giving detail of his the real relationship with her, he account for how they meet what they do and how they do it.

To differentiate between the projections of the two women, we noticed the poets normally give a detail and vivid description of the ideal woman's body and stature; her face, tattoo, hair, legs, height and what have you. The comparison drawn been her and other objects are also symbolic and metaphoric, she is liken to gazelle, sun, ostrich , fawn camel and Oryx all symbolizing beauty and perfection.

The distinguishing feature of the real woman is the role she plays in the society and hardly will the poet give details of her body and stature, the poet may explain about his promiscuous love affairs with her as we saw in Imru'al-Qais' example, or how she lights a touch and place it high on the mountain as guide to lead Tarafa to her tent. or explain their social role like their function at battle field and their service at a drinking spot as we observed in Amr' Mu'allaqa.

In a net shell, it is not an overstatement to say that the depiction of woman in the Mu'allaqat, be her ideal woman or real, be it in the nasib or within the body of the Qasida does not go beyond description and simile. In other words positing women in the Mu'allaqat is confined to describing and comparing her with objects which the Jahiliya poets find in their surroundings. From such depiction we are able to infer how woman is regarded in the Jahilliya community. In the analysis of this thesis we come to the conclusion that women were highly cherished by their male counterparts in the Jahiliya societies to the extent that due to her reproductive function as mother she was deified and respected so much so that the poets made it a requirement to invoke her in the prelude of their qasida which was regarded as the register for the Arabs and the only literary art they had during the pre-Islamic period. We further observed in the analysis that women were giving priority in terms of protection and security during the Jahiliya period. We saw in the depiction of Za'a'in women are always carried in the howdahs so as to secure them from the harsh desert conditions and from being attacked by the desert beasts.

Not least, we also realize from the analysis of this study that a woman in Jahiliya period wields a high level of autonomy; she has a maximum freedom to choose a partner and has also the right to abrogate the relationship without any hindrance or obstacle.

Most importantly, women in Jahiliya era were not considered a domestic workers or housewives alone, they contribute their social role in all facet of the socio- cultural life of the community to the extent that they participate in the warfare by nursing the injured and feeding the horses , above all, women also serve as morale boosters by encouraging their husbands to advance and concur the enemy.

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