

Emotional Manipulation, Coercion, and Precarity in the Tales of Jamīl and Buthayna

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Abstract

This article rereads several canonical anecdotes from the story-cycle of the famed ‘udhrī lover Jamīl b. Ma‘mar and his beloved, Buthayna. Rather than flatly accepting the stories’ internal interpretations or the traditional frameworks through which these stories have been interpreted, in this article, I provide an alternative interpretation of the story-cycle by focusing on how Buthayna might have experienced the relationship. This article argues that the Jamīl-Buthayna story-cycle can be read as more open-ended than previously considered, that it explores themes of emotional manipulation and abuse just as much as it deals with abstemious chastity and noble sentiments, that Jamīl might not be the outstanding moral exemplar for the modern reader that the medieval tradition built him up to be. Beyond that, when we read these stories from Buthayna’s—or any beloved’s—perspective, it becomes apparent how far this role might expose an individual to threat, scandal, and precarity within their broader social world.

In the tenth/sixteenth century, Dāwūd al-Anṭākī (d. 1008/1599), a physician and ethicist living in Ottoman Cairo, wrote a long compilatory treatise about love, entitled *Tazyīn al-aswāq bi-tafṣīl ashwāq al-‘ushshāq* (*Decorating the Markets with the Classification of [or, Setting Forth in Detail] the Longing of the Lovers*). In this compilation, he quoted a vast array of love stories, often set in times long past, depicting characters who once lived navigating their complex relationships with each other. These stories had a purpose for al-Anṭākī. Much like the other love “theorists” who had come before him,¹ al-Anṭākī found in these old stories an important tool, perhaps the most important tool, for thinking about what love is, how it affects the individual (medically, spiritually etc.), and how it shapes and is shaped by the world around it. His treatise, like others, blends together the quotation of stories and poetry with broader theoretical ideas about love, be they medical, theological, philosophical, moral, or legal. The stories might support various theoretical propositions about love, or they may problematize them, but throughout the treatise it is by reckoning with the mimetic imagination of love’s effects upon the human in stories that the compiler is able to make some sense of love as a social and emotional reality and make claims about human behavior, morality, and experience.

1. On this tradition, see Lois Anita Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love among the Arabs* (New York: New York University Press, 1971); for a brief discussion of the complications attending to the word “theory,” see Giffen’s introduction. See also Monica Balda-Tillier, *Histoires d’amour et de mort: le précis des martyrs de l’amour de Muğulḫāy (m.1361)* (Cairo: Institut français d’archéologie orientale du Caire, 2022), 83–113, for a further discussion of the same texts.

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Al-Anṭākī, once again like many of the other “theorists,” was fond of the stories of Jamīl (d. 82/701) and Buthayna and the other ‘*udhrī*’ lover-poets, like Kuthayyir ‘Azza (d. 105/723) or Majnūn Laylā;² for such theorists, these stories essentially provide a heroic gloss to the individual’s struggle not to break Islamic sexual laws in the face of extreme desire.³ The generic label ‘*udhrī*’ was a term that, whatever the original social, political, or theoretical content of the (Umayyad-era) poems,⁴ had morphed over time to describe a story-type that charted impossible, unfulfilled love, the lover(-poet)’s fatal desire to be with his beloved, a desire stymied by social forces beyond his control.⁵ This basic story-type, death from cruelly unfulfilled love, is ubiquitous in the chaste love tradition and stretches far beyond the Bedouin social context in which canonically ‘*udhrī*’ stories ordinarily occur.⁶

Jamīl is one of many characters whose life and poetry became the stuff of these legendary stories. Stringing the vast corpus of stories that depict episodes of his supposed life into a story-cycle,⁷ the essential core of the legend is as follows: Jamīl was born into the Banū ‘Udhra in the supposedly impoverished Wādī al-Qurā to the north of Medina. He fell in love with a woman from his tribe, whose name in his poetry is recorded both as Buthayna and Bathna, of which Buthayna is the diminutive.⁸ As is common to practically all ‘*udhrī*’

2. For love theorists’ treatment of these stories, see, for example, Dāwūd al-Anṭākī, *Tazyīn al-aswāq bi-tafṣīl ashwāq al-‘ushshāq* (Cairo: Dār al-Bayān al-‘Arabī, 2001), 1:111–25; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Dhamm al-hawā*, ed. Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Salām ‘Aṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1971), 331–37; Muḡhulṭāy b. Qilīj, *al-Wāḍiḥ al-mubīn fī dhikr man ustushhida min al-muḥibbīn* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Intishār al-‘Arabī, 1997), 158–68; Ibn Abī Ḥajala, *Dīwān al-ṣabāba* (Beirut: Dār wa-Maktabat al-Hilāl, 1980), 251. Ibn Abī Ḥajala describes Jamīl as the primary example of the culture of *‘iffa* (chastity) that he intends to inculcate across his text.

3. An argument that parallels Balda-Tillier’s description of ‘*udhrī*’ love as providing a “morale parallèle à celle de l’Islam” in the ‘Abbāsīd world; Monica Balda-Tillier, “Parler d’amour sans mot dire: les stigmates de la passion,” *Annales Islamologiques* 48, no. 1 (2014): 185–202, at 200.

4. Renate Jacobi, “The ‘Udhra: Love and Death in the Umayyad Period,” in *Martyrdom in Literature: Visions of Death and Meaningful Suffering in Europe and the Middle East from Antiquity to Modernity*, ed. Friederike Pannewick, 137–48 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2004).

5. Stefan Leder, “The ‘Udhri Narrative in Arabic Literature,” in *Martyrdom in Literature*, 162–89.

6. The story of much later and urban figures, such as Ibn Dāwūd, follows the same essential topos.

7. See, for example, Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, ed. Iḥsān ‘Abbās, Ibrāhīm al-Sa‘āfīn, and Bakr ‘Abbās, 5th ed. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2019), 8:66–112. The earliest collection of stories still extant can be found in Ibn Qutayba, *al-Shi‘r wa-l-shu‘arā’*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākīr (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1966–67), 434–44. These two collections have been translated into German in Martin Jagonak, *Das Bild der Liebe im Werk des Dichters Ḡamīl ibn Ma‘mar: eine Studie zur ‘udritischen Lyrik in der arabischen Literatur des späten 7. Jahrhunderts* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2008). Other collections of stories concerning Jamīl and his beloved can be found in the biographical tradition; see, for example, Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a‘yān wa-anbā’ abnā’ al-zamān*, ed. Iḥsān ‘Abbās, 6th ed. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2013), 1:366–371; Khalīl b. Aybak al-Ṣafādī, *Kitāb al-Wāfī bi-l-wafayāt* (Leipzig: Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft, 1931–2007), 11:182–86. These quasi-biographical collections of stories claim neither completeness, nor chronological sense, nor to be repositories of uncomplicated historical data about an individual. Nor, more significantly, are they free from internal contradictions; see note 10. On the complexities of using the biographical tradition as a historical source, see, for example, Julia Bray, “Literary Approaches to Medieval and Early Modern Arabic Biography,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 20, no. 3 (2010): 237–53; Hilary Kilpatrick, “Time and Death in Compiled *Adab* ‘Biographies,’” *Al-Qanṭara* 25, no. 2 (2004): 387–412.

8. Al-Iṣbahānī, *al-Aghānī*, 8:71.

romances, her parents hostilely refuse Jamīl,⁹ saving her for a different man, her eventual husband. Thwarted by these fraught circumstances, the pair continue to meet each other in secret, away from watchful eyes. Over time, however, their relationship proved to be unsustainable and Jamīl leaves Wādī al-Qurā, winding up in Egypt (or Syria), where he dies, clinging on to his love for Buthayna, who is left saddened by his death.¹⁰

One important approach in scholarship has been to read these stories with an eye for their (real and imagined) production and reception contexts.¹¹ Medieval scholars, to be sure, read these tales and gleaned from them broader quasi-anthropological ideas about Bedouin sexual and emotional ethics,¹² ideas which “ha[ve] little if anything” to do with the actual world out of which the (earlier) poems originated.¹³ Yet, whilst the stories may derive much of their content from the poetry itself,¹⁴ they cannot perforce be used as a source to tell us about the actual or historical Bedouin context they purport to describe, nor be used as uncomplicated data to reconstruct the historical life of the poet; as Jokha Alharthi has argued at length, the poems provide a much more complicated image of the poet than the majority of the stories and the ways in which the stories have been received both in medieval and modern scholarship as representing a chaste and abstemious lover.¹⁵ The

9. See, for example, al-Iṣbahānī, *al-Aghānī*, 8:71–73, 79–80.

10. Ibn Khallikān (d.681/1282) compiles a short account of his journey to Egypt and reception by the then governor ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Marwān (d. 86/705), alongside a story narrated by ‘Abbās b. Sahl al-Sā‘idī (d.120/737–8), sometimes narrated by his father, the Companion Sahl b. Sa‘d al-Sā‘idī (d.88/706–7 or 91/709–10), which depicts Jamīl dying in Syria. As Ibn Khallikān notes, the concordance of these events is confusing. Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*, 1:380–81.

11. For a useful consideration of how these characters bore significance in a parallel *‘udhrī* tale in the ‘Abbāsīd world, see Khan’s querying “how...one optimally reads Laylā in the tenth-century *Aghānī* version” of the Majnūn Laylā romance; Ruqayya Yasmine Khan, *Bedouin and ‘Abbāsīd Cultural Identities: The Arabic Majnūn Laylā Story* (London: Routledge, 2019), ch. 7. For an example of an author reading them critically against both the Umayyad world in which the characters lived and the ‘Abbāsīd world in which the stories emerged, see Jacobi, “*‘Udhra*.” A more obviously historicizing use of these stories is Djedidi’s reading of the Banū ‘Udhra’s socioeconomic circumstances out of the poetry’s/story’s emotions and vice versa; Tahar Labib Djedidi, *La poésie amoureuse des Arabes: le cas des ‘Udhrites* (Algiers: Société nationale d’édition et diffusion, 1974).

12. See, for example, Mughulṭāy, *al-Wāḍih*, 45–50, for exemplary stories that ventriloquize Bedouin sexual and emotional ethics.

13. Jacobi, “*‘Udhra*,” 138. This has not stopped a considerable body of scholarship using the anecdotes as the essential raw data to analyze the poems, or rather reading the poetry through the biography. See, for example, Jūrj Ghurayyib, *al-Ghazal: tārikhuhu wa-a‘lāmuhu*, ‘Umar b. Abī Rabī‘a, *Jamīl b. Ma‘mar* (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1966); Hind Bin Šāliḥ, *al-Ghazal: Jamīl b. Ma‘mar*, ‘Umar b. Abī Rabī‘a (Sfax: Maktabat ‘Alā’ al-Dīn, 2018); Raymond Farrin, *Abundance from the Desert: Classical Arabic Poetry* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2011); all of these works essentially retell Jamīl’s life from the anecdotal tradition and use the biographical background as the essential hermeneutic for the poetry, without probing into the genealogy of the stories or their complex interweaving with the poems.

14. A point noted decades ago by Simoni, who emphasized that almost all of what we think we know about *‘udhrī* life, love, and emotion comes to us by way of the anecdotal-poetic synthesis created within the *adab* tradition; Eva Simoni, “Reviewed Work: *La poésie amoureuse des Arabes: le cas des ‘Udhrites*,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 99, no. 2 (1979): 365–66, at 366.

