HE DESIRES HER? SITUATING NAZHUN'S *MUWASHSHAḤ* IN AN ANDROGYNOUS AESTHETIC OF COURTLY LOVE

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In the corpus of extant Andalusian Arabic (and Hebrew) stanzaic poems known as the *muwashshaḥāt*, Nazhun's poem is, or at least appears to be, the only piece that is attributed to a woman, named or unnamed. Given its unique status, it is rather odd that scholars of women's literature have – to my knowledge – thus far overlooked it, especially when one considers the relatively extensive body of scholarship devoted to women poets of Islamic Spain.[1] In fact, although Samuel Stern published an Arabic-language journal article about the poem in 1960,[2] and although the poem has been circulating in an anthology edited by Sayyid Ghazi since 1979,[3] during the decades that followed its very existence seemed to have escaped the notice of nearly everybody in western academia save the editors of the anthologies in which it is found.[4] In 1997, references to the *muwashshaḥ*, along with a bit of commentary on its *kharja*, finally materialise in *Love Songs from al-Andalus* by Otto Zwartjes.[5] Then, in the year 2000, a truncated version of the piece was featured on a compact disc released by the Spanish composer Luís Delgado.[6] It is perhaps appropriate that this *muwashshaḥ*, part of a corpus of "popular" music that circulated primarily, one presumes, among musicians, should surface on a world music CD before any scholar of women's writing managed to grapple with the various textual problems it poses.

But then again why should anyone have taken notice of the poem: true, it was written by a woman, but why would this be textually significant in and of itself? The poem reads very well, hence it may be worthy of our attention as a fine example of a strophic love song. Yet its formulations, conceits and images are altogether typical according to our understanding of the poetic idiom of courtly love in which its author was engaged. One does not necessarily hear a "feminine" voice, so why read it as a woman's text? Moreover, the literary historians are not likely to interpret the fact of the poem's attribution to a woman as particularly noteworthy. It would appear to be an anomaly. Its existence does not, on the face of it, challenge our notions about the predominance of male poets and the "masculine" personae they project into their verses in this particular strand of the Arabic tradition; rather it could easily be cited as the exception that proves the rule that women were not generally engaged in activities such as composing song lyrics. In my view, however, the potential impact of Nazhun's *muwashshaḥ* on our understanding of literary history is enormous. This is because, for over half a century, that is since the discovery of the so-called Romance *kharja*

by Samuel Stern in the 1940s, woman's voice, her first person, has been relegated to the *kharja*, that stanza of the *muwashshaḥ* which is often called the final refrain, and which is often written in the vernacular, be it Arabic or Romance, in contradistinction to the high register of Arabic or Hebrew employed in the rest of the poem. This trend began in the middle of the twentieth century, with the scholar Theodor Frings citing the existence of the Romance *kharja*s as evidence in support of his theory that the origins of European courtly love lay in a primordial female lament.[7] And the trend has continued in more recent years with academics who have viewed the vernacular final refrain of the *muwashshaḥ* as a source of empowerment for previously voiceless women. Listen, for example, to Maria Rosa Menocal as she beautifully expounds upon the form's linguistic and cultural heterogeneity:

> ...a new generation of poets wreaks havoc with classical traditions, rooted in singularity and the immutable written language, by making them sing to and with the Other – the vernacular, the explicitly vulgar, the fluid and oral, the female voice. And in such a union, unheard of on all sides, each of the original and separate traditions is transformed. Not only is the classical voice made, literally, to dance the beat of the street singer, but she, in turn, becomes respectable enough to play at court.[8]

While I do not necessarily take issue with her premise that the kind of hybridity that characterises the *muwashshaḥ* engages with woman's voice in a different manner than more orthodox poetic forms, the implication that her voice is associated primarily with colloquial registers is misleading, because it would seem to deny that women had access to the literary language: in the Arabic tradition, women poets and musicians always played at court, and the female voice is not, by any means, excluded from its canonical poetry.

Nevertheless, for the feminist scholar, the *kharja* does represent, at least in theory, a potential locus for women's voice, and for a while I did pursue this line of inquiry.

