Jahiliyyah Arabic Verse: The Dichotomy in Its Poetry

BUSOERI, Muritala Alhaji (Ph.D)
Dept. of Foreign Langs., Faculty of Arts, Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos, Nigeria.

ANIMASHAUN, Maruf Suraqat (Ph.D)
Dept. of Foreign Langs, Faculty of Arts, Lagos State University, (LASU), Lagos.

"All the sorrow in the world is less Than virtue's might and value's confidence"[1]
"The more a theory lays claim to universal validity, the less capable it is of doing   justice to the individual facts."[2]

Abstract

This study is actuated with three notions of vital importance to the understanding of *Jahiliyyah* verse; firstly, that the concept of the ritualistic function of the *sha'ir* is in danger of causing the personal and inward aspects of pre-Islamic poetry to be neglected, by providing a convenient explanation of the apparently stereotypical conventionality of *Jahiliyyah* poetry; secondly, that the poetic force and importance of the *dhikr al-atlal* and *nasib* movements,[3] had not been properly understood, the translation of the term *nasib* as "amatory prelude" being representative of this deficiency in understanding; thirdly, that, although I considered that scholars who discerned a connection between *Jahiliyyah* poetry and the concept of *muruwwah* were on the right path, nevertheless, I did not think that they had fully realized the extent of that connection. The purpose of this study, then, is to rectify what I consider to be serious shortcomings in our knowledge and understanding of the poetry of this period.

Keywords: *Jahiliyyah;* Versification; Poetry; Dichotomy.

Introduction

Muruwwah in pre-Islamic Arabia was a concept which comprised everything that the ancient Bedouin thought redounded to his honour.[4] Yet it was not merely a conception of life, a *Weltanschauung*, but was also a way of life. Its full relevance must be realized-being both a practical method of living and an idealised programme of how an Arab should live, its influence was ubiquitous, permeating every aspect of life. Essentially *muruwwah* was the cohesive factor in the Bedouin interpretation of reality, and was the standard by which he evaluated his own deeds and aspirations as well as those of others: it was an ideal, but an eminently realizable one. This conception of reality is one of competitive virtue and is a natural development of the nomadic and fundamentally tribal system then prevalent. However it was important not merely on the tribal level but also on the personal level. It dictated the way in which the Bedouin of the *Jãhiliyyah* thought of himself and how he interpreted his environment in relation to himself.

Naturally, then, *muruwwah*, comprising the Bedouin outlook on life, is reflected in the poetry of the *Jahi1iyyah*: it is its subject matter, that with which most pre-Islamic *qaşa'id* are concerned. The ubiquity of the permeation of *muruwwah* was such that the seven posited themes of the *Jãhili qaşidah*[5] are in fact poetical manifestations of this world-view and may be explained in the following manner:

Ghazal (Love Poetry): The *habib*, the object of the poet's love, is beautiful to the degree that her beauty surpasses all others; the passion, not merely love, felt for the beloved is of an intensity which cannot be matched;

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[1] E. Spenser, *The Faerie Queene,* pp. 3, 11, 14

[2] C.J. Jung, *Selected Writings,* (ed. A. Storr), Fontana 1983, p.352.

[3] Movement: the analogy with the musical terminology is intentional, because it captures the essence of the *qasidah* and how it was composed in a way in which the words 'section' or passage' do not. This will become evidence if the following explanation of the term 'movement' is used as a working base: a movement can be a self-contained section, or part, of a larger composition, such as a concerto or symphony in orchestral music, or a sonata, or string-quartet, solo or chamber music. Its self- containment and potential independence capture the peculiar nature of any movement of a pre-Islamic *qasidah*, which is both integral to, and independence of the *qasidah* when considered as a holistic phenomenon. The term is applied to such 'building blocks' of the *qasidah* as the *nasib* and the *rihlah*.

[4] The best definition of *muruwwah* is to be found in I. Goldziher, Muhammedanische Studien, Halle 1889-1890, p. 3. Contrary to Goldziher who sees *Muruwwah* as a fully regular and disciplined legal system, the ideas of which were the product of tradition, arid °i a sort of Arabian jurisprudence, I see *muruwwah* as more abstract and less vlgorously defined, as not a definite system but rather a fundamental view of reality which arose naturally from a society such as that of the Bedouins: *muruwwah* was felt rather than enunciated. It must not be supposed that what follows is an exposition of a Philosophy of *muruwwah* devised by the Bedouins themselves. There is no evidence for this. Rather, the word *muruwwah* is used in an attempt to capture the quintessence of their Interpretation of life, the basic data of which were tacitly assumed.

[5] On the seven themes, see A. El -Tayyib, in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*, Cambridge 1983, p. 39.

these two aspects are well exemplified in the *Muᶜallaqah* of 'Amr b. Kulthūm,[1] lines 13-18, the poet's hyperbolic description of the *habib* and lines 19-20, his assertion of the extent of his passionate grief; the grief experienced at her departure and the ecstasy of being near her are all consuming. The indefinite language in which the beloved is described reflects this aspect: the poet does not offer his audience an individualized portrait of her but seems to be trying to capture an abstracted ideal, with which they were not unacquainted.[2]   is a foil for the poet's own excellence, redounding to his credit.[3] His excellence is also reflected in his ability to describe the beloved and evoke his own feelings. The *nasib* of the *Muᶜallaqah* of Imru' al-Qays is an extensive expression of this competitive virtue conception of love in it both love and erotic prowess are presented as a source of pride for the poet and his approach is both sexual and artistic.[4] As far as the sexual aspect is concerned, the poet sees his amorous conquests as a tribute to his sexual prowess and hence to his manliness. Artistically, the poet not only has a fine eye for beauty, he can also describe that beauty consummately well although the description always remains highly abstract: one *habib*, as an individual personality, is often indistinguishable from another. The descriptions of the *habib* which occur in the *nasib* are to be considered in this light-the poet represents himself as surpassing other poets in his ability to capture perfectly the beauty of the beloved-he is a consummate master of the craft of poetry.