15. See Jokha Alharthi, *The Body in Arabic Love Poetry: The ‘Udhri Tradition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 16–19. Here she reviews a considerable body of scholarship, much of which glosses

stories and poems derive from separate, if interwoven, literary processes and genealogies. In literary terms, many of the (later) stories “staged” the poems or provided them with a biographical hermeneutical context through which they could be interpreted,¹⁶ and by which the historical artifact of the poetry—a material reality that, without getting caught up in questions of authenticity, provides us (and the storytellers) with a direct link to the historical person—becomes anchored into the historical life of the individual, turning the stories into a sort of *tafsīr* of the poetry, much as the *asbāb al-nuzūl* provide an anchor for some of the Qur’anic revelations.¹⁷ The world of campsite trysts and unbreakable sexual morality is a stylized world and value system, imagined and propagated by an Arabizing ‘Abbāsīd public.¹⁸

Likewise, the relationship of the values the anecdotes depict to the ‘Abbāsīd context in which they became highly popular is also tenuous.¹⁹ Already the gender relations demonstrated by characters in the stories were quite strange and distant; as al-Jāhīz (d. 255/868–69) comments in *Risālat al-Qiyān (Epistle on Singing Girls)*, the ease with which men and women interacted in the Bedouin world, the evidence for which he draws from these selfsame stories, is starkly different from the contemporary.²⁰ We can trace aspects of medieval thought about love through these stories; the stories of the Bedouin lovers are a group of texts through which many of the central ethical ideals that emerged in the “love theory” tradition were (or had been) imagined and explored, problematized and questioned. Yet, there is not necessarily a straight line between these imaginative and entertaining stories and moral norms or ideals, nor is there between them and social or emotional realities.²¹

over the emotional complications found in Jamīl’s *dīwān* by suggesting that the themes of innuendo or sexual desire are merely attempts to ape contemporary *hijāzī* poetics or else should not sully our received view of ‘*udhrī*’ chaste desire. Of particular note here are her arguments regarding the ideas of Yūsuf Bakkār, ‘Afīf Ḥātūm, Muṣṭafā al-Shak‘a, and Aḥmad al-Jawārī, all of whom, in slightly different ways, begin from the perspective that ‘*udhrī*’ love is essentially chaste, or to quote Alharthī’s analysis of al-Jawārī’s perspective, “an elevated aspect of love, which rises above sensual desire and physical lust” (16).

16. Beatrice Gruendler, “Verse and Taxes: The Function of Poetry in Selected Literary *Akhbār* of the Third/Ninth Century,” in *On Fiction and Adab in Medieval Arabic Literature*, ed. Philip F. Kennedy, 85–124 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005), 96, 88. See also Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), which also argues for *akhbār* as biographical “commentary” on poetry.

17. Jonathan Lawrence, “It’s All Just Poetry: Writing ‘Umar ibn Abī Rabī‘ah’s Life,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 52, no. 3–4 (2021): 321–50, at 325–27.

18. Stefan Leder, *Ibn al-Ġawzī und seine Kompilation wider die Leidenschaft: der Traditionalist in gelehrter Überlieferung und originärer Lehre* (Beirut: Orient-Institut der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, 1984), 139; Susanne Enderwitz, *Liebe als Beruf: al-‘Abbās ibn al-Aḥnaf und das Ġazal* (Beirut: In Kommission bei Franz-Steiner-Verlag Stuttgart, 1995), 25–29.

19. On the complex relationship between the highly stylized emotions found in contemporaneously popular stories and what we might call real life, see Julia Bray, “Codes of Emotion in Ninth- and Tenth-Century Baghdad: Slave Concubines in Literature and Life-Writing,” *Cultural History* 8, no. 2 (2019): 184–201, at 195–97.

20. A. F. L. Beeston, ed. and trans., *The Epistle on Singing-Girls of Jāhīz* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1980), 16–17.

21. As Bray comments with regard to the sold slave girl story-type, emotions are not a “form of realia” that

In generic terms, too, the relationship between the poetic and the anecdotal Jamīl is not seamless. In one sense, the stories imagine how this poetry, tightly focused on the poet's longing for his distant beloved,²² might be set into a populated social world that is brimming with all sorts of potential challenges to the smooth progression of a love affair. In another sense, there is the question of perspective. Where the poetry seems emotionally raw and internal, the stories are always externally narrated, producing a tension between the emotions found in each text, leading us to ask how far we can trust Jamīl's interpretation of events and emotions, both in the poems and the stories.²³ Do the poems really tell us about the relationship, or just the way Jamīl interprets, imagines, and fantasizes his love/beloved? In many ways, these third-person stories demonstrate a much more inconsistent and ambiguous love than what he claims for himself in the poetry, a love more precarious and complicated by other human emotions, like jealousy or pride. Across this article, I suggest that the anecdotal Jamīl is imagined to have a far more self-interested side to his seemingly extravagant and self-abnegating poetic sentiments, a productive disjunction between the two sets of texts that complicates any simplistic reading of either incarnation, the poetic or anecdotal Jamīl, as a moral and emotional hero.

Returning to al-Anṭākī, the tales of these *ʿudhrī* lovers depicted a world buried deep in the mythic past, almost a millennium ago already, far removed from Ottoman Cairo. This world likely never existed. It was a "Bedouin Arcadia,"²⁴ a legendary space constructed in the romantic and historical imagination, which retained an overwhelmingly powerful hold on the culture across the centuries.²⁵ However, that authors and readers in Ottoman Cairo could still find something instructive about these stories after so many centuries, that they remained meaningful explorations of love, desire, and emotion, that moral and emotional values could still be drawn from them, ought to remind us that these stories are not hermetically sealed cultural products of either the Bedouin world or the *ʿAbbāsīd* literary scene, but open-ended cultural products that continued to resonate far beyond their original production contexts—and, indeed, continue to do so today.²⁶ Moving away from a positivist or historicist account of these stories, then, how else can these tales be read? What other lenses can be brought to them? How do we, how can we, read these tales in the present?

stories "convey unconsciously," but are "shaped by imagination and argument"; Bray, "Codes," 197, 184.

22. For a useful survey of the major themes in Jamīl's verse, see Alharthi, *Body*, chs. 4–7.

23. An approach to poetics, reading beyond the poet's perspective, that has also been undertaken to similar effect in Adam Talib, "Unlearning the Aesthetics of Malicious Joy," *Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wuṣṭā* 32 (2024): 340–60, esp. at 355–57.

24. Jacobi, "Udhra," 137.

25. Jaroslav Stetkevych, *The Zephyrs of Najd: The Poetics of Nostalgia in the Classical Arabic Nasīb* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

26. Alharthi, *Body*, 1–2. See, for example, the paintings of Laylā and Majnūn by Iraqi artist Ḍiyāʾ al-ʿAzzāwī (exhibited December 2022–June 2023 at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford); or Qassim Haddad, *Chronicles of Majnun Layla and Selected Poems*, trans. Ferial Ghazoul and John Verlenden (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014).

In this article, I reread four fairly ordinary anecdotes from the Jamīl-Buthayna story-cycle, focusing on Buthayna's perspective and thinking anachronistically about how we can glean some access into her experience of the relationship. The four stories selected here focus on the same set of protagonists, providing us with a stable core from which to work.²⁷ In some ways, the anecdotes are unremarkable, no more significant to the tradition than any others; it would be wrong to assume that my point here is to attack Jamīl specifically, or to depict him as some kind of abuser, or to make totalizing claims about him as a character that stretch beyond these individual scenes. This is not so much about revising our view of Jamīl, but about trying to explore how individual scenes can be read beyond the traditional framework that is wholly shaped by his perspective—or, more generically, by the lover's perspective. It is my contention here that the only way to challenge dominant and traditional readings of these stories is through close readings of individual scenes. As a strategy, closely reading a small number of texts, rather than focusing on the aggregate interpretation of a much baggier, looser set of anecdotes that all in some way coalesce around the same character, allows us to plumb the depths of what is possible within the anecdotes themselves, to explore Jamīl's actions and intentions and his treatment of Buthayna at the most granular level, without imposing the mythic figure onto the scene at hand. Instead, focusing insistently on what is there in each individual story allows us to consider afresh at each turn the choices, actions, and intentions of different characters and how they can be read and reread in new and perhaps unexpected ways, away from the mythos constructed around them.

Importantly, I do not argue for psychological consistency across anecdotes: the Jamīl we meet in one story is not necessarily the same Jamīl we meet in others. These anecdotes may be collected together into quasi-biographical notices, but they come from a multiplicity of sources and were transmitted over long stretches of time, with variant textual formats and chains of transmission, all of which complicates our approach to the characters;²⁸ reading across anecdotes produces a sense of a coherent character but this is largely illusory. For this reason, I am reading across the tradition, not exclusively from, say, Ibn Khallikān's collection or al-İşbahānī's, in an attempt to move away from a biographizing impulse and towards seeing the anecdotes as discrete units of signification that are strung into a wider legend but which make meaning in multiple ways across their compilatory contexts.

In some ways, the methods adopted in this article dovetail with Adam Talib's study of the eroticization of urban space in the Ottoman-era poetic imaginary, what he calls the "predatory city, an exhaustingly erotic, frighteningly promiscuous, and diverse and dangerous arena."²⁹ Rather than focusing exclusively on the poetic voice, or trying to reconstruct tangible historical phenomena, Talib instead chooses to consider the potentially

27. For a fuller accounting of the breadth of the tradition, see the list of anecdotes and translation of Ibn Qutayba's and al-İşbahānī's entries on Jamīl in Jagonak, *Das Bild*.

28. They are examples of what Stefan Leder has described as "unauthored" literature, on which see Stefan Leder, "Authorship and Transmission in Unauthored Literature: The Akhbār Attributed to al-Haytham ibn 'Adī" *Oriens* 31 (1988): 67–81.

29. Adam Talib, "Citystruck," in *The City in Arabic Literature: Classical and Modern Perspectives*, ed. Nizar F. Hermes and Gretchen Head, 138–64 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 138.

“anachronistic” question of how the eroticized youth might feel; what was his perspective? The poetic beloved stands in as a screen through which we might begin to consider the actual historic experience of young boys and women in this time and place; as Talib asks us to consider, “what must it have been like to inhabit the body of a woman or a pubescent male in a premodern Arab city?”³⁰ This question is not easy to answer. It is hard not to move from exploring the imagination of the city in poetry to using poetry as a source for real-life attitudes about the city or for the experience of being in the city; this is methodologically and analytically fraught, as Talib recognizes, given that the scenes described in poems are “perforce fictional and perhaps even comic.”³¹ Poets portray their (imagined and aspirational) fun and flirty encounters with ease and give little consideration for how the repetition and ubiquity of such a discourse within the culture might shape the psychologies and emotional experiences of those they depict.

In the same way, it is the perspective and experience of Jamīl (and other lovers) that anecdotes linger over. By contrast, when we attempt to imagine Buthayna’s experience of the relationship and their interactions, what kinds of problems and emotions lie underneath the surface interpretation of the anecdotes? What would it look like to read these anecdotes without accepting Jamīl’s perspective? When we read *‘udhrī* anecdotes now, we may challenge the emotional, moral, and gendered assumptions upon which they are founded and through which they are routinely read by bringing inherently modern concerns to them and stacking those concerns up against the frames of thought that shaped the anecdotes’ production. Focusing on the interpersonal, on unpicking the ways in which Buthayna may have experienced this relationship, on how Jamīl *treats* Buthayna, on how their relationship sits against a broader social world with all sorts of other actors in it, these stories can take on a darker edge and allow us to think in greater detail about whose experiences are being prioritized, and whose experiences are being passed over or even silenced. They are not simple stories about the lover valiantly fighting against his social circumstances to continue to see his beloved and against his own desires to ensure he maintains sexual propriety. Rather, he becomes a far more complicated hero. Rereading the following four scenes from the anecdotal tradition from Buthayna’s perspective, this article demonstrates that they contain a whole host of problems for us to think through, including such problems as how a lover relates to his beloved, how the beloved’s emotions are diminished through the focus on the male lover’s struggle, how love can lead to abuse, how other characters can become caught up in a love story, and how a beloved becomes ensnared into the grip of a lover.