What I found in the *kharja*s, however, was mostly a dead end, in that the texts themselves did not strike me as springboards for analysis of women's writing; for they tended to be clipped, sometimes indecipherable (especially in the case of the Romance *kharja*s), and usually put into the mouth of a character whose relationship to any kind of reality projected by the poem is at best hard to determine. Moreover, the *kharja*s are often put into the mouths of animals, of feminine or masculine grammatical gender, and they are sometimes uttered in the voice of the poet. While it is true that the *kharja*s are often spoken or sung by the figure of the beloved, the beloved himself is often masculine, and, in my view, one cannot in this particular idiom simply explain away his masculinity by noting the convention in Arabic poetry, as well as in the troubadour lyrics, to encode the female beloved with masculine gender. When we consider the *kharja*

textually, absent from its performance context (since ultimately we do not know who "sang" the final refrains of these songs – at least not in individual cases), it simply is not the case that it is usually conveyed in an identifiably female voice. It is frequently uttered by a female figure, especially in the case of the Romance *kharja*s, but the third person feminine is by no means predominant there. Furthermore, in those cases when the *kharja* is clearly citing a woman's voice, the sentiment expressed in it often reads either as what a man would want a woman would say, such as the following refrain:

> Take my bracelets and unbind my generous bosom.
>
> Come with me to bed, like an animal, and sleep in the nude.[9]

Or, conversely, as what a man would dread to hear, such as the following:

> Slow down, heavy one, you're ripping my drawers.
>
> You want too much, be content with kissing me.[10]

There are, of course, many other themes to the *kharja*s, and I would not wish to reduce them to direct responses, affirmative or negative, to masculine carnal desires. However, on the whole, when we are dealing with *kharja*s explicitly put into the mouths of females, I regret to say I agree in part with Leo Spitzer where he states:

> If we compare our *jarchas* with the series of German and Romance *Frauenlieder* which have been attested by Frings, we cannot fail to glimpse a world-embracing perspective illuminating the genesis [...] of European lyrical poetry in general. We are brought ultimately to visualize a primitive world of women dancing and chanting stanzas of love provided for them by the poets [...] who thus achieve a vicarious pleasure: that of hearing their own conception of woman (as a passionate being who voices only her own uninhibited desire) echoed by the women who sing the stanzas composed for them. We owe primeval lyricism to men, who have ever known how to impersonate their own passion in the form of woman's desire. Thus woman has in primitive world literature a role imposed upon her by man, answering him with the very words of longing he has suggested to her.[11]

When I first came across Nazhun's *muwashshaḥ*,[12] I was quite taken aback, because it suddenly occurred to me that it was not the *muwashshaḥ* composers who relegated women's voices to the *kharja*; rather it was the western literary scholars who did so. The song's very existence, especially when considered in the light of information gleaned from historical sources, suggests that women participated in the culture of courtly musical lyricism as somewhat more than desirous objects of quotation. Therefore, before I introduce you to Nazhun's poem, I would like first to highlight what little we do know about women as composers of *muwashshaḥāt*.

In the biographical dictionaries and historical annals of Islamic Iberia that I have consulted,[13] only two or three women emerge as figures renowned for their composition of *muwashshaḥāt*. Curiously, Nazhun is not one of them. The first is Umm al-Kiram bt. al-Muʿtasim b. Sumadih, the daughter of a ruler of Almería (r. 1051-91 CE). Although her *muwashshaḥāt* are apparently lost, some of her "proper" love poetry survives. Here's an example of her verse:

ألا ليت شعري هل سبيلٌ لخَلْوةٍ   يُنَزَّهُ عنها سمعُ كلِّ مُراقِبِ
ويا عجبًا أشْتاقُ خَلْوةً مَنْ غدَا   ومَثْواهُ ما بين الحَشَا والتَّرائبِ

If only I knew a way to a secluded place,
soundproof to every chaperone.
Strange, that I long to be alone
with one who already dwells in my heart.[14]

The second woman said to be involved with the composition of *muwashshaḥāt* is Qasmuna bt. Ismaʿil, a poet probably of the 12th century – like Nazhun – who is thought by some scholars to be the daughter or at least a descendant of Samuel ha-Nagid (d. 1056 CE),[15] one of the earliest composers of Hebrew *muwashshaḥāt*. Unlike Umm al-Kiram, Qasmuna reportedly did not write *muwashshaḥāt* on her own but rather finished compositions begun by her father. I agree with Otto Zwartjes where he states "it is tempting to think of the possibility that the poetess added a *kharja* of her own at the end"; however, he notes "this cannot be sustained by evidence."[16] Once again, her song lyrics have seemingly not survived, but other examples of her poetry have, such as the following couplet:

أرى روضةً قد حان منها قطافها   ولستُ أرى جانٍ أن يمدَّ لها يدا
فوا أسفا يمضي الشبابُ مُضيَّعا   ويبقى الذي ما ان أسمّيه مُفردا

I see a garden, ripe for the picking,
who will extend a hand and pluck her?
Alas, youth passes by, wasted,
and the one I dare not name remains single.[17]

An unmarried Qasmuna is said to have recited this about herself, thereby prompting her father to find a husband for her. Beyond Umm al-Kiram and Qasmuna, and one other woman whose name I have come across,[18] I have not found references to women composing *muwashshaḥāt* in the Islamic West. What I have found, however, is evidence of a twelfth-century *zajjāla* – one Rumayla, an associate of the Almohad *washshāḥ* Ibn Ghurla.[19] In sum, based on the evidence we have gathered thus far – evidence that does not take Nazhun's *muwashshaḥ* into account – it seems that women contributed

to musical life as composers of lyrics and not only as singers and performers. Therefore, it would be wrong to overemphasise the significance of the *kharja* as a textual locus for woman's authorial voice.

Nazhun herself is a provocative and elusive figure: I will not go into detail here about her sketchy biography. Suffice to say that we do know she was a Granadan poet of the twelfth century who is said to have dedicated amorous and laudatory verses to Abu Bakr b. Saᶜid, a financial administrator of the city under the Almoravids, and she is said to have poked fun at the great *zajjāl* Ibn Quzman (d. 1160), as well as to have exchanged vituperative verses with the notorious satirist Abu Bakr al-Makhzumi. She was appreciated for her obscenity and her wit, in addition to her grace and charm.[20] Excluding this *muwashshaḥ*, Nazhun's surviving corpus contains only about 21 lines of verse, set in seven poems or poetic fragments; hence this 25-line *muwashshaḥ* more than doubles her poetic legacy. If we consider it from the point of view of its length and its structural integrity, leaving aside, for the moment, its impressive aesthetic merits, we find that there is little to compare it to in all of classical Arabic poetry by women, especially if we disregard the pre-Islamic *marāthī* or elegies for the dead. I make this assertion not in order to downplay women's contributions to Arabic poetry – and I acknowledge that this assertion could be challenged on a number of fronts – but rather I do so in order to convey how exceptional Nazhun's poem is in a positive sense. The only other piece I can compare it with, from the perspective of its seminal status within a genre not typically identified with female authors, is the Umayyad poet Layla al-Akhyaliyya's praise poem for ᶜAbd al-Malik b. Marwan.[21] That piece is for the so-called poly-thematic *qaṣīda* what Nazhun's piece is for the *muwashshaḥ*: allow me to elaborate.

The so-called "poly-thematic" or "tripartite" *qaṣīda* is a long poem that moves from one theme to another in certain set orders. It dates back to the pre-and Early Islamic eras. Typically, it follows the following pattern: a male poet or poetic persona opens his poem with a *nasīb*, sometimes called an amatory prelude, in which he bemoans the departure of a female beloved and her nomadic tribe; he then consoles himself briefly before moving on, astride a she-camel, in what is called the *raḥīl* or journey section. Then, at the end of the journey, which is usually rife with descriptions of desert wildlife, he gets to his main point – the reason behind the composition of the poem, which is often *madḥ* (panegyric) or *fakhr* (boasting). As has been observed in a ground-breaking article by Dana Sajdi, Layla al-Akhyaliyya's *qaṣīda* features an unusual journey section: for there the poetic persona places a surrogate male rider astride her camel and then conflates her own voice with that of the mount.[22]