Hikmah (Aphoristic and Didactic Poetry): the wisdom which the poet possesses and his ability to give it the fullest and most eloquent expression possible point to his superiority, in that the wiser a man is, the greater his ability to make wise decisions and to persuade others that those decisions are the right ones, and this is an important aspect of the societal function of the *shaᶜir*. In the *Mu'allaqah* of Zuhayr b. Abi Sulma there is a celebrated *hikmah* movement wherein the poet represents the two chiefs whom he is praising, Harith and Harim, as objectifications of wisdom. In this passage the poet is also establishing his own wisdom as a laudatory foil to that of the two *mamdūhs*: if the poet's wisdom is such as he portrays it in his poetry, then by praising the two chiefs for their wisdom, he enhances that praise by implying that their wisdom is greater and more impressive than his. This is the poetic rationale behind the *hikmah* movement in the *Muᶜallaqah* of Zuhayr.[5]

Wasf (Descriptive Poetry): This type of poetry is relevant to the concept of *muruwwah* for two reasons: the poet's possessions and his mastery of the language – the more vivid the description, the better the poet and the better the possessions the greater the advantage he has over his enemies. This is best exemplified in the lengthy and, to Western sensibilities, protracted descriptions of camels and horses. However descriptions are also an important component of the so called *Schlussteil* section, especially of the eulogistic and self vaunting type, thereby indicating that these descriptions do have an ulterior purpose—they are an implicit form of *fakhr* and *madih*. Furthermore the *rihlah* which often introduces the descriptions of camels and horses also functions as a foil to the poet: the desert-journey is a test of his hardiness, the difficulties encountered whilst on such a journey which the poet revels in surmounting are a challenge to his manhood and the riding-beast is an extension of that manhood, without which it would be incomplete.

The same conclusions can be reached concerning almost all of the descriptions which occur in pre-Islamic *qaṣa'id*. In the case of many lightning- or rain-storm descriptions, for example, it is significant that the poet introduces it with the question *ya man li*, for example, or with an exhortative apostrophe of his companions, urging them to join him: the implication seems to be that they are reluctant, unable or afraid to do so. On a less sophisticated level, the fact that the poet either sees or experiences something which his companions do not i consonant with a primitive society's attitude to the poet, an attitude which is comprised in the ritualistic function of the *shaᶜir*. What is more important, in this context, is that the superlativeness of the description reflects the superlativeness of the poet's poetic genius.

Poem 6 in the *diwan* of ᶜAbid is particularly interesting in that it exemplifies these points and raises the important and difficult question of the fragmentariness of *Jahili* poetry. The point at issue here is whether it is

[1] The text used is that of al-Zawzani, Beirut, n.d.

[2] Analogous to the idealization of the *habib* is the practice of the painters of Greek vases, when painting a youth or a woman. "Each painter seems to have adopted a formula for the face and adhered to it consistently". They often attached a name to the 'portrait', perhaps to communicate that "this is the most beautiful youth I can portray, and ... is as beautiful as that." K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, Duckworth 1978.

[3] See G. E. von Grunebaum, JNES IV (1945), p. 137.

[4] See A. El-Tayyib, *op. cit.,* p. 59 for a discussion of the sexual and aesthetic attitudes towards women in *Jahili* poetry,

[5] It is not, however, the sole reason for the extensiveness of the *hikmah* movement. The good pre-Islamic poet was well aware of how he should compose his *qaṣidah* to create the best effect possible. However in the excitement and urgency of recital or extemporaneous composition, the impulse to exult in the grandeur and majesty of the poetry itself led him to dwell on subjects which were necessitated by a perfectly obvious rationale but which took control, as it were, of the poet. This impulse is also to be seen in the extended similes and descriptions for which C. J. Lyall tries to account in "The Pictorial Aspects of Ancient Arabian Poetry", *JRAS* (1912).

necessary to postulate the existence of a larger *qaṣidah* of which this is a part or whether the poem can stand as it is. It is a vivid storm-description and on the basis of the *muruwwah* conception of poetry a case can be made for the poem's independence; the actual language and description are themselves a reflection of the poet's genius, are a tribute to his ability to describe a storm. Furthermore there is no direct need to refer to a theory of oral transmission and to the fluidity of poetry transmitted in such a fashion,[1] since according to this interpretation; the poem is an instance of the glorification of the poet's poetic prowess. The personal and intimate aspect of the poetry must not be lost sight of – the poet himself may be exulting in the language and its evocative majesty and the impulse to compose this short piece need not be supposed to have originated from some external source or ritualistic necessity.

Hija' (Satirical Poetry): The relevance of this as a poetic manifestation of *muruwwah* is obvious: the object of the satire is portrayed as someone who has flagrantly violated the code of competitive virtue and by means of such a portrayal is shown to be worthless and of no merit. Moreover, the poet's hatred and the vehemence of his response are constituents of *muruwwah*, which is composed of extremes. The success of the satire reflected both on the poet's genius and the inadequacy of the person satirized.

Ritha' (Elegiac Poetry): In this type of poetry the poet praises the dead person in much the same way as he does the *mamduh* with the exception that in *ritha'* the extent of the poet's grief has a twofold relevance; it implies praise of the person being mourned and it reflects on the poet, or poetess – the passionate nature of the grief is a fitting reflection of the greatness of the dead person, but it is only an exceptional person who can grieve to the extent that the poet or poetess does. Thus the topic of the disconsolate poet, common in the *dhikr al-atlal,* the *nasib* and *ritha'* is a manifestation of an important component of *muruwwah* – passionate feelings, whether of love or hate, grief or joy.