(1) The Test

One of the most commonly retold stories from the Jamīl legend is that of his meeting with Buthayna one night as the pair are observed by her family:³²

30. Talib, “Citystruck,” 157.

31. Talib, “Citystruck,” 157.

32. I quote this version from Mughulṭāy, *al-Wāḍih*, 167–68; it is sourced from al-Iṣbahānī, *al-Aghānī*, 8:76–77. Other variants exist.

قال أبو الفرج: وشت جارية بثينة بها إلى أبيها وأخيها وقالت لهما: إن جميلاً عندها الليلة، فأتيا مشتملين على سيفيهما فرأياه جالساً حجرة منها يحدثها ويشكو إليها بثه، ثم قال لها: يا بثينة، أرايت ما بي من الشغف والعشق، ألا تجزيه؟ قالت: بماذا؟ قال: بما يكون بين المتحابين، فقالت له: يا جميل، أهذا تبغي! والله لقد كنت عندي بعيداً منه ولئن عاودت تعريضاً بريية لا رأيت وجهي أبداً! فضحك وقال: والله ما قلت هذا إلا لأعلم ما عندك فيه، ولو علمت أنك تجيبيني إليه لعلمت أنك تجيبي غيري ولو رأيت منك مساعدة عليه لضربتك بسيفي هذا ما أستمسك في يدي إن طوعتني نفسي أو لهجرتك أبداً، أو ما سمعت قولي:

وَإِيَّ لَأَرْضِي مِنْ بُثَيْنَةَ بِالَّذِي *** لَوْ أَبْصَرَهُ الْوَاشِي لَقَرَّتْ بِلَابِلِهِ
بِلَا وَبِأَلَا أَسْتَطِيعُ وَبِالْمَنَى *** وَبِالْوَعْدِ حَتَّى يَسَامَ الْوَعْدَ أَمَلَهُ
وَبِالنَّظَرَةِ الْعَجَلَى وَبِالْحَوْلِ تَنْفُضِي *** أَوْاجِرُهُ لَا نَلْتَقِي وَأَوَائِلُهُ

فقال أبوها لأخيها: قم بنا فما ينبغي لنا بعد اليوم أن نمنع هذا الرجل من لقاءها فانصرفا وتركاهما.

Abū al-Faraj [al-Iṣbahānī] said: One of Buthayna's handmaids betrayed her to her father and her brother and said to the pair, "Jamīl is with her tonight." Her father and brother then went off, carrying their swords, and saw him sitting apart from her, speaking to her and complaining of his sorrow to her. Then he said to her, "Buthayna, do you see the heartfelt love and passion I feel for you? Won't you reward it?" She replied, "With what?" He said, "With what happens between lovers." She said, "Jamīl, do you want that?! By God, you were far from it with me, but surely if you come back again exposing [me] to suspicion, you won't see my face again!" He laughed and said, "By God, I only said that in order to know where you stood on the matter. If you had reacted positively to my question, I would have known that you would react positively to someone else. If I had seen you help me [to make it happen], then I would have struck you with this sword of mine, the one I have in my hand, if my soul would comply with me, or I would have left you forever. Have you not heard my poem: [ṭawīl]

Verily, I am [only] pleased with Buthayna doing something,
That, were it seen by a slanderer,
Would settle his evil thoughts
[I am pleased] by a "no," an "I cannot"
By just good wishes and expectant hope—
Hope which always disappoints the hoper!
By the swiftest glance, [even] by the year
Which begins and ends
Without us meeting

[After hearing this,] her father said to her brother, "Come on, let's go. From today onwards, we don't need to prevent this man from meeting her," and they went off, leaving the two of them alone.

Sometimes, for example in al-Ḥalabī's (d. 725/1325) compilation about love, *Manāzil al-aḥbāb wa-manāzih al-albāb* (*Lovers' Waystations and Hearts' Gardens*), Jamīl's request is rendered as *hal laki yā Buthayna an nuḥaqqiq mā yaqūl al-nās finā* (what do you think about making real what everybody says about us?), presupposing that everyone around them already thinks and says they are getting up to more than just sitting idly apart from each other.³³ In Mughulṭāy's (d. 762/1361) and al-Iṣbahānī's (d. 356/967) version, based on her horrified reaction and her mention of the suspicion (*rayba*) that might derive from it, we can safely assume he intends some kind of sexual union; this is made concrete in al-Ḥalabī's alternate recension of the story in which she says, *da' ḥubbanā makānahā fa-inna al-ḥubb idhā nukihā fasada* (leave our love where it is, for love is spoilt after sex), echoing the standard refrain we find across the medieval romantic imaginary that ventriloquizes Bedouins as concerned that penetrative sexual intercourse might in some way spoil the emotional heft of true love.³⁴

When read with an eye to Buthayna's experience of the relationship, this scene might be understood as uncomfortable for many reasons. Throughout the scene, Buthayna's social relations are precarious. Her handmaiden betrays her. Much can be made from this choice of verb, *washā*, derived from the same root as the *wāshī*, often translated as the slanderer, a stock figure in the early Arabic romantic imaginary.³⁵ Here, it is not that she slanders or lies about the pair exactly—they do meet under cover of night, after all—but that she betrays Buthayna's presumed confidence in her. Has Buthayna, thinking she is safe to confide in this woman, revealed the depth of her passion to this woman or the secret ins and outs of her meetings with Jamīl?

It was a well-worn motif in the story-cycle that her male relatives might try and trap the lovers together, or that they would be keen to enact violence to ensure patriarchal compliance; here, they lie in wait armed with swords. Her family are elsewhere depicted seeking judicial support from the local governor,³⁶ who declares that they can kill Jamīl for his affair with their daughter. In another scene we see them violently attacking one of her handmaidens to extract information about her movements.³⁷ In this story, the threat of violence from her family does not prevent her from going to Jamīl, although it is clear that her handmaiden's betrayal happens without her knowledge and she goes under cover

33. Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd al-Ḥalabī, *Manāzil al-aḥbāb wa-manāzih al-albāb*, ed. Muḥammad al-Dībājī (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2000), 208.

34. The paradigmatic story in this tradition sees al-Aṣma'ī venturing into the desert where an elderly Bedouin woman tells him that passionate love (*īshq*) is hugging, embracing, winking, and chatting. The penetrative intercourse practiced by urbanites is, to her, not *īshq* but *ṭalab walad* (seeking a baby). See Mughulṭāy, *al-Wāḍiḥ*, 85, for this and other similar stories.

35. For the most elaborate discussion of this and other stock figures in the tradition, see Ibn Ḥazm, *Ṭawq al-ḥamāma fī al-ulfāh wa-l-ullāf*, ed. Ḥasan Kāmil al-Ṣayrafī (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Tijāriyya al-Kubrā, 1964), 48–59. See also Teresa Garulo, "Raḳīb," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. J. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1954–2009).

36. This story is told twice by al-Iṣbahānī, *al-Aghānī*, 8:79, 89. The character who permits Jamīl's murder is variously named Dajāja b. Rib'ī and 'Āmir b. Rib'ī b. Dajāja.

37. Al-Iṣbahānī, *al-Aghānī*, 8:80–81.

of nightfall as protection.³⁸ Yet, as we see from her response to his request for sexual favors, she is indeed concerned not to arouse suspicion. The line hits the reader somewhat ironically within the broader context of her being observed by her father and brother, who clearly already believe something suspicious is happening between them; yet, it appears that, in Buthayna's mind at least, her own knowledge of their abstinence safeguards the relationship from such suspicions, that her supposedly (but not actually) secret relationship with Jamīl has not already exposed her to suspicion.

Perhaps more striking than her isolation from her family, the story demonstrates her precarity within her relationship with Jamīl. Placing ourselves within the chronology of the interaction and viewing it from Buthayna's perspective, there is emotional abuse at work here, however anachronistic the terminology might seem. In their initial interaction, we find a confused and hurt Buthayna, who cannot quite understand how the man with whom she had previously considered herself safe from the specter of "what happens between lovers" could suddenly want to turn their relationship sexual; so great is her repugnance from this idea that she swears never to see him again should he return to it. After having led her up one quite painful path, Jamīl suddenly claims that he was just testing her. If we believe this claim, we might wonder how the suspicion might make her feel. She must now reckon with the fact that, despite her belief in the pair's mutually committed chastity, her trust that he poses no threat to her reputation, that he was "far from" bringing suspicion onto her through a sexual relationship, he clearly did not trust the same was true of her. This in its own way may feel a betrayal, a lack of faith in her and her motives that pulls the rug out from under her.

In a way, we can read their interaction as a rhetorical game, as each character articulates their position in extremis, with the chaste Buthayna opting for total abstinence and the supposedly sexual Jamīl pushing for intercourse, rather than some lesser union, before roundly changing tack and arguing in reverse that he would kill her if she wanted to have sex. Yet, even if we do read it in this ludic manner, Jamīl is consistently leading the conversation and forcing her into the position where she might have to adopt increasingly severe positions to bat against his requests for sexual favors. It is he who insists on turning their interaction towards the sexual, in spite of their (presumable) prior mutual commitments to maintaining a nonsexual relationship. Moreover, having been duped across the entire scene, totally unaware of the betrayal of her handmaiden, and the gaze of her relatives (or the reader) on the scene, we might even suggest that Buthayna has no real reason to lie or artfully disguise her feelings here—nor does she seem to disbelieve Jamīl's sincerity, even if it jars with his prior sentiments.

As is the case with many stories that depict the pair, the ending configures how we are supposed to interpret Jamīl's intentions and actions at the start of the story. We are *meant* to believe that he is simply testing Buthayna and that the sincerity and purity of his affections, supposedly demonstrated in the heartfelt poetry, attest to his chaste intentions. This is confirmed by the father's relenting in his antagonism towards his daughter's lover:

38. On nightfall as a setting for couples' liaisons, see Ruqayya Yasmine Khan, *Self and Secrecy in Early Islam* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), 113–19.

they have been convinced that Jamīl no longer poses them any threat—and so should we. However, this reading seems naive. It is not too much of a stretch to read Jamīl here, as Bürgel has before me, as “active and cunning,” that he “made a serious proposal but sensing either the coy reserve of Buthayna [*sic*] or the presence of her guardians, or the one as well as the other, he withdrew into the ‘Udhrite guise or pose,” arguing all along that this was merely a test.³⁹ This story, like so many in the tradition, provides us with no insight into how she feels about the interaction or Jamīl’s motivations, leaving the reader open to imagine her emotional experience. If we can doubt the sincerity of his claim to be testing her, why should Buthayna not also question it?