Layla al-Akhyaliyya's poem may be the only extant tripartite *qaṣīda* penned by a woman,[23] but its singularity does not present us with a crisis of

context, because she is so obviously subverting a paradigm. Her poem is itself highly sexually-charged, and in a way serves as a parody of the machismo of the *qaṣīda*. Of course the *machismo* of the *qaṣīda* – its *fuḥūla* – is a vast topic, and I do not wish to get embroiled in it here; suffice it to say that I find it much more difficult to contextualise Nazhun's *muwashshaḥ* in a gender-specific way. Yes, we may read it and compare it on many levels to other *muwashshaḥāt* which happen to have been written by men; and we can make pronouncements about its aesthetic merits within that body of poetry; but if we want to read it as an example of women's writing, of *écriture féminine*, we are at somewhat of a loss, because the Andalusian *muwashshaḥāt* were, by and large, replete with gender ambiguity, and the sex of the beloved and the sex of the poetic persona are frequently hard to determine through textual analysis. To attempt to sort them out often seems like a pointless task. Another fruitless endeavour, to my mind, is to try to assign a gendered economy of desire (namely heterosexual or homosexual) to the passion articulated in a particular poem. Of course there are some *muwashshaḥāt* that employ explicit references to gender, but many others do not. In any case, the particular idiom in which Nazhun partakes is an androgynous one, and if her words do contain sexual markings – and I argue that they do – they are encoded rather than overt. But before we take the poem apart, decoding its language and imagery, let us first consider the piece in its entirety.

ᶜUddat al-Jalīs # 239

بأبي مَنْ هَدَّ من جسْمي القُوى طَرْقهُ الاحْور
وسقاني ما سقى يومَ النّوى ويْح مَن غَرّر
كلّما رُمْتُ خُضوعًا في الهَوى تاهَ واستكْبَرَ

As cherished as my father is the one whose black gaze debilitated me, and who, on the day of parting, satiated me with drink. What a thirst-quencher! But the more I longed for his submission in passion, the more he grew haughty and aloof.

يا له مِن شادِن صَيَّرني رَهْن أشْجان
لم يَدَعْ في الحُور مِنْهُ عِوَضا عند رضْوان

What a fawn! He has rendered me a hostage of sorrows.
No houri can compensate for him in paradise.[24]

مَرَّ بي في رَبْرَب مِن سِرْبِه يَقطِفُ الزَهْرَا
وَهْوَ يَتْلُوا ءَايَةً مِن حِزْبه يَبْتَغي الاجْرا

بَعْدَ ما ذكَّرَني مِن حُبِّهِ   ءَايةَ اخْرا

He passed by me in a herd from his flock of gazelles, plucking flowers, reciting a sign [verse] from his Quranic portion, seeking remuneration – this after he had reminded me of another sign of his love.

والذي لو شاء ما ذكَّرني   بعد نسْيان
قلَّبَ القلبَ على جمْرِ الغضا   فهْوَ في شان

By Him who, had he willed, would not have reminded me, once forgotten. He turns my heart over the live embers of the tamarisk, for he's preoccupied.

حَفِظَ اللهُ حَبيبا نَزحا   خَشْيةَ الهَجْرِ
جاءتِ البُشْرى به فانشرَحا   عندها صَدْري
واستطار القلبُ مِنّي فرَحا   ثمَّ لا ادْري

May God preserve a beloved who has gone away, fearing separation.
Good news of him arrived so my chest opened up
And my heart burst out, rejoicing, but I could not tell…

امِنَ الانْسِ الذي بَشَّرَني   امْ مِّنَ الجانِ
غَيْرَ انّي شِمْتُ بَرْقًا اوْمَضا   حينَ حَيّاني

was it a human being that brought me the good news? or a Jinn? Even so, I watched the lightning flash, anticipating rain, when he greeted me.

قلتُ لمّا زارني طَيْفُ الخيالْ   من رَشا الانْس
مَرْحَبا بالزائرِ الحُلْوِ الخِلالْ   مُخْجِل الشمس
والذي سوّاه مِن ماء الجَمالْ   واحِد الجنس

When the vision of the beloved, that gazelle of a human being, came to me, I said, "Welcome to the visitor with a sweet disposition, you put the Sun to shame." By God, who shaped him out of brilliant beauty, he's unique.

ما بَرا جسْمي ولا غيَّرني   خَوْفُ هجْران
انّما غَيَّرَ جسْمي مَرَضا   لَحْظةُ الرّاني

What has worn out my body is not the fear of separation.
No, what has made me weak and emaciated is his fixed gaze.