Madih (Panegyric Poetry): In the context of *madih* the poet portrays the *mamduh* as the personification or objectification of the ideal of *muruwwah;* the *mamduh* has no faults, but has attained *muruwwah* to a degree which marks him as pre-eminent among men. The *mamduh* becomes *muruwwah* and is *muruwwah* in his every thought and action. Moreover, the concept of poetry as an important facet of *muruwwah* also contributes towards eulogizing the *mamduh*: the poet is both offering and displaying his poetic genius to the *mamduh* in recognition of his excellence. This is also true of *hija', ritha'* and *fakhr*, although with different emphasis in each case.

Fakhr (Self-vaunting Poetry): Fakhr can be of two types – personal and tribal. It is the most explicit statement of the Bedouin world-view and as such it has tended to fall under the general categorical label of the 'aim' of the *qaṣidah*, the direction in which the poem moves. That it has been so labelled is a sufficient indication of the importance of *muruwwah* in pre-Islamic poetry. In *fakhr* of the personal type the poet extols his own worth, whereas in tribal *fakhr* the tribe becomes the paradigm of *muruwwah* and the poet, without losing his individualism, merges with the tribe; he retains his individualism by means of his role as poet, poetry being a vital aspect of *muruwwah*, but in this instance subordinates his own importance to that of the tribe. However there is very little distinction between the poet and the tribe, since personal *fakhr* implicitly functions as a glorificatory foil to the tribe, the assumption being that the excellence of the poetry is proportionate to the excellence of the poet, *mamduh* or tribe.

One aspect of *muruwwah* which has been touched upon in the foregoing discussion is that it comprehends the pre-Islamic conception of poetry: the poet's ability to compose *qaṣa'id* and to use language, metre and rhyme are constituents of competitive virtue. If this interpretation is accepted, many of the difficulties encountered when considering any *Jahili qaṣa'id* can be made sense of: the obscurity of the language, assuming that there was an element of obscurity for at least some of the poet's audience, is to a large extent contrived and purposed, in addition to the wide diversity of dialects then prevalent and the linguistic potentialities available in the Arabic language, for the poet's genius is reflected, first and foremost, in his ability to use words. The diversity of the topical development of many pre-Islamic *qaṣa'id* is also pertinent at this juncture; no two *qaṣidahs* are identical in the treatment of topics, motifs and technical devices and any normative approach to the structure of the *qaṣidah* ought to be abandoned. The poets of the *Jahiliyyah* were not slaves of convention, rather the stock of materials available were their tools winch they frequently manipulated. Pre-Islamic poetry was so vibrant and urgent that it is debatable whether the term "conventional'' can be used to describe it and any standardisation which may be thought to have occurred is attributable to two phenomena; normativisation on the part of transmitters or philologists and the importance of poetry as providing the artistic expression of *muruwwah*. In this latter instance, standardization occurred because the movements and topics were poetical manifestations of *muruwwah*, because they were of immediate relevance to the poet and his audience and it is from this that their vitality derived. Poetry was as much a part of *muruwwah* as was nobility, bravery and generosity.

To maintain, then, that there are seven themes of pre-Islamic poetry is to place emphasis where it ought not to be placed, for despite the facility of these neat compartmentalization there is essentially one theme around

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[1] "J. T. Monroe, "On the Oral Composition of pre-Islamic Poetry", *JAL* p.11.

which many, if not all, *Jahili qaṣa'id* revolve - *muruwwah*. Pre-Islamic poetry is, in fact, the poetical statement of how the Bedouins conceived of themselves in relation to the world: it is the expression of an all-pervasive *Weltanschauung*. Hyperbole is vital to this conception of poetry as a constituent of *muruwwah*. It fulfills two functions: it is a means by which the poet suggests the excellence of his poetic genius and of his manhood as reflected in his possessions, and, on a more abstract level, it perpetuates the vitality of *muruwwah*, in that the ideal of competitive virtue is constituted of extremes. Hyperbole has only attained the status of being one of the tools at the poet's disposal as a result of its relevance to *muruwwah*. Its permanence is similar to the permanence of the topics and motifs which occur in pre-Islamic poetry, and their permanence derives from their relevance to the world-view of the *Jahiliyyah*.

This conceptual connection between poetry and virtue is well exemplified in two poems by 'Abid which are concerned with the poet and his poetry (poems 10 and 23).

The relevant section of poem 10 can be schematized as follows:

Lines 11-20:   The personal *fakhr* movement.
   11:      The topic of the poet on a raid; motif; the poet shelters a companion with his own cloak at night.
   12-20:   The topic of the poet's poetic prowess, described in military language; motifs; the poet's humbling of an opposing satirist (12-14), the renown gained from the contest and the sword-like sharpness of his tongue (15-17), the apostrophe of an unnamed opponent, containing a metaphor in which the poet is alluded to as a lion (18), the lion's power and prowess (19) and the two opponents of the poet, one of whom he has killed with his tongue, while the other escapes badly wounded (20), are described.

The celebration of the poetic prowess of the poet in martial language is significant, because that prowess is vindicated by means of an extended metaphorical equation of poetic ability and martial excellence (the word "equation" is probably misleading for in the poet's world-view there is no fundamental distinction, no sharp dichotomy between poetic ability and martial prowess in that they are both manifestations of the ideal of *muruwwah*). The use of metaphor is also very enlightening; a metaphor captures the essence of this conception more completely, because in a metaphor no distinction is made between the two separate entities involved, as occurs in a simile – the ultimate effect of poetical and satirical prowess is the same as that of martial prowess within the domain of *muruwwah*.[1]

Poem 23, and particularly lines 816, is a splendid example of the poetry of ᶜAbid at its best, and in this context C. J. Lyall's note is informative, elucidating some of the poem's difficulties whilst being unable to account for them: "This poem is of doubtful authenticity. But on the whole the picture (of the storm) wants the definiteness of the other passages, and it has no proper names to mark the locality as is customary; there is a heaping together of high-sounding words which savours of over-elaboration. Some of the words used are (as not infrequently happens with a difficult rhyme) of doubtful reading and application …. and the alliteration of some of the lines (e.g. line 15) is not like the style of ancient poetry''.[2]