Compounding this, when we get to the end of the anecdote, Jamīl seems no less potentially violent than her father. One misstep here and she might have been killed, given “this sword” in his hand, an unspoken threat (which is in fact retroactively spoken), to use it on her if she answered him in a way he did not want. Read moment by moment, her rejection of his advances under such conditions demonstrates a remarkable strength of purpose and agency. Read anachronistically, the story essentially dramatizes for us a woman’s refusal to give her consent to sexual union even under fraught and potentially violent circumstances and frames her adoption of abstinence as an exercise of agency within the relationship.⁴⁰ Even if we read Jamīl’s motivations as sincere—meaning, there was never any real threat of sexual intercourse—it remains a tale about sexual autonomy, the complicated ways couples might navigate their sexual desires in relationships, and the unpleasant lengths that a person may go to in order to coerce their partner into sex or, alternatively, to prove their abstinence.

The final aspect of this story that sits uncomfortably for the modern reader is the misogynistic logic that runs through Jamīl’s expression of the test, when he tells her that “if you had reacted positively to my question, I would have known that you would react positively to someone else,” a line of thought that assumes her desire is based on nothing but sexual fulfillment, which she could receive from *any* man, rather than the kind of emotional fixity and love that he supposedly expressed towards her.⁴¹

Indeed, through his poetry and the exculpatory explanation, he paradoxically shifts the prospect of any sexual threat being introduced into the relationship onto Buthayna, even as she not only defends her abstinence in the face of potential violence but also finds herself blindsided and shocked by Jamīl’s request, which actually introduced the question of sex into the relationship in the first place.

39. J. Christoff Bürgel, “Love, Lust, and Longing: Eroticism in Early Islam as Reflected in Literary Sources,” in *Society and the Sexes in Medieval Islam*, ed. Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid-Marsot, 81–117 (Malibu: Undena Publications, 1979), 93–94. “Coy” is itself a problematic choice and continues to read Buthayna—as Jamīl does—as essentially sexualized, rather than allowing for her to adopt the chaste ‘*udhrī*’ pose herself.

40. On sexual consent/violation in Islamic law, see Hina Azam, *Sexual Violation in Islamic Law: Substance, Evidence, and Procedure* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

41. On contemporaneously popular ideas of women as agents of sexual chaos afflicted by a much greater, uncontrollable lust, see Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur’an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oneworld, 2016), 9; Pernilla Myrne, *Female Sexuality in the Early Medieval Islamic World: Gender and Sex in Arabic Literature* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2020), 57–60.

The poem is a classically self-abnegating collection of verses that argue for Jamīl as an essentially masochistic lover.⁴² It is not that the threat or presence of the stock figure of the *wāshī* necessarily constrains his desires, but rather that his desires are already so minimal that the *wāshī* would be unmoved by them, despite the fact that he is imagined as an enemy to the lovers. The poem's first line is not really about Jamīl at all, however, displacing the potential threat of suspicious action onto Buthayna: it is an action that *she* might undertake which would arouse or calm the suspicions of the *wāshī*. He appears only through his own detachment, as a recipient of Buthayna's decisions and actions, as the explicitly passive party in the relationship, whose entire emotional world is wholly centered on her treatment of him—even, as in the second two lines of this poem, when that treatment is essentially rejection and distancing. Of course, the poem's claim to masochistic passivity in their interactions sits awkwardly against his active, threatening demeanor at the beginning of the prose story, pleading for sexual union with a sword in his hand. It is she who is being toyed with, not he, producing an emotional and interpersonal disjunction between the poem and the anecdotal scene in which it is quoted as evidence for his chastity.

Structural harm here intertwines with the personal as misogyny becomes a lens through which Jamīl is able to express his jealousy. It is not just the case that Jamīl imagines Buthayna through a received view of women's sexual insatiability, incapable of dedicating herself to him chastely, although that is certainly part of his accusatory tone. Rather, in this scene, the test reveals the depth of his concern that his love for her is not truly reciprocated, that he might not be the only focus of her affections. In doing so, he demonstrates a controlling streak. Even though he cannot have her, having been rejected by her family, he remains keen to ensure that she is his alone; his threat of violence is not idle, but used to reinforce the fact that he might kill her or abandon her if he believed that she would give herself to somebody else.

In a way, the implicit misogyny of his words may seem less personally cutting than its specific incarnation as jealous control in this interaction. To read this interaction to its logical end, Buthayna is being reminded that she is always at the risk of his caprice, that his love for her is possessive and demands that she not accede either to him for sex or to anybody else, for anything less than virginal abstinence becomes suspicious in Jamīl's mind, let alone to the broader community, whose concerns she earlier touted.

How is Buthayna being made to feel in the relationship? The sands of their chaste relationship shift jaggedly this way and that, as her supposed lover not only plays a trick on her, but a trick with potentially fatal consequences should she make a false move. Trying to put oneself in the mind of this character certainly requires a considerable amount of speculation, even fabrication. It is not, however, impossible to read this story and see wrapped within it a difficult conversation that plays both on the double threat of physical danger (from Jamīl) and social exclusion (through exposure). This conversation is wholly orchestrated and controlled by Jamīl at the expense of his supposed beloved, whom he is

42. A point on which I agree with al-ʿAẓm; for his broader argument concerning sadomasochism, see Ṣādiq Jalāl al-ʿAẓm, *Fī al-ḥubb wa-l-ḥubb al-ʿudhrī*, 8th ed. (Damascus: Mada Publishing Company, 2008), 90–93. Alharthi acknowledges this perspective but declares that it is “open to criticism,” on which she does not expand; Alharthi, *Body*, 17.

deliberately deceiving. Jamīl may claim a masochistic passivity in his verse, yet his actions and words in the story tell of a different love, one shaded by jealousy and pride, by his desire to control her, his suspicion regarding her sexual availability, his ease in adopting a casual misogyny in the way he thinks about her, and his willingness to go to extreme measures to remind her that she is his.

(2) The Trick

The above scene, in which Jamīl pretends to want sexual intercourse to investigate Buthayna's real intentions, is not the only time we see him deliberately trick her.⁴³

وفي أخباره للزبير: أن قوم بثينة كانوا يقولون إن جميلاً تعشّق من وليدة لنا فجاء جميل فبات معها وتركها وهي نائمة ليرى قومها أنّها هي المعشوقة لا غيرها.

In the stories about him told by al-Zubayr [b. Bakkār]: Buthayna's tribe were going around saying that Jamīl had fallen passionately in love with one of their enslaved women, so Jamīl came [one day] and slept with [Buthayna] and left her while she was [still] sleeping so that her tribe would see that she was the beloved, not another.

This story is difficult to read for many reasons, despite its brevity. Across his *dīwān*, Jamīl's poems repeatedly name Buthayna as the object of his love. In this instance, her family, presumably in order to spare her and their honor, suggest that Buthayna is not the real target of his affections, thus dispelling rumors of the affair. Jamīl, on the other hand, is not content with this situation. Chafing under the fact others may now believe his beloved to be someone other than Buthayna, he decides to reveal the truth. Somehow orchestrating a nighttime rendezvous, he sleeps with her—presumably, if we are to read this against the other stories in the story-cycle, chastely. He leaves in such a way as to attract the attention of the tribe, revealing Buthayna's identity as his beloved. No longer is the story of their affair mere rumor or conjecture, no longer can she or her family protect her reputation through deflecting Jamīl's poetry onto someone else. Even if she had agreed to the rendezvous, it can be inferred she did not realize he was planning to leave in such a conspicuous way. Jamīl has set a trap, and Buthayna is ensnared within it.

Reading the story from Buthayna's perspective, she is used as a trophy. In the same way that the love poetry of Jamīl's contemporary 'Umar b. Abī Rabī'a (d. ca. 93/712) has been read as a site of *fakhr*, documenting his romantic liaisons and the desire of upper-class Meccan women for the poet,⁴⁴ Jamīl too uses Buthayna in this scene as a way of showing off,

43. Mughulṭāy, *al-Wāḍiḥ*, 167. Al-Zubayr's (now lost) book of *akhbār* about the pair just predates Ibn Qutayba's biography; Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 2006), 124. This is not the only story cited by al-Zubayr that portrays an unfamiliar, emotionally abusive Jamīl. According to Mughulṭāy, *min aghrab mā ra'aytu mā dhakarahu al-Zubayr fī akhbār Jamīl anna Buthayna kānat bintahu* (among the strangest of that which I have seen al-Zubayr relate in his collection of stories on Jamīl is that Buthayna was his daughter), adding a further bizarre and complicated aspect to thinking through how the characters might have felt or acted within stories. Buthayna, here, becomes the (silent?) target of incestuous abuse. Mughulṭāy, *al-Wāḍiḥ*, 167.

44. Julia Bray, "A Competitive Fantasy Figure and His Female Conquests: 'Umar ibn Abī Rabī'a," in *Gender*

acting out a desire for his love to be known. Not content that his verse is being attached to some unnamed—and, in the context of the story, at least, unimportant—enslaved woman, he tricks her into revealing herself, not thinking or caring about whatever consequences she may face for that revelation. What we do not see in this story is how Buthayna may be made to feel. Her reaction is never explored in the story, and nor are the consequences that the pair might face for their liaison. At a basic level, however, she has been used, left exposed by the man she presumably trusted enough to meet by cover of darkness.

Of course, Buthayna is not the only woman who finds herself used in this story. Buthayna, a free woman, sits in an obvious power relationship with a nameless enslaved woman (*walīda*).⁴⁵ For Buthayna (or, more accurately, for her family), it appears to be a scandal that Jamīl’s poetry references her, that it was widely assumed to refer to a real infatuation, hence their attempt to make people believe her name was a screen name for his true beloved, the *walīda* whose own chastity and reputation are, for Buthayna’s family at least, entirely irrelevant, as, presumably, are her feelings about this rumor. For Jamīl, by contrast, it seems to be a deeply felt emotional and personal scandal that people would claim the object of his love is someone other than Buthayna. Despite the considerable reputational and, perhaps, personal risks to which he is exposing her (and perhaps himself), he seeks to make known that the object of his love is a free woman. Following the story’s logic, the enslaved woman becomes an unimpressive, if unsurprising, beloved, someone Buthayna’s family is happy to frame. This too is his *fakhr*, the attempt to reveal the depth of feeling and desire that Buthayna, a woman with a lot to lose, has for him, and his ability to make her risk it all to be with him.

Reading the story now, one of the reasons it feels so uncomfortable is because it seems to jar with our assumptions about how a lover ought to treat their beloved, especially a lover who wrote at such lengths about the depth of their passion. I am not the first person to make the point that this story is uncomfortable. Ṭāhā Ḥusayn was so shocked by its contents that he wrote it off as entirely inauthentic, filled with the *sukhf* (folly) and *iḥāla* (implausibility) that he saw as hallmarks of the ‘Abbāsīd era’s proliferation of stories about earlier poets:⁴⁶

أتظن أن مثل هذا الخبر يمكن أن يكون حقاً وأن رجلاً كجميل كان يحب بشينة حباً كالذي نجده في شعره يستطيع أن يعرضها لمثل هذه الفضيحة؟

Do you really think that this story can be true, that a man like Jamīl could love Buthayna in the way we find in the *dīwān* and could also expose her to such scandal?

Explicit within Ḥusayn’s argument are two central assumptions. The first, and simplest to deal with, is that the love described in the poetry ought in some way to map directly

and Status Competition in Pre-Modern Societies, ed. Martha Bayless, Jonas Liliequist, and Lewis Webb, 299–310 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 306.

45. *Walīda* is a term used to describe a person born into slavery.

46. Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, *Min tārikh al-adab al-‘arabī: al-‘aṣr al-jāhīlī wa-l-‘aṣr al-islāmī* (Beirut: Dār al-‘Ilm li-l-Malāyīn, 1970), 508–10.

onto the behavior of the character that we find in the stories, an assumption discussed in the introduction. The second point is perhaps more challenging. For Ḥusayn, Jamīl simply could not have done anything resembling *ghadr* (perfidy), because this was not part of ‘*udhrī* love, either as we in the modern period understand it or as it was understood in the past.⁴⁷ The central idea here is that the emotions that Ḥusayn reads in Jamīl’s poetry cannot be reconciled with his incarnation in this story. Ḥusayn’s point is that it seems only axiomatic to him that the ‘*udhrī* lover, who speaks at such length about his desire for his beloved, would treat her in such a way that matches his conception of that desire. However, love, or at least the theorization of love in a metaemotional sense, is historically and socially bound. Ḥusayn’s reflections on what it means to love, or how the lover should act, are fundamentally different from the early medieval conception of idealized love and the idealized lover that we see emerge both within stories of this kind, but also medieval scholarship on the topic of love.

There are two parts to this broader argument. In the first instance, the generic label ‘*udhrī* is far more capacious than Ḥusayn (or other modern and medieval readers) credits;⁴⁸ in many ways, it remains unclear what ‘*udhrī* love is in an ontological sense, beyond an array of poetic images and motifs that eventually calcified into a set of narrative situations and quasi-anthropological observations about Bedouin emotions.⁴⁹ Different iconic characters from this tradition, say Jamīl and Majnūn, are almost polar opposites in the way they navigate their emotional situation, ultimately sharing little that can be reconciled into a singular emotional experience except their experience of rejection. Where Jamīl’s love is generally characterized by his emotional and intellectual control, Majnūn is entirely imagined through his devastating lack of control, his inability to regulate his emotions, and his descent from the human and the social to the animal and the isolated.

Moreover, in the broader strokes of ‘Abbāsīd (and later) emotional thought, “the” ‘*udhrī* narrative was eventually boiled down so far into the idea that ‘*udhrīs* “die when they love.”⁵⁰ As an old woman is quoted as saying at the outset of Ibn Khallikān’s (d. 681/1282) biography of Jamīl, *anā min qawm idhā aḥabbū mātū* (I am from a tribe who dies when they love).⁵¹ Ibn Khallikān appears to quote this seemingly unrelated story to provide the reader with context over Jamīl’s tribal affiliations and, presumably, his genealogical predisposition to fall in love so strongly that it becomes fatal, a motif that does not really map onto the actual story-cycle itself.⁵² Across the chaste tradition, stories abound that witness narrators

47. As discussed by Alharthi at some length, Ḥusayn is not the only scholar to make this argument, which has proven an important—albeit problematic—framework for interpreting ‘*udhrī* love for over half a century; see Alharthi, *Body*, 15–19.

48. For a discussion of the capaciousness of the tradition, see Jocelyn Sharlet, “Chaste Lovers, Umayyad Rulers, and Abbasid Writers,” in *In the Presence of Power: Court and Performance in the Pre-Modern Middle East*, ed. Maurice A. Pomerantz and Evelyn Birge Vitz, 215–42 (New York: New York University Press, 2017).

49. A point also noted in Samuel Truman Wilder, “*Ghazal* Poetry and the Marwānids: A Study of Kuthayyir ‘Azza” (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2019), 25.

50. For a survey of this transformation, see Wilder, “*Ghazal*,” 23–25.

51. Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*, 1:366.

52. This point is controversial. Al-Ḥalabī argues that Jamīl should not really be counted as one of the lovers

stumbling upon weak and decrepit men and women, passively wasting away because of the effects of their unfulfilled love.⁵³ A character like the Jamīl we see in this story challenges that received idea of the passive figure of the ‘*udhrī* lover; here, he is plotting, caring for naught other than the revelation of the identity of his beloved and the social recognition of his love. The breadth of characters and motifs that all contributed to this diffused ‘*udhrī* tradition must make us question absolutist statements about what ‘*udhrī* love *is* or *was*. Clearly, at least some readers and storytellers saw this tale as a believable emotional possibility for an ‘*udhrī*, maybe even the arch-‘*udhrī*, lover.

In the second instance, the value system that structures how love was imagined through these stories differs from that which Ḥusayn expects. In the medieval tradition—and, following on from that, a considerable body of modern scholarship—Jamīl is routinely viewed as a kind of moral hero, lionized precisely because of how he cultivated, maintained, and lived his experience of desire, all the while constrained by an unfriendly social world that is keen to keep him away from his beloved.⁵⁴ The moral and emotional apogee of love was not theorized in this story-cycle or this tradition through interpersonal care or the ways in which the lover treats the beloved, even if that is the framework through which Ḥusayn seems to expect love and the lover to be evaluated. This is not why Jamīl has been remembered as a martyr to love or a hero of the chaste tradition. Buthayna’s welfare, much like the welfare of other beloveds—often those without social or narratorial power within stories, thinking primarily of women and youths and slaves and eunuchs, characters who found themselves frequently cast as the passive beloved, not the active lover—did not much trouble medieval storytellers or thinkers on the subject of love.⁵⁵ His action in this story may not seem kind or caring, but it is not out of step with an ethics of love or a storytelling prerogative that prioritized love as an emotion to be cultivated and the lover’s emotional struggle against his social circumstances, rather than interpersonal care.

(3) The Tryst

In the chapter on lovers’ deliverance in *Kitāb al-Faraj ba’d al-shidda* (*The Book of Deliverance following Adversity*), al-Tanūkhī (d. 384/994) includes a story about Buthayna and Jamīl in which the pair spend the night together, set this time against the backdrop of a busy and populated social world:⁵⁶

who died directly from love itself, given the circumstances of his death scene, but other authors, such as his contemporary Mughulṭāy, paint him as a martyr to love; al-Ḥalabī, *Manāzil*, 11–12.

53. Mughulṭāy includes a vast collection of stories on this theme.

54. Over half a century ago, Kinany made the same observation, noting that the focus of ‘*udhrī* love is on the cultivation of love as emotional experience, not the beloved; A. K. Kinany, *The Development of Gazal in Arabic Literature: Pre-Islamic and Early Islamic Periods* (Damascus: Syrian University Press, 1951), 276. Leder, too, notes that in the ‘*udhrī* narrative, the lover becomes progressively detached from the beloved, focusing instead on the “pure and refined stance” of chaste love itself; Leder, “‘*Udhrī*,” 170.

55. Here again, I draw on the methodological insights of Talib’s work in “Citystruck” and “Unlearning.”

56. Al-Muḥassin b. ‘Alī al-Tanūkhī, *Kitāb al-Faraj ba’d al-shidda*, ed. ‘Abbūd Shālji (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1978), 422–24. Story also cited with slight variations in al-Iṣbahānī, *al-Aghānī*, 8:84.

ذكر الهيثم بن عدي أن جماعة من بني عذرة حدثوه:
 أن جميل بثينة حضر ذات ليلة عند حباء بثينة حتى إذا صادف منها خلوة تنكر ودنا منها وكانت الليلة
 ظلماء ذات غيم ورعد وريح.
 فحذف بحصاة فأصابته بعض أترابها ففزعت وقالت: ما حذفتني في هذه الليلة إلا الجن.
 ففطنت بثينة أن جميلاً فعل ذلك فقالت لرتبها: ألا فانصري يا أختي إلى منزلك حتى تنامي فانصرفت
 وبقيت مع بثينة أم الحسين—ويروى أم الجسير—بنت منظور وكانت لا تكتمها.
 فقامت إلى جميل فأدخلته الحباء معها وتحدثوا جميعاً ثم اضطجعوا وذهب به النوم حتى أصبحوا.
 وجاءهم غلام زوجها بصبح من اللبن بعث به إليها فأراها نائمة ونظر جميلاً فمضى لوجهه حتى خبر
 سيده.
 وكانت ليلي رأت الغلام والصبح معه وقد عرفت خبر جميل بثينة فاستوقفتها كأنها تسأله عن حاله وطاولته
 الحديث وبعثت بجارية لها وقالت: حذري جميلاً وبثينة.
 فجاءت الجارية ونبهتها فلما تبينت بثينة أن الصبح قد أضاء والناس قد انتشروا ارتاعت لذلك وقالت:
 يا جميل نفسك فقد جاء غلام بعلي من اللبن فرأنا نائمين.
 فقال جميل وهو غير مكترث:

لَعَمْرُكَ مَا حَوَّفَتْنِي مِنْ مَخَافَةٍ *** بَثْنَيْنَ وَلَا حَذْرَتْنِي مَوْضِعَ الْحَذْرِ
 فَأَقْسِمُ لَا يُلْفَى لِي الْيَوْمَ عَرَّةٌ *** وَفِي الْكَفِّ مِثِّي صَارِمٌ قَاطِعٌ ذَكَرَ

فأقسمت عليه أن يلقي نفسه تحت النضد وقالت: إنما أسألك خوفاً على نفسي من الفضيحة لا خوفاً
 عليك ففعل ذلك ونامت وأضجعت أم الحسين إلى جانبها وذهبت خادم ليلي إليها فأخبرتها الخبر فتركت
 العبد يمضي إلى سيده فمضى والصبح معه وقال له: إني رأيت بثينة مضطجعة وجميل إلى جنبها.
 فجاء زوجها إلى أخيها وأبيها فعرفهما الخبر وجاءوا بأجمعهم إلى بثينة وهي نائمة فكشفوا عنها الثوب
 فرأوا أم الحسين إلى جانبها نائمة.
 فخجل زوجها وسب عبده وقالت ليلي لأبيها وأخيها فبحكما الله في كل يوم تفضحان المرأة في فنائكما
 ويلكما هذا لا يجوز.
 فقالا: إنما فعل هذا زوجها.
 فقالت: قبحه الله وإياكما فجعلنا يسبان زوجها وانصرفوا.
 وأقام جميل تحت النضد إلى الليل ثم ودعها وانصرف.

Al-Haytham b. ‘Adī related that a group of people from the Banū ‘Udhra told him:
 One night, Jamīl Buthayna was hanging around outside Buthayna’s tent so that he
 might bump into her by chance, having disguised himself, and approach her. It was a
 dark night, filled with clouds and thunder and wind.
 He threw a stone and it struck one of her companions. She was spooked and said, “On
 a night like tonight, it must be a jinn who has struck me.”
 Buthayna intuited that Jamīl had done it and said to her friend, “In that case, my sister,
 go back to your tent and go to sleep!” So, she left, whilst Umm al-Ḥusayn—some say her
 name is Umm al-Jusayr—bt. Manzūr, from whom she had no secrets, remained.
 [Buthayna] went over to Jamīl and invited him into her tent with her and they all
 chattered and went to bed until they woke up.
 [Later,] one of her husband’s lads came to her tent with her morning draught of milk
 that he [the husband] had sent to her. The lad saw her sleeping and saw Jamīl so he left

that instant in order to tell the news to his master.

Laylā⁵⁷ had seen all of this happen and knew the whole story about Jamīl [and] Buthayna, so she stopped [the lad] as if she was asking him about how he was getting on, and took a long time in talking to him. She sent for her own maidservant and said to her, “Go and warn Jamīl and Buthayna.”

So, the maidservant came [to them] and warned [Buthayna]. When Buthayna realized that dawn had risen and people were going about, she became terrified.

She said, “Jamīl! My husband’s lad came with the milk and saw us sleeping!”

Jamīl, unbothered, said: [*tawīl*]

By your life, you have not made me afraid
of something I might face, nor made me cautious

I swear today, I will face no surprises

In my hand, I wield a firm, decisive, and sharp [weapon]⁵⁸

She entreated him to fling himself under the bed, saying, “I am asking you [to do this] out of fear for myself from the scandal, not out of fear for you!” So, he did what she asked, and she went back to sleep, with Umm al-Ḥusayn lying next to her. Laylā’s servant left and told her the story, so [Laylā] allowed the servant [Buthayna’s husband’s lad] to go to his master. He left, carrying the morning draught still and said to him [the master], “I saw Buthayna lying down—and Jamīl was next to her!”

Her husband came to her brother and father and told them the story, and they all went off to Buthayna’s tent, whilst she was asleep. They ripped the quilt off her and saw Umm al-Ḥusayn lying next to her asleep.

The husband became embarrassed and scolded his servant. Laylā said to [Buthayna’s] father and brother, “Then May God denounce [your actions] as shameful! Every day you go about bringing scandal upon the free women in this campsite—shame on you! This cannot go on!”

The two of them said, “But her husband is the one who did it!”

She said, “May God denounce him—and the two of you!” At this point, they began to scold the husband and all of them left.

Jamīl remained under her bed until nighttime, at which point he said goodbye to her, and left.

57. Shālji notes that Laylā, Umm al-Ḥusayn, and a woman called Nujayyā were all maternal cousins of Buthayna’s, based on al-Iṣbahānī’s biography.

58. The line, when read chastely, seems to refer to a cutting (*qāṭi*⁵) and sharp (*ṣārim*) object, most easily interpreted as a sword. The final term *dhakar*, when applied to a metal object like a sword, can mean that it is made of a kind of swirly Damascus steel. When this hemistich is understood with an eye for double entendre, the word *dhakar* (also: male[ness], penis) joined to *ṣārim* and *qāṭi*⁵, here perhaps best interpreted as stern/rigorous and decisive/definite, can be read as a coy reference to his firm, resolute, and erect penis, and, by extension, his virility and masculinity. The reference to his phallic virility conjures up the image of a kind of medieval “dick-swinging” contest; his *ṣārim*/sharp and *qāṭi*⁵/cutting sword makes us think simultaneously of his *ṣārim*/rigorous and *qāṭi*⁵/decisive virility, realized through his (sword-shaped, when “firm”!) *dhakar*/penis.

Khan has described the story as one which depicts a “competition” in which the men are shown actively seeking to uncover an illicit or potentially illicit love affair, whilst the women are seen seeking to cover it up, a competition which “galvanizes same-sex loyalties.”⁵⁹ The reliance of Buthayna on her female friends is obvious from the beginning of the story. When Jamīl emerges into the scene, Umm al-Ḥusayn remains with the pair and the group chatter throughout the evening; the verb here is *taḥaddathū* in the plural, not *taḥaddathā* in the dual, and the pair are never totally alone. Of course, her presence does perform a narrative function, in that Umm al-Ḥusayn is close at hand to take the place of Jamīl when called upon. More than that, however, that she remains with the couple provides a chaperone, shielding the pair from any prurient suspicions that *we as readers* may bring to their relationship. Laylā, likewise, is relied upon throughout the scene. Buthayna has clearly confided in her—“Laylā...knew the whole story”—and it is only through her actions that she could buy enough time so that Jamīl and Buthayna could be warned and reconfigure the bedroom scene, hiding Jamīl from sight.

Beyond the logistical, there is also a vague and inconsistent sense of the women operating here through a consciousness of their own gendered relation to desire and social power.⁶⁰ At the end of the scene, we witness Laylā caustically attack the men of the tribe for bringing Buthayna under suspicion. Every day, she says, Buthayna’s brother and father (a synecdoche for the men of the tribe, perhaps) go about bringing scandal upon free women (*al-marʿa*) in the campsite,⁶¹ surveilling the women’s nighttime activities and suspecting them of affairs, barging into their tents and haranguing them. Women (and, more specifically, this woman) are constantly being placed under suspicion by the men in their(/her) life, who appear eager to catch the lovers in the act. For Laylā, things need to change (“This cannot go on!”); it seems that the culture of suspicion axiomatically leads not only to the secrecy and concealment that the characters practice, as well as the women’s banding together to ensure Buthayna’s safety, but also to the kind of terror expressed by Buthayna earlier in the story. Ironically, the narrative itself only reconfirms the men’s grounds for suspicion, chipping away at the seriousness of Laylā’s castigation of the embarrassed male characters: Buthayna really is spending the night with Jamīl.

However, Laylā’s caustic criticism of the men, whilst comic and ironic for the reader, can—and should—be read too as an expression of exhaustion at the constant suspicion and control the women are placed under, of frustration at the women’s inability to pursue their own emotional lives or desires, of chafing under patriarchal sexual and emotional control. Whilst this individual event is a scene of deliverance, as we expect from al-Tanūkhī’s compilation, the audience is left to wonder what kind of future Buthayna has, caught

59. Khan, *Self*, 116.

60. Early on, Buthayna sends away one of her companions after she misinterprets Jamīl’s throwing the stone as the sound of the jinn; clearly, Buthayna does not wish for this companion to be privy to her nighttime tryst with her lover and, much as we saw in the first story’s depiction of her handmaiden’s betrayal, she cannot count on every woman in the tribe not to side with her male relatives. This is not necessarily a simple men-against-women story despite Laylā’s closing defense of the women’s chastity or Khan’s reading.

61. I have translated the singular here as plural, but one could argue Laylā is referring to “the woman,” meaning Buthayna.

between him and her family. Is this what her life will look like from now on? The women's machinations, the ease with which each female character divines their role in the extended double intrigue, suggests they have this operation down to a tee, or at least that they do not find it shocking or challenging to deceive the menfolk. We are left to assume that she will be placed into a precarious situation like this again, and will require renewed deliverance, because at no point does the culture or ethos of love through which she experiences the relationship change, in spite of Laylā's criticism or the menfolk's embarrassment at their actions—or Jamīl's experience of being caught.

Indeed, turning away from outside characters and towards Jamīl, it is not as if the lovers' relationship is depicted without its emotional complications. The story begins with an uninvited Jamīl interloping into the campsite when Buthayna is not alone and trying to get her attention, a risky endeavor, one which has all the potential to expose them both from the outset. More problematically, Jamīl's reaction to the threat of revelation bespeaks a vastly different perspective regarding how the pair navigate the relationship. When Buthayna is terrified (*irtā'at*) of the consequences revelation might have, Jamīl remains "unbothered" (*ghayr muktarith*) by it.

His immediate response to the threat of exposure, and the potential for violence or death that comes with it, is grandstanding. His couplet is focused on how *he* feels regarding the situation, on his bravery and steadfastness in the face of potential threats to his love affair, the (imagined?) weapon in his hand with which he is ready to fight against them. In many ways, the poetry has a cold, almost critical tone to it in this context, as if he is upbraiding her for her fear, for her inability to make him feel what she is feeling ("you have not made me afraid..."), perhaps even for not believing in his capacity to fight back and consequently questioning his masculinity vis-à-vis the men of the tribe, hence the weapon supposedly in his hand. He does not consider the potential consequences *she* may face for his interloping into the encampment, nor how she might feel about the threat of revelation. It is only his (lack of) fear and resolution that count.

Buthayna, meanwhile, is clear-eyed about the dangers of the situation. One could make the case that her concern that he hide himself on account of the consequences *she* may face—"I am asking you [to do this] out of fear for myself from the scandal, not out of fear for you!"—reflects a similarly self-centered attitude as his grandstanding. Yet the stakes between the two outcomes are vastly different in terms of how they threaten the other. Buthayna's instinct to hide Jamīl may diminish his claim to bravery in the face of revelation, but it simultaneously saves him from having to deal with violence at the hands of her male relatives, allowing the relationship to continue and the pair to avoid some unpleasant outcome. By imploring him to think about her, she shifts the conversation away from his urge to stand bravely in the face of these men's prying eyes, and onto her fear for herself. In doing so, we cannot discount the idea that she is choosing her words carefully in order not to bruise his ego or paradoxically egg him on further to confront the situation by suggesting she really is afraid for him; already in his poetry he is imagining fighting against the three men.

We are left to wonder what might have happened had she not done so and had he gone through with his fearless attitude. Certainly, we can imagine the trio would have treated Jamīl violently, as imagined across the story-cycle. Yet, what might have happened to her? She refers to the amorphous and ill-defined threat of *faḍīḥa*, a term which crops up repeatedly in contemporary love literature, standing in as a shorthand for the seemingly severe social consequences and stigma that women might face on account of illicit affairs being revealed. Her place within the community and, perhaps, her literal future would have been placed in grave danger.

In this moment, we see Buthayna caught between two opposing masculinist visions that offer little concern for her experience or feelings. Her male relatives are set on exposing her affair, keen to bring scandal upon her and shame her for her actions; their familial bond is constructed in this story through the prism of a precarious patriarchal control. At no point do her family show any concern for her feelings regarding either her match with Jamīl or her husband, a standard motif across the contemporary narrative tradition that leads to the obvious reading of women as victims of circumstance in these tales.⁶² Meanwhile, Jamīl hardly offers a more caring alternative vision, a desire to fight for his love without thinking through the future impact such an outcome might have for his beloved, or the reasons for her trepidation, an inability to empathize with the depth of her concerns, as we see in his final hemistich, which demonstrates a fundamental lack of concern either for her well-being or for the kind of precarity this relationship forces her into.

(4) The Ruse

One of the most well-known stories about the pair features their use of Kuthayyir as a mediator and envoy, which allows them to organize a ruse under the nose of her father. This story is remarkably unstable with multiple different variations of the same scene, ranging from variants with minor lexical changes to entirely different storylines.⁶³ In his biography of Jamīl, Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) cites two different versions of the story, one of which is below, and the other involves a complex double ruse, in which both Jamīl and Kuthayyir organize meetings for their respective beloveds.⁶⁴ Below, I translate Ibn Qutayba's short recension, Ibn Khallikān's slightly longer variant, and some of the central additions/ variations that we find in al-Ṣbahānī's version. The variations between them open up gaps that allow us to question and complicate the ways in which the relationship is presented.

62. "Trapped between [cultural] norms and the love she feels"; Khan, *Bedouin*, 180.

63. Perhaps the most striking variant is al-Ḥalabī, *Manāzil*, 126–27, which barely resembles the versions here at all.

64. For the longer version, see Ibn Qutayba, *al-Shī'r*, 436–38 (immediately following the short version). This was later taken up and extended in [Pseudo-]Ibn al-Jawzī, *Akḥbār al-nisā'*, ed. Barakāt Yūsuf Habbūd (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-ʿAṣriyya, 2023), 174–66.

[A] Ibn Qutayba's short recension:⁶⁵

وقال كثير: قال لي جميل: خذ لي موعداً من بئينة! قلت له: هل بينك وبينها علامة؟ فقال لي: عهدي
بها وهم بوادي الدوم يرحضون ثيابهم فأتيتهم فأجد أباهما قاعداً بالفناء فسلمت فرد وحادثته ساعة حتى
استنشدني فأنشدته:

وَقُلْتُ لَهَا يَا عَزَّ أَرْسَلَ صَاحِبِي *** عَلَى نَأْيِ دَارِ وَالرَّسُولُ مُوَكَّلُ
بَأَنْ جَعَلِي بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَكَ مَوْعِداً *** وَأَنْ تَأْمُرِنِي بِالَّذِي فِيهِ أَفْعَلُ
وَأَخِرُ عَهْدٍ مِنْكَ يَوْمَ لَقَيْتَنِي *** بِأَسْفَلِ وَادِي الدَّوْمِ وَالتَّوْبُ يُغْسَلُ

فضربت بئينة جانب الخدر وقالت اخساً! فقال لها أبوها مهيم يا بئينة؟ كلب يأتينا إذا نوم الناس من
وراء هذه الراية قال: فأتيت جميلاً فأخبرته أنها واعدته وراء الراية إذا نوم الناس.