The language used in evoking the picture of the storm is elaborate and difficult because it is intended to establish the superlativeness of the poet's genius, being an example of this genius, as, in a more involved way, is the comparison between the poet's tongue and the fish. In this context too it is useful to reflect that the poet may be reveling in the urgency and intricacy of his images and language. The comparison with the fish is, significantly, both introduced and rounded off by personal *fakhr* (lines 8-9 and 17-18). When ᶜAbid describes the fish he is by obvious implication describing his poetic ability, referred to in line 9 as his tongue *(lisan)*. Therefore the superiority of the fish and its domination of the other fishes is a symbol for the poet's ability and his domination of other poets. Having established his poetic pre-eminence by means of demonstrating it in the descriptions of the storm and the fish, and having expressly stated it in lines 8-9, the poet is now in an unassailable position and can proceed to boast of his generosity and to vilify the baseness of the unnamed person apostrophized in lines 8, 17 and 19-22. If it is supposed that the person satirized had attacked the poet on some occasion, then the measures ᶜAbid takes to emphasize his poetic ability and the attendant difficulty of the language used are placed in their proper context.

To conceive of poetry as being an important constituent of *muruwwah* solves, or helps to solve, many of the problems of interpretation which are encountered all too frequently in the course of reading any *diwan*, let alone the whole corpus of pre-Islamic poetry.

When any theory of general application is being put forward, the more general it is in its application, the more liable it is to be disturbed by details and anomalies which necessitate more specific treatment. In the case of the application of a scheme based on the *muruwwah* interpretation of pre-Islamic poetry, a very

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[1] I. A. Richards, *Practical Criticism*, Routledge and Kegan Paul 1929, P. 223. Was ᶜAbid forcing his audience to conceive of poetic ability as similar to martial prowess?, or was this the view of his audience, which he was couching in a novel metaphor?
[2] C.J. Lyall, *op. cit*. p.51.

important provision must be stated, namely that there is a certain equivocalness about the *dhikr al-atlal* and *nasib* movements and about the profusion of pessimistic gnomes and aphoristic statements in the corpus of *Jahili* poetry which requires further discussion.

There are two ways of interpreting the *dhikr al-atlal* and the *nasib* movements. They can be interpreted as poetical manifestations of *muruwwah* in the manner adopted above; alternatively, they can be interpreted as introducing into the poet's mind a pessimism and sadness which sow the seeds of doubt concerning the validity and general relevance of living one's life according to the dictates of *muruwwah*. Any *qaşidah* which is introduced by a *dhikr al-atlal,* by a *nasib* or by pessimistic gnomes has the potentiality of developing in two different ways: the whole *qaşidah* may become either a poetic manifestation of *muruwwah* or a negation of the validity and relevance of *muruwwah*. The likelihood is that the doubt engendered by the movements was subliminal or subconscious. This confrontation between pessimism and *muruwwah* may help to explain the importance and dominance enjoyed by poetry of the *Jahiliyyah* in subsequent Arabic literature, because, as W. Montgomery Watt has shown, this tendency towards pessimism was an Arab characteristic, not simply a pre-Islamic one.[1] Furthermore it may be the source of that ever-present tension which endows the poetry with that quality of *jazalah* which, as A. El- Tayyib has suggested, later Arab poets constantly sought to recapture.[2] The development of the topics and motifs of the poem was not fixed until the poet found himself faced with public delivery. No pre-Islamic *qaşidah* had an end or conclusion until the poet in his performance, if he had composed it previously, or in his extemporaneous composition actually arrived at the point at which he finished it: the poem was not considered to be a monolithic structure but existed as the poet delivered it. In an oral culture the poem has an immediacy which it does not possess in a written culture; any *nasib*, for example, is both important in its own right and subordinate to the rest of the *qaşidah* when it has been delivered. The *Jahili qaşidah* is thus both disparate, in that each section has its own importance and urgency, and a unified whole, in that it is the artistic creation of a human being interpreting his environment according to the conception which for him makes sense of that environment: its unity lies in that it is the poetical treatment of a Weltanschauung awl that it is the product of the human mind experiencing one of the most irrational and enduring acts of creation.

This accounts for the divergence of modern opinion concerning the unity of the *qaşidah*.[3] Undoubtedly ''the melodic dimension of oral poetry'' and ''the poet's wish to keep alive the audience's interest'' are important, but if the above interpretation of the fluidity of the structure of the pre-Islamic *qasidah* has any validity at all, then these concepts are simply too casual an explanation; they do not fully account for the nature of the poetry of the Jāhiliyyah. The onion-bulbs of the *Mu'allaqah* of Imru' al-Qays, for example, formally are no different, according to the competitive virtue conception of poetry, from sonic of the details of 'Abid's storm-descriptions and indeed many of the apparently gratuitous details in which pre-Islamic poetry abounds. Attractive as it maybe to consider that the audience grew weary at this point in the recital, it is more likely that these details are to be attributed to a striving for originality—it is too arbitrary to presume that the audience was bored and that this dictated to the poet the end of his *qasidah*. Rather the poet recited what he wanted to and ended his poem with a description of a storm, the details of which are stunning in their aptitude and exhilarating in their verve. A good poet was the master of his audience and not vice-versa, as may well have been the case with poets of lesser ability.

Many *qasa'id* embody a tension between pessimism and *muruwwah*: occasionally pessimism pervades the whole *qasidah* but often *muruwwah* transcends pessimism. Such, however, was the force of this pessimism and its effect on the Arab mind that any *qasidah* might have ended on either a pessimistic or a vindictive, transcendent note, from the moment that the poet began his public recitation or extemporaneous composition of it.

Poem I by 'Abid, sometimes numbered among the *Mu^callaqah*, reveals how subtle and unconscious this feeling of pessimism could be.

Lines 1-11:   *Dhikr al-atlal* movement.

1-3:   The topic of the enumeration of deserted campsites; motif; place-names.

4-6a: The topic of the desolation and change of the *atlal*; motifs; people have been exchanged for wild beasts (4) and the advent of death (5-6a).

6b-10:   The topic of the disconsolate poet; motifs; similes comparing the poet's tears to a water skin full of holes (7-8), a torrent (8), a brook at the bottom of a valley (9) and a stream of water under time shade of date-palms (10).

11:    The topic of the advent of old age; motif; a warning of the imminence of death given by the grayness of the poet's hair.

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[1] W. M. Watt, *Free Will and Pre-destination in Early Islam,* Lucaz 1948, Chapter 2; "The Opposing Trends in Islam.

[2] A. EI Tayyib, op. cit., pp.33-36.

[3] J. T. Monroe, op. cit., G. J. H. van Gelder, *Beyond the Line,* Leiden 1982 and "The Abstracted Self in Arabic Poetry", a paper delivered at the first *JAL* Symposium on *Classical Arabic Poetry*, 1981.

Lines12-24:   The *hikmah* movement.

 Pessimistic gnomes; motifs; the transitoriness of life (12-17), contentment

(18), the futility of instructing the man whom time has failed to instruct

 (19), the treachery of friends (20), comment strangers and kinsmen (21-22)

and the longer one lives, the more pain one undergoes (24).[1]

Lines 25-27a: The *rihlah movement*.

25-27a: The topic of the desert-journey; motifs; the tainted water-hole and dangerous desert (25), the palpitation of the heart (26) and the journey at dawn (27a).

Lines 27b-45:   The *wasf* movement.

27b-31:   The topic of the description of the she-camel; motifs; swiftness (27b), the she-camel is compared to a wild-ass (28), the camel's strong back and withers are like a sand-dune (28), her age (29), resemblance to a wild-ass of *Ghab* which bears the scars of its fighting (30), a simile likening the young she-camel to a wild- hull digging up the *rukhamah* plant whilst the North Wind blows (31).

32-45:   The topic of the description of a mare; motifs; the she-camel is a part of the past (32), the mare's frame arid forelock (33), oily smoothness of movement (34), a simile in which the mare is compared to an eagle (34-45) – its hunting prowess (35), night- long perseverance in waiting for prey (36), emergence in the cold of dawn (37), espial of a fox (38), how it moved as it went in pursuit (39 & 41), the fox cowers (40 & 42), the moment of the kill (43 & 45).

The *qasidah* appears to work on a very simple and economical binary antithesis of pessimism (1-24) and *muruwwah* (25-45). Despite the apparent transcendence of the feelings of pessimism in lines 25-45, the poet has not adequately reassured himself of the validity of *muruwwah* as a *Weltanschauung*.

Lines 12-24, the pessimistic *hikmah* movement, are pervaded by attempts made by the poet to overcome his sense of desolation and worthlessness. The feeling of pessimism is introduced by the enumeration of the erstwhile dwellings of the tribe and the mention of their passing away. It is corroborated by the reference to the poet's old age in line 6: his feeling of pessimism is both personal and environmental – a total collapse of the relevance of competitive virtue as a means of confronting the transience and impermanence of the world. In many *qaṣa'id* the topic of the disconsolate poet is an inverted self-g1oiificatory foil-excessive grief being a component of *muruwwah* - and the poet manages to dispel this grief both by indulging it and by means of the desert-journey. However in this poem these means of transcendence are not successful because these very means are being questioned and doubted. Line 11 is the first instance of what seems to be self-remonstrance.

Taṣbu fa- anna la-ka al-tasabi   anna wa- qad ra'aka al- mashibu
You (are full of) longing, but how can you deceive yourself (that you will achieve
 anything by weeping), how, when hoariness has frightened you?

Solace is not to be found in weeping, the desolation which surrounds the poet is overpowering, and depth of grief and excessive mourning no longer have any significance, because the whole world-view of the poet has been called into doubt.

In the pessimistic *hikmah* movement (lines 12-24) the poet tries to find meaning in the apparently random and meaningless events which have come to pass. His pessimism is enunciated in the gnomes contained in lines 12-17 and 19-20. However the self-apostrophe and advice contained in line 18 is insufficient to stem the flow; in the formally parallel line 24 he resigns himself to expressing a desolate and bleak gnome. The poet's wisdom and depth of feeling have proved to be of no avail in endowing *muruwwah* with its pristine validity and relevance.

In lines 25-45 the poet seemingly re-establishes the validity of competitive virtue; both the she-camel and the mare reflect his manhood, their excellence standing as a foil to his. The duality of the *wasf* movement in which two animals are described can be interpreted in the light of the extensive nature of the pessimism contained in lines 1-24, an extra effort being needed to dispel the doubt and uncertainty. Nevertheless, on some level, possibly unconscious, the poet has still not managed to come to terms with that pessimism. The word *ajin* (line 25) and its interpretation are vital in this context. The verb *ajana* means to become tainted or corrupted, used of water, and if it implies no more nuances than this, then the goal for which the poet hazards his life by embarking on such a perilous desert-journey is no more than tainted water, that is, the efforts have been worthless - a further expression of the pessimism which the poet is experiencing. Alternatively, if C. J. Lyall is correct in his translation of the word, "altered for the worse, covered with slime and stinking from long standing unvisited",[2] then the inaccessibility of the place may be a corroboratory detail in the re-invigoration of

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[1] The presence of the (probably) Islamic line 23 is an indication of the Arabness of this type of pessimism. The fluidity of an oral tradition is adduced as an explanation of this phenomenon in J. T. Monroe, op. cit., pp. 39-40 and M. Zwettler, *The Oral Tradition of Classical Arabic Poetry: its character and implication*, Ohio State University Press: Columbus 1978, p. 21.