Kuthayyir said: Jamīl said to me: “Get me a meeting with Buthayna!”

[I said,] “Do you have some kind of signal [that she would recognize]?”

[Jamīl said,] “Last time I met her, they were all down at Wādī al-Dawm, washing their
clothes.”

I went to them, and found her father sitting in the yard in front of their campsite, so I
greeted him and he returned the greeting. I spoke to him for a while until he asked me
to recite some poetry, upon which point I sang: [ṭawīl]

I said to her, ‘Azza,⁶⁶ my friend has set off

To a distant land, entrusted with a message

Please organize a rendezvous with me

And tell me what to do!

The last time we met, we were

At the bottom of Wādī al-Dawm

And clothes were being washed

She struck the side of her garment and said, “Scram!”

Her father asked her, “What is wrong, Buthayna?”

“[There is] a dog [who keeps] coming to us from behind this hill when everyone is
asleep.”

I went to Jamīl and told him that she had promised to meet him behind the hill, when
everyone was asleep.

65. Ibn Qutayba, *al-Shi‘r*, 435–36. In al-Kharā‘iṭī’s (d. 327/938) version—which is similar to [A]—Jamīl complains to Kuthayyir that he has not seen Buthayna for an entire year, a call back, perhaps, to the poem we saw in the first section, and Kuthayyir offers to go and organize the meeting with her on account of that. The rest of the story follows almost exactly as here, except that Buthayna words her response as *kalb lā yazāl yaṭinā min warā’ hādihā al-jabal bi-l-layl wa-inṣāf al-nahār*. Muḥammad b. Ja‘far al-Kharā‘iṭī, *I‘tilāl al-qulūb fī akhbār al-‘ushshāq wa-l-muḥibbīn*, ed. Gharīd Shaykh (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2001), 262.

66. The entire ruse scene turns on Kuthayyir addressing his poem to his beloved ‘Azza, thereby concealing the latent identity of the intended beloved. Across the tradition, ‘Azza and Buthayna have a complicated relationship. In the longer version in *Akhbār al-nisā’*, Buthayna appears pleased by Kuthayyir embarrassing ‘Azza by declaiming some scandalous poetry to her in front of her husband. Elsewhere, ‘Azza overhears Kuthayyir declare that all his poetry is really directed at Buthayna and he simply puts her name to it. As al-Ḥalabī says, that is a story which *ṭa‘ana fī ṣiḥḥat ‘ishqihī* (pierces through the truth of his love); al-Ḥalabī, *Manāzil*, 160.

[B] Ibn Khallikān's variant:⁶⁷

تحدث كثير قال: لقيني مرة جميل فقال لي: من أين أقبلت؟ قلت: من عند أبي الحبيبة، أعني بثينة؛ فقال: وإلى أين تمضي؟ قلت إلى الحبيبة، أعني عزة؛ فقال: لا بدّ من أن ترجعَ عودك علي بدئك فتستجدي لي موعداً من بثينة، فقلت: عهدي بها الساعة وأنا أستحيي من أن أرجع: فقال: لا بد من ذلك. فقال له: فمتى عهديك ببثينة؟ فقال: في أول الصيد وقد وقعت سحابة بأسفل وادي الدوم فخرجت ومعها جارية تغسل ثيابها، فلما أبصرتني أنكرتني، فضربت يديها إلى ثوب في الماء فالتحفت به وعرفتني الجارية فأعادت الثوب في الماء وتحدثنا حتى غابت الشمس، وسألت الموعد فقالت: أهلي سائرون؛ وما وجدت أحداً آمنه فأرسله إليها. فقال له كثير: فهل لك في أن آتي الحى فأنزع بأبيات من شعر أذكر فيها هذه العلامات إن لم أقدر علي الخلوة بها؟ فقال: ذلك الصواب؛ فرسله إليها: فقال له: انظري. ثم خرج كثير حتى أناخ بهم؛ فقال له أبوها: ما ردك؟ ثلاثة أبيات عرضت لي فأحببت لي أن أعرضها عليك؛ فقال: هاتهما؛ فقال كثير: فأنشدتها وبثينة تسمع:

فَقُلْتُ هَا يَا عَزُّ أَرْسَلُ صَاحِبِي *** إِلَيْكَ رَسُولًا وَالْمَوْكَلُ مَرْسِلُ
بَأَنْ تَجْعَلِي بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَكَ مَوْعِدًا *** وَأَنْ تَأْمُرِي مَا الَّذِي فِيهِ أَفْعَلُ
وَأَخْرُ عَهْدِي مِنْكَ يَوْمَ لَقَيْتَنِي *** بِأَسْفَلِ وَادِي الدَّوْمِ وَالثُّوبُ يُغْسَلُ

قال: فضربت بثينة جانب خدرها وقالت: احسأ! احسأ! فقال أبوها: مهيم يا بثينة؟ قالت: كلب يأيننا إذا نوم الناس من وراء الرابية! ثم قالت للجارية: ابغينا من الدومات حطباً لنذبح لكثير شاة ونشويها له، فقال كثير: أنا أعجل من ذلك. فراح إلى جميل فأخبره فقال له جميل: الموعد الدومات. وخرجت بثينة وصواحبها إلى الدومات وجاء جميل وكثير إليهن فما برحوا حتى برق الصبح فكان كثير يقول: ما رأيت مجلساً قط أحسن من ذلك المجلس ولا مثل علم أحدهما بضمير الآخر ما أدري أيهما كان أفهم.

Kuthayyir said: Once, I bumped into Jamīl and he said to me, “Where are you coming from?”

I said, “From the beloved’s father’s”—meaning Buthayna.

He asked, “Where are you heading?”

I replied, “To the beloved’s”—this time he meant ‘Azza.

At this, he said, “You’ll have to go back from whence you came, and implore Buthayna to meet with me.”

I told him, “I’ve only just left Buthayna and I’d be embarrassed to go back.”

He said, “You must.”

So, I asked him, “When did you meet her?”

He said, “It was at the beginning of the hunting season; a cloud had fallen into the lowest part of Wādī al-Dawm, and she had gone out with a young woman to wash her clothes. When she saw me, she did not know me, so she grabbed her robe from the water and wrapped it around herself. The other young woman, however, did know me, so she put the robe back in the water, and we chatted the night away until sundown. I asked her when we might meet again, and she said, ‘My people are leaving [soon].’ So far, I haven’t found anyone that I trust to send word to her.”

Kuthayyir replied, “Do you want me to go to her neighborhood and, assuming we don’t

67. Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt*, 1:368–69.

get a moment alone together, tell her this hint disguised in lines of poetry?”
He said, “That’s it!” So, he sent him to her and said to him, “Wait for me.” Then, Kuthayyir left, journeying until he set his camel down where Buthayna’s clan had set up camp. Her father said to him, “What have you come back for?”
[I said,] “Three lines of poetry came to me and I wanted to share them with you.”
He said, “Go on then.” So, I recited to him as Buthayna was listening:

I said to her, ‘Azz[a], I send my friend
To you, charged with a message:
Please organize a rendezvous with me
 And tell me what to do!
The last time we met, we were
 At the bottom of Wādī al-Dawn
 And clothes were being washed

He [Kuthayyir—as narrator] said, “Buthayna struck the side of her garment and said, ‘Scram!’”
Her father asked her, “What’s wrong, Buthayna?”
She said, “[There is] a dog [who] comes to us from behind a hill when everyone has gone to sleep!” Then, she said to her friend, “Get us firewood down by the palm trees so that we can slaughter a sheep for Kuthayyir and grill it for him.”
At that, Kuthayyir said, “I am in too great a hurry for that!” He rode off to Jamīl and told him what happened, whereupon Jamīl said to him, “The meeting will be at the palms.” Buthayna went down with her companions to the palm trees and Jamīl and Kuthayyir came to them. They remained there until the dawn broke. Kuthayyir used to say: “I have never seen a better gathering than that, nor anything like the knowledge each of them had about the innermost feelings of the other; I do not know which of them was more understanding [of the other]!”

[C] al-Iṣbahānī’s variant:⁶⁸

In al-Iṣbahānī’s slightly elongated version of this story, we see a further addition to the story. After Kuthayyir leaves, Buthayna becomes a kind of secondary narrator and supposedly says to Laylā, Umm al-Ḥusayn, and Nujayyā,⁶⁹ women with whom she *anisat wa-aṭma’annat bihinna* (was intimate friends, could talk freely), *innī qad ra’aytu fī naḥw nashīd Kuthayyir anna Jamīl^{an} ma’ahu* (I could see in the grammar of Kuthayyir’s song that Jamīl was with him [i.e., I could tell from the wording of the poem that it was about Jamīl]). The story then returns to Kuthayyir as primary narrator and the ending is as above.

68. Al-Iṣbahānī, *al-Aghānī*, 8:78. The rest of the story is almost entirely as in [B], and the variants are not worth writing out in full.

69. Her faithful cousins whom we met previously in al-Tanūkhī’s tale. See n. 57.

There are significant differences between these three variants, in particular as regards our access to Buthayna's perspective and the framing of the relationship, differences which allow us to trouble Kuthayyir's sentimental epilogue. In his brief discussion of [C], and the Buthayna found across the *Aghānī*, Serrano describes her as "willing to go to great, conniving lengths to slip past the surveillance of her father...if the Buthayna of the stories in *Kitāb al-Aghānī* is an invention, her creator imagined a willful, clever, headstrong young woman—in fact, a liar and a trickstress—for whom there is no evidence in the poetry."⁷⁰ Glossing over the unsympathetic and critical terminology (conniving, liar, trickstress) Serrano uses to describe Buthayna, the point stands: the Buthayna we see in al-Ṣbahānī's version, acknowledging that she was aware of what Kuthayyir was talking about the whole time, and playing along, is far less equivocal in her participation in the ruse than the Buthayna we meet in [A]. In [C], many of the open-ended questions we might bring to [A/B] are simplified by the polyphonic narration of the tale. The inclusion of Buthayna's private conversation with her friends—surely unknowable to the story's primary narrator and supposed transmitter, Kuthayyir—makes clear to the reader that her participation in the ruse was no accident. Even without access to Buthayna's conversation with her friends in [B], we, as Kuthayyir and/or Jamīl does, are supposed to read Buthayna as understanding the point of the poetry, given the syntactic concordance of the *dawamāt* (palm trees) with Wādī al-Dawm, through which she seems keen to make clear her participation in the ruse.

Her response in [A] is far less emotionally clear-cut, with no real confirmation of assent, even if it is clear given the prior discussion of a "signal" that she understands what is meant in the poetry. There is no syntactic concordance here, no conversation with friends. After Kuthayyir's recitation of the poem, Buthayna immediately screams, "Scram!" We are meant to read this as a quick-thinking deflection tactic, a way to divert her father's attention (*mahiyam?*) to her rather than the only barely coded poem Kuthayyir declaimed. Yet, it is striking that she does not immediately explain her outburst, which according to Kuthayyir's interpretation gives away the location of the meeting; what would have happened next if her father had not drawn out the reason for her outburst, which seems so jarring to him in this social context? Is there scope for reading this initial outburst not as a deflection tactic, but literally, as Buthayna shooing Kuthayyir away? Thereafter, in all variants, she refers to a (potentially imaginary) dog, whom she claims to be shooing. This dog, coming into the campsite from behind a hill in the dead of night, bears a striking resemblance to Jamīl and the threat he poses to her. Jamīl becomes a fox in the henhouse, intruding, albeit through an intermediary, out of nowhere or, as she puts it, from behind a hill, into her home, when she and her family have their guard down. Her reaction in [A], without the final epilogue or the syntactic concordance between words in [B/C], can be read as one of exasperation and frustration as easily as it can a coded message implying assent to a rendezvous.