[2] C. J, Lyall, *op. cit*. p.19, note 1.

muruwwah, with the emphasis being on the absence of visitors to the Water - only the poet is adequate to the challenge, brave enough to overcome the perils involved in such a journey. There may also be a note of hybristic exultation implied in taking such risks merely for the sake of tainted water. Nonetheless, the very possibility of divergent interpretations suggests that the poet is not sure in his own mind that he is vindicating *muruwwah* in its very ambiguity this poem points to the subtlety of pessimism and this line, 23, may cast some doubt over the validity of Kamal Abu Deeb's statement that "the journey always leads to safety despite the hardships involved. It seems that structurally the end of the journey counteracts its beginning and brings balance to the whole process which is fundamental to the human and (animal) condition."[1] ᶜAbid was unable to convince himself that the impermanence of mortal existence could be surmounted This tension invests the poem with a vitality and ambiguity which are also characteristic of the *Muaᶜllaqah* of Labid in the last line of which the poet refers to the existence of base men *(li'am)* among the members of his tribe which he is extolling. This is an indication, similar to ᶜAbid's use of dim in line 25, that the poem's conflict and tension have not been resolved by the poet; *muruwwah* has not been vindicated.

Poem 5 by ᶜAbid evinces characteristics similar to those of poem 1; the *dhikr al-atlal* movement, in which the emphasis is laid on the tribe, despite the reference to the beloved, Hind, in line 1; the topic of the advent of old age in line 5; a personal *fakhr* movement in which the poet's martial prowess, mare, drunkenness and amorous prowess are delineated. Yet despite the personal *fakhr* movement, the poet cannot rid himself of doubt, and the *qaşidah* concludes on a note of pessimism.

It will be informative, to consider at this point some poems by poets other than ᶜAbid. Poem 4 in Brockelmann's edition of the *diwan* of Labid provides an excellent example of a thoroughly pessimistic poem. It is an elegy which manifests no explicit tension between pessimism and *muruwwah*. As befits an elegy this poem is thoroughly pessimistic, though on a subjective level the poet's grief and his poetic ability manifested in evoking that grief may be interpreted as instances of *muruwwah*, in the manner indicated in the discussion of *ritha'*. A profitable contrast can be made between Labid poem 4 and a poem in much the same vein by Imru' al-Qays, number 5 in Ahlwardi's edition, pages 72-73 of the Dãr Şadir text. In contrast to Labid's elegy (poem 4), the poet refuses to accept his pessimistic feelings, despite their recurrence throughout the whole *qaşidah*, in lines 1-2, 4-5 and 10-13. In the final hemistich (13b) he ends on a note of hope, assertion and vindication with the possibility of avenging *Sharahil* b. ᶜAmr "the man killed at al-Kulab". Essentially, the purpose of both poets is to immortalize the memory of their dead ancestors by means of *marathi*, but they differ greatly in their approach to and treatment of this purpose primarily in the assertion of their individuality and explicit reaction to the tension between *muruwwah* and pessimism. Labid acquiesces and indulges his grief, whereas Imru' al-Qays is unable to come to terms with it: both poems are successful elegies but differ entirely in attitude.

Another interestingly pessimistic poem; though not an elegy, is poem number 13 in Ahlwardt's edition of the *diwãn* of Tarafah. The poem is remarkable for the poet's treatment of his love and feelings of pessimism - indeed in this instance he seems to be exulting in them and makes no attempt at an objective, external resolution and transcendence, and this is manifested in the narrative of *Muraqqish* and *'Asma'* (14-19), which is followed by a pessimistic *hikmah* movement, and in the equation of Tarafah's passion with that of Muraqqish (22-23). However, as is the case with Labid poem 4, on a subjective and personal level the *muruwwah* conception of love and grief is probably at work.

Poem 9 in the *diwan* of ᶜAbid provides a very good illustration of how the antithesis of pessimism and *muruwwah* can dictate the structure of a *qaşidah*. The poem falls into two halves, lines 1-8 and 9-16, each half finishing with a pessimistic aphorism, the mutability and deceitfulness of the world (8) and the trouble that is entailed in living (16), and in each half the poet tries to endow his Weltanschauung with relevance and immediacy but does not succeed. In the first half the attempt is made through the medium of boasting of his sexual prowess, drunkenness and his companions, in the second through descriptions of a raid, a desert- journey and of a she-camel. Indeed it may not be too sanguine or extreme to see in this poem something like an artistic treatment of pessimism, and as such a case could be made for ascribing it to a later stage of the development of the tradition, but this must remain in the realm of conjecture.

A similar problem arises in the case of a poem contained in the *diwan* of ʿAntarah b. Shaddad.[2] The brevity of the *dhikr al-atlal* movement of this *qaşidah*, lines 1-3, may suggest two things, one of which is dependent upon the other. It may suggest that the movement is being used as a poetic device in order to effect an introduction leading smoothly to the apostrophe of Bint Malik in line 5, given that a woman or a tribe are usually implicitly connected with the series of responses evoked by this movement. This manipulation of the movement as an introduction may suggest that at the time of the composition of the poem the *dhikr al-atlal* had as a movement in the development of the *qaşidah* reached a degree of ossification at which the emotive vibrancy it had previously been endowed with was steadily receding in immediacy and potency. Of course different poets

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[1] K. Abu Deeb, "*Towards a Structural Analysis of pre-Islamic Poetry*: part 1, *IJMAS* 6 (1976), p.173.

[2] *The diwän of Antarah b. Shaddãd*, ed. M. S. Mawlawi, pp. 336-338.

had different sensibilities, were of differing abilities and composed at different stages throughout their lives ᶜAntarah may have composed this at a later stage in the tradition when the *dhikr al-atlal* had come to be treated as an introduction and when the inevitable process of ossification had begun to assert its influence. Another contingent solution may be the attribution of authorship, if it is permissible to use such a word when dealing with an oral tradition to someone other than ᶜAntarah, concluding that this poem is the product of a later period. A diachronistic study of the development and ossification of the *dhikr al-atlal* movement might permit a more conclusive solution to be reached.

Two movements of the pre-Islamic *qaşidah* are of particular importance in understanding the force and presence of pessimism: the *dhikr al-atlal* and the *nasib*. However pessimism found its fullest expression in the gnomes which pervade the whole corpus of *Jãhili* poetry. A translation of some of these gnomes, taken from ᶜAbid's *diwan*, can stand as an illustration of the form that *Jahili* pessimism assumed

Tara 'l-mar'a yaşbu li-hayati wa-tuliha, // wa fi tuli 'ayshi 'l-mar'i abrahu ta'dhibi.

"You see man longing for length of life, yet long life is the most chastising torment."
………[ᶜAbid 9, 16]

Wa-khaladtu baᶜdahum wa lastu bi-khalidin // fa 'l-dahru dhu gbirin wa dhu alwani.

"And I live after them though I will not live for ever: Time is spiteful, the master of (many) colours." ….. [ᶜAbid 16, 9]

Fa-inna wa-man qad bada minna fa-ka-'lladhi // yaruhu wa-ka 'l-qadi 'l-batata li-yaghladi.

"Indeed we and those of us who have perished are like the man who travels at night and the man who gets ready his travelling-provisions to set out in the morning." [ᶜAbid 30, 36].

Line 9 of poem 16 by ᶜAbid quoted and translated above, is a thought which is echoed in line 7 of poem 4 by Labid and lines 11-12 of poem 5 by Imru al-Qays. It epitomizes a very important paradox, the irreconcilability of knowledge and emotion: the poets constantly hope for leniency from life and passionately desire to live a long life, despite their knowledge and understanding of what life entails. This is probably the most fundamental existential problem which the pre-Islamic Arab had to face and seems to have been a major source of despondency.

Many poems end on a note of vindictive assertion and transcendence by means of *muruwwah*; the doubts and pessimism to which the Arab was all too prone were dispelled by means of the exultant celebration of *muruwwah*, whereby the relevance and validity of this concept as a way of living were asserted. These poems are not fatalistic in the sense that the poet surrenders himself in wanton abandon to these feelings and ceases to vindicate his view of reality. This is the view forwarded by W. M. Watt - ''the attitude of 'Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.' It is to this whole practical and religious attitude that the term 'fatalism' is properly applied, and not simply to the theoretical view that the course of events is pre-determined. When a man believes that everything in his life is fixed already, or at least all the important things, he has little incentive to make any strenuous efforts for anything. He will drift along, following whichever impulse happens to be uppermost at the moment, taking the way of pleasure and of avoidance of pain; he will choose the easier path, and will not even attempt the difficult or inconvenient things, because he has no belief in their possibility. His resignation to fate will include much that is by no means inevitable."[1] They are, however, fatalistic according to the definition which H. Ringgren uses as a working base in his *Studies in Arabian Fatalism* – "the doctrine that all things are determined or arbitrarily decreed by fate."[2] This transcendence of pessimism is best illustrated by means of a discussion of three poems, two from the *diwan* of ᶜAbid and one by Imru' al-Qays in each of which it takes a different form: poem 26, in which transcendence is effected on the tribal level, and poem 19, in which the *mamduh* is the poet's means of dispelling his doubts, from the *diwan* of ᶜAbid and poem 17 from Ahlwardi's edition of the *diwan* of Imru' al-Qays.

In the contents and structure of poem 26 there is evident a development from grief to pessimistic doubt to transcendence by means of *muruwwah*. The abandonment and desolation of the campsite, the passing on of the tribe, the old age of the poet and his reminiscence of days of former glory cause him grief; he seeks consolation by means of proving himself in the desert-journey, but the brevity of the *rihlah* movement may suggest that the poet is not too comfortable in his belief in the efficacy of these measures as the way to purge himself of his grief - he doubts the validity of *muruwwah* on the personal level and realises that the answer must

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[1] W. M. Watt, op. cit., p.23.

[2] H. Ringgren, *Studies in Arabian Fatalism,* Uppsala and Wiesbaden ,p.3.

be sought through the tribe. To them he turns and through them he emerges triumphant, confident in the validity of the concept of competitive virtue as exemplified in his tribe. *Muruwwah* and the poet's attainment of it are represented in the extent of the poet's grief, in the undertaking of arduous desert-journeys and in the excellence of his riding-beast, yet he cannot achieve transcendence on the personal level - his attainment of *muruwwah* is far from complete and his pursuit of it far from satisfactory. In this instance it can only be found through the tribe: ultimately the poet is a member of his tribe and is dependent upon that tribe for his existence. Poem 26 is the poet's realization of that dependence.

Poem 19 is a panegyric in honour of Sharahil, in which the vindication of *muruwwah* bears similarities to Poem 26 but with manifestly different emphasis.[1] It evinces both pessimism and transcendence by means of *muruwwah* but seems to be of a more manufactured and intentional sort than that of the other poems.. The poem opens with two - if Lyall's reading is correct[2] – or three pessimistic gnomes which replace the *dhikr al-atlal* movement and the beloved is described in lines 4-6. These lines also contain the antithesis between the human and animal worlds, a frequent motif in the *dhikr al-atlal* movement, although this antithesis is unusual for its emphasis on the loneliness of the fawn. The departure of the beloved and her tribe reiterates the tone of pessimism and as a consequence the poet turns to the desert-journey and his she-camel in lines 8-15, attempting thereby to overcome the pessimism of lines 1-7. His pursuit arid celebration of *muruwwah* are not for himself; rather the poet proves his worth and suggests by implication that he is fit to praise the king, the objectivisation of competitive virtue - it is by means of the *mamduh* that meaning in the world is found and pessimism and grief are dispelled. The poetic rationale of the *rihlah/wasf* movement is its function as an inverted form of eulogy; the poet's attainment and pursuit of *muruwwah* stand as foils to that of Sharahil, whom he is praising. Many, if not all, *qaṣa'id* are composed of movements which have a double edge to them, being both subordinate to the overall *qaṣidah* and valid expressions of the Bedouin world-view in their own right.