Kuthayyir's analysis of the pair's relationship in the sentimental epilogue to [B] and

70. Richard Serrano, "Making Love through Scholarship in Jamīl Buthayna," in *The Beloved in Middle Eastern Literatures: The Culture of Love and Languishing*, ed. Alireza Korangy, Hanadi Al-Samman, and Michael C. Beard, 155–76 (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 169. This is not an unusual way to view the beloved in similar stories. Khan has elsewhere analyzed the 'Abbāsīd view of Laylā as an "adulteress"; *Bedouin*, 174–76.

[C] streamlines the hermeneutic possibilities open to the reader of this story that emerge from my reading of [A]. The emotional progression across the story is not as transparent as Kuthayyir's (or Serrano's) interpretation implies, however; whilst he ends [B] and [C] by describing the excellence of the meeting and the pair's affinity, the beginning of both variants is far more open-ended. Even in [C], the Buthayna we see at the end of the story, confidently able to parse the code latent within Kuthayyir's poem and presumably keen to go to the meeting, appears to be far more in tune with the lover than the Buthayna we meet at the beginning of the story.

Her attitude throughout the opening half of [B/C] is hardly encouraging to the lover, nor does each character seem to be deeply in tune with the innermost feelings of the other. When they first meet, she does not know him, or does not recognize him, and immediately covers up; it is only when her companion recognizes him that the robe is lowered and put back into the water for washing. The story is internally unclear on whether this is their first meeting; reading it against the story-cycle and legendary biography, then it is not. It seems surprising, then, that Buthayna should hardly recognize him. Her lack of recognition must surely make us question the men's overarching interpretation of the relationship. Is this really a relationship between two people who love *each other* dearly, or are they taking Buthayna's feelings for granted? Is Jamīl not turned into the figure of a stalker, accosting his beloved who does not even really seem to know him? Reading the beginning of the story skeptically (or without Kuthayyir's final analysis of the pair's relationship in [A]), Buthayna's feelings towards Jamīl seem far cooler and more ambivalent than he makes out, detached almost from the relationship.

When Jamīl asks if they can meet again, Buthayna is caught at a precipice. What might happen if she rejects him? Neither violence nor defamation are unheard of within this story-cycle, as we have seen. Her simple, two-word answer, *ahlī sā'irūn* (my people are leaving [soon]), deflects the rejection onto her family and away from her. Her speech is short, unemotional. She neither eagerly awaits another meeting, nor does she oppose the idea out of hand; the door is left open for him to imagine he has a chance to be with her, but practical necessities, rather than emotions or desire, stand in his way. Yet, the lack of emotion and encouragement found within this statement may well reflect a Buthayna who is choosing her words carefully, trying to avoid hurting Jamīl's feelings through outright and personal rejection; given what comes next, Buthayna's family are not in such a rush to leave that Jamīl does not have time to send her a missive and try to arrange a meeting.

Contrastingly, the beginning of [A] simplifies some of the emotional complications in [B/C]. There is no prior conversation between Jamīl and Buthayna, no rejection, no lack of recognition, merely the reference to the last time they saw each other; in Ibn Qutayba's wording, Jamīl sees them (*-hum*) in the masculine/generic plural, changing the demographic of the initial meeting scene from one in which he confronts the two women at the lake to one in which he presumably sees her amongst a group of others, although it is unclear if they interact.⁷¹ Yet that simplification ought only make the reader even more skeptical. Without access to their prior meeting, we are left to wonder how she feels about him, how

71. In al-Kharā'itī's version, Jamīl sees her here alone.

he interacted with her, what kind of things they said to each other, if at all. Clearly, in what follows, she recognizes that it is Jamīl who is being spoken about, but, without any of the conclusion, the story leaves the reader without any closure regarding what comes next. Does Buthayna go to the meeting? Did Kuthayyir interpret her words correctly, or does he simply assume her intent and rush off to tell Jamīl, interpreting for her (and for us readers) what she means by her description of this interloping dog?

The problems that are brought up by my reading of [A] serve to complicate the received image of Buthayna that is constructed in, say, Serrano's reading of [C] or Dāwūd al-Anṭākī's sixteenth-century assessment that Buthayna used to egg Jamīl on, providing him little clues to aid him in his heroic pursuit of her.⁷² Anecdote variants sit in a complicated relationship with each other and their differences remind us that we cannot take Buthayna's perspective or experience for granted—and nor should we read variants through each other. When we impose the rather sweet interactions that can easily be read in [B] and [C], demonstrating two people whose desires for further interaction are stymied by the world around them, onto [A], we might lose sight of the very real possibility that her reaction is a frustrated rejection, in spite of how Kuthayyir understands it. Rather than defining Buthayna's experience as singular, we must be prepared as readers in the modern day to see the multiple and uneven nature of the pair's interactions, disrupting the hegemonic interpretation of the relationship set by Kuthayyir here.

Conclusion

It would be misleading to suggest that Buthayna is constantly and silently manipulated by her lover. Indeed, in the four stories we have seen here, she has at various times stood up for herself and maintained her commitment to chastity, questioned his actions, defended herself against her family, and participated in lovers' meetings. In the wider tradition, Buthayna is frequently depicted standing up for herself. In one anecdote, she makes a comedic quip at the expense of the caliph 'Abd al-Malik and, in another, she tells 'Umar b. Abī Rabī'a that *lā akūn min nisā'ika al-lātī yaz'umna an qad qatalahunna al-wajd bika* (I am not one of your women who claim that passion for you killed them).⁷³ Jamīl too is not immune from her quips, although this is rarer. As al-Iṣbahānī reports:⁷⁴

لقي جميل بثينة بعد تهاجر كان بينهما طالت مدته، فتعابها طويلاً فقالت له: ويحك يا جميل! أتزعم أنك
تحواني وأنت الذي تقول:

رَمَى اللهُ فِي عَيْنِي بُثَيْنَةَ بِالْقَدَى *** وَفِي الْعُرِّ مِنْ أَنْبَاهِهَا بِالْقَوَادِحِ

فأطرق طويلاً يبكي، ثم قال: بل أنا القائل:

أَلَا لَيْتَنِي أَعْمَى أَصَمَّ تَقُودِنِي *** بُثَيْنَةُ لَا يُخْفِي عَلَيَّ كَلَامُهَا

فقالت له: ويحك! ما حملك على هذه المنى؟ أوليس في سعة العافية ما كفانا جميعاً؟

72. Al-Anṭākī, *Tazyīn*, 1:111.

73. Al-Iṣbahānī, *al-Aghānī*, 8:89, 104–5.

74. Al-Iṣbahānī, *al-Aghānī*, 8:76.

She said to him, “Woe unto you, Jamīl! You claim you love me, but you are the one who said: [*ṭawīl*]

May God put specks in Buthayna’s eyes
And blacken her brilliant teeth!”

He bowed his head for a long time, weeping, and then said, “But I am also the speaker of:

Oh, if only I were blind and deaf,
Buthayna [could] lead me and no word [would] be hidden from me”

She said to him, “Woe unto you! What has brought you to wish for this? Is there not enough health for the both of us?”

Jamīl’s poetry can sting—and she will let him know it, even bringing him to bow his head in shame (*aṭraqa ṭawīl^{an}*) and to tears (*yabkī*). Her argument is self-explanatory: he cannot possibly love her if he wishes for her teeth to be blackened, an argument that in itself is not far from Ḥusayn’s reading of the second anecdote discussed above. Jamīl returns to a self-abnegatory stance in his response, quoting a poem that adopts the same masochistic pose that we saw in the first anecdote; this poem effectively argues that his greatest wish is to lose control of his corporeal sensorium in favor of being led by Buthayna, giving up total control of his self to her. Whereas in the first anecdote we did not see Buthayna’s response to his poetic adoption of this self-denialism, here she seems perturbed by his attitude, made uncomfortable by his extravagant sentiments that bespeak his total and overwhelming desire for her, placing a significant emotional burden on her shoulders. Here, we see an anecdote grapple with the instability of these characters’ affections and the ways in which their words and actions might hurt the other. What does it really mean for a character to be loved by a man who sings in one breath of his desire for her to experience hurt but in another of his desire to give himself over to her control completely?

That she occasionally gets a dig in at Jamīl’s expense—and, even here, the dig is hardly all that cutting, in spite of the cruelty she perceives in Jamīl’s words—does not change the fact that across the tradition, it is—generally speaking—his perspective that is the central node of the anecdote, his struggles in love, his emotional problems. Rarely do we see real concern given to Buthayna’s feelings or her experience of his love.

In this article, the only story to give actual consideration to Buthayna’s experience was the third one, which pits her terror against Jamīl’s supposed bravery, as he inserts himself into her tent and relies on her friends’ help to ensure the smooth progression of their (unplanned) nighttime rendezvous. Ordinarily, we find Buthayna’s thoughts and feelings narrated for her, as Kuthayyir does twice in the final story. In a way, she is a kind of black box onto which storytellers could hook all sorts of ideas and emotions. Her feelings about Jamīl’s various adventures or their interactions are rarely explored at all; authors and anecdotists seem to take for granted that she too is keen to continue the affair, even if at times, as I suggested above in my analysis of these tales, that may seem more equivocal or ambiguous.

This article has focused on exploring the ways in which Jamīl's behavior towards his beloved might be read as troubling; how his tricks, tests, and deceptions might make us reevaluate the medieval tradition's lionization of this man as a moral hero. Here, I have taken a specific approach in reading these stories. Others can—and should continue to—read these stories and characters with different perspectives in mind; the Jamīl-Buthayna legend is far too vast for one article to cover every aspect of it, or even to cover every story contained within it. In my analysis of these four scenes, I have analyzed Jamīl as both a cunning trickster (the first two) and a menacing interloper (the second two), placing Buthayna in awkward situations, caring little for her feelings or experiences, or her safety within her familial relationships. Yet, there are other, more romantic ways to imagine their relationship and his various schemes to spend time with her, as have been taken up by writers in both the medieval and modern worlds.

Love changes over time, as do our expectations of what love means and how it inheres in relationships. Certainly, the medieval tradition's elevation of these stories to a moral apogee did not foreground interpersonal care as its primary ethics of love, instead emphasizing the importance of Jamīl's cultivation of love in the face of seemingly insurmountable social obstacles. Yet, read from the present and with a focus on Buthayna's experience of the relationship, these stories can be seen as explorations of more than just the lover-hero's quest for his beloved. They can tell us other tales, tales about consent, gendered occupation of space, patriarchal control and public humiliation, how lovers can turn on their beloved for social capital, or test their motivations with the threat of violence. When read with a view to the present and beyond the mythic ideals that have been layered onto them, these stories remind us of the multiple ways in which we can harm each other in a relationship, of the ways in which we expose ourselves in opening up to another person and putting our trust in them, just as much as they chronicle the tribulations the lover might face when interacting with the world around him.

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