A poem by Imru' al-Qays, number 17 in Ahlwardt's edition of the *diwan*, reveals a development from pessimism to *madih* similar to that of poem 18 by ꜥAbid although of a less manufactured and purposed nature. The precise analysis of the poem is determined by the edition used, although the conclusions remain relatively unaffected. I have decided to use the Dar Sadir edition, pages 99-101.

Line 1:   The poet's unworthiness.

Line 2:   The *hikmah* movement.

       2:        Pessimistic gnome; motif; the ravages of Time.

Lines 3-10:   The *nasib* movement.

       3-5:   The topic of the sexual prowess of the poet; motifs; the nights spent by the poet in the company of Hirr and Faratna (3-4); Hirr destroyed his youth (4).

       5-10:   The topic of the description of the *habib*; motifs; her mouth tasted like wine long matured (5); they both resemble wild-cows of *Tabalah* or the ivory statues of Hakir (6); the musk, of which they are redolent, is like the smell of aloes-wood, carried by the East wind (7); the fine wine of Khuşş and how it was mixed with water (8-10).

Lines 11-12:   The apology; motifs; the ill-timed words for which the poet apologizes, attributing them to his naive inexperience.

Lines 13-20:   The *madih* movement.

       13:        The topic of the *mamduh* character traits; motifs; Saꜥd b. Dibāb, the poet's brother, is neither a criminal, nor a coward nor a miser.

       14-16:   Narrative explaining why the poet is praising the *mamduh*; motifs; shelter provided for the poet and the raiding party (14); they value the people of the *mamduh* more than they do the people of a mountain-peak, in the tracks of whose sheep a leopard stalks (the people the poet is going to raid?) (15); the entertainment provided by the *mamduh* (16).

       17:        The topic of the poet and the mamduh motif; Saꜥd is dearer to him than a horse which has eaten too much barley; apostrophe.

       18-19:   The topic of the *mamduh's* character traits; motifs; he inherited them from his father and his maternal uncle (18); his forbearance, piety and generosity, whether he is drunk or sober (19).

The impetus for the composition of this poem may have been the poet's realization that he has disgraced himself and failed in the pursuit of *muruwwah*. The poem takes the form of a series of apologetic self-justifications until line 13, where the poet realizes that the only way in which he will vindicate *muruwwah* and set right his wrongs is through the praise of his brother. In lines 3-10 he attempts to vindicate *muruwwah* on the personal level and this *nasib* movement is double edged in function; it reveals the poet's consuming passion for

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[1] R. Jacobi, "The Camel Section of the Panegyrical Ode", *JAL* XIII, P. 6. Line 7.

[2] C. J. Lyall, op. cit., p.44.

two women and implies his sexual prowess, there being two women and not one - that there are two women is also an indication of the extent to which he feels he has failed in his pursuit of competitive virtue. This vindication of one aspect of *muruwwah* is by no means sufficient and the poet reverts to his feelings of inadequacy and failure in pursuit of *muruwwah* The poet's apologies and admission of unworthiness have a technical function, enhancing the poet's praise of his brother who is, in this poem a paradigm of *muruwwah* ʿAbid subordinates his attainment of *muruwwah* to the *mamduh*, Imru' al-Qays contrasts his.

The analyses of these poems make it clear that the constituent motifs topics and movements of the *qaşidah* must be considered in their own context as well as m reference to a holistic scheme or theory generalities in the abstract are valid as an initial means to understanding the overall background but it must be remembered that they are abstractions and more importantly, that no two pre Islamic poems are the same either in development of topics or in the detail of their motifs.

In these poems the whole world-view of the poets seems to have collapsed into a state of meaninglessness no longer having any relevance. The poets confront the pessimism attendant upon this meaninglessness by celebrating and vindicating their conception of reality in their poetry. To appreciate fully the nature of this dichotomy, this tension of opposites, in *Jahili* poetry it must be understood that even if the poet, in a poem composed anterior to the time of its recital, has concluded that the concept of *muruwwah* has no validity as an effective or useful world-view, it is at the actual moment of recital that the poet contends with his feelings of futility and tries to endow the concept of *muruwwah* with relevance. The poet does not simply narrate the feelings of doubt which he experienced on one occasion, but rather experiences these doubts at the moment either of recital or of extemporaneous composition, and his poetry is a very real attempt to surmount them. The tension is a real one and not merely poetic or mimetic. Similarly the poet's audience joins with him in experiencing this struggle and striving after transcendence - his experience is their experience, his short-comings and successes are theirs. In this way poetry becomes reality and ceases to be a mimesis of reality; it is an act of creation which is intensely immediate and one peculiar to an oral culture, rarely found in a literate society with its sharp distinction between a poet's thoughts and the form which they take on paper

Conclusion

The consequence of this tension and immediacy of the *qaşidah* is that no pre-Islamic *qaşidah* which begins on a note of pessimism will have a definite ending or conclusion until the poet has finished reciting: a poem may have ended in the way in which the poet had previously composed it, but there was no compelling necessity for this to be so. Every *qasidah* which begins with a *dhikr al-atlal*, *nasib* or a pessimistic *hikmah* movement could have concluded either on a note of pessimism or of assertive vindication depending upon the intensity of the poet's experiences at the time either of recital or of extemporaneous composition. Herein lies the *jazalah*, the vitality, of the poetry of the *jahiliyyah* that the Arab of later periods found so compelling, a compulsion which was a conscious rationalization of an unconscious reaction.

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