لمْ تَزل تُظهر فيهِ الكَلَفا　　　عندما عَنَّتْ
غادةٌ لَوْ رامَ مِنْها النَّصَفا　　　غَيْرُه ضَنَّتْ
فَهْوَ يَهْواها ويُبْدي الصَّلَفا　　　فَلِذا غَنَّتْ

She still adored him, fondly when she appeared
A tender young thing, who would have refused the advances
of anyone else.
He would love her then give her the cold shoulder, so she sang:

يَتَمَنّاني اذا لمْ يَرني　　　يَتَمَنّاني
فاذا راني تَوَلّى معْرضا　　　كنُّ ما راني

"He desires me so long as he does not see me he desires me,
But when he sees me he turns his back as if he doesn't see me."

In the finest tradition of that brand of courtly love to be found in many of the *muwashshaḥāt*, the passion expressed by the poet is sexually ambiguous, even though it is highly erotic and sensual. Unlike the form's bawdier specimens, there are no direct references to sexual organs, primary or secondary, belonging to either lover or beloved in this poem. Instead what one finds is (1) a grammatically masculine beloved, transmogrified into a still masculine but poetically if not biologically neutered gazelle, (2) a poetic persona whose first person is almost entirely androgynous, and (3) a decidedly feminine *kharja* speaker, a "maiden" whose voice is somewhat conflated with that of the poetic persona, since both figures have been shunned by the beloved. At first glance, it would seem that this third finding, that is the conflation of the voices of the poetic persona and the maiden, would be very revealing with regard to the sexual economy of desire in the poem. This is not so straightforward as it seems, however, because many male composers of panegyric *muwashshaḥāt* exploit the figure of the maiden not only as a beloved offering a response to the poet's desire, but also as a conduit for the poet's admiration of a usually male third party. That is to say that male poets, too, conflate their voices with the figure of the *kharja*'s maiden.

As to the grammatical masculinity of the beloved, it is quite obvious and hardly requires elaboration; what is perhaps more worthy of our attention is that this masculine beloved is portrayed more as an active agent than a described object; his eye may be beautiful, but it is its arrow that saps the lover's strength; and his agency acts upon the poem's unsexed first-

person lover. *He debilitated me, he satiated me, he reminded me*, etc. But grammatical masculinity in and of itself is not enough to denote a male beloved, since masculinity in Arabic as well as many other languages is, in effect, a default gender. One is often tempted when reading the corpus of Andalusian Arabic love songs to read the various terms for gazelle as encoded markings of the beloved's sex: to read *shādin* as male, for example, and *ẓaby* as female, but I have found this to be an unfruitful line of inquiry in part because, as Philip Kennedy has observed, gazelles often appear in clusters, and several words for gazelle, theoretically evoking a single beloved, often occur within the same poem.[25] In Nazhun's poem, we have both *shādin* and *rasha`*. Furthermore, it seems to me that describing the beloved in terms of a gazelle is a device that poets exploit in order to make the beloved – and hence their love for the beloved – transcend matters of carnal desire and human flesh. Thus we are left with very few overt references to biological gender in the poem. These include the reference to the father in the opening line, the emergence of the *ghāda* or maiden in the poem's penultimate stanza, and the reference to the houris in the second stanza.

The houris, it must be said, are a feminine presence, and as Geert Jan van Gelder has suggested to me, the implicit comparison of the beloved to the houris, through the statement "no houri can compensate for him in paradise," in some sense feminises him. (This comparison, by the way, is foreshadowed in the first stanza, with the attribute *aḥwar*, describing the beloved's gaze. *Aḥwar* and *ḥur* – or houris – are derived from the same root.) However, one could also read the beloved's equation with the houris as a feminisation of the stance of the poetic persona. For, as a woman whose beloved is male, the promise that nymphs await the chaste in paradise is little compensation for good behaviour, since those nymphs are all female. Returning to the *ghāda*, there is no doubt that the poet wishes to identify her first person with that maidenly figure, in the sense that both feel jilted by a lover playing hard to get; but this sort of conflation of the poet's voice with that of a young woman is by no means unusual in men's *muwashshaḥāt*, especially the panegyrics. Thus we are still left befuddled by the significance of this conflation. Indeed, the same *kharja* that is attributed to this maiden's voice, a *kharja* which may or may not be Nazhun's composition, appears again in the poem immediately following this one in the *ᶜUddat al-Jalīs*, but in *that* instance the *kharja* is uttered by the poet in the first person. In that anonymous poem, which is strikingly similar to Nazhun's and which must be considered either a model *for* or imitation *of* her poem, the *kharja* is introduced thus:

لم يزل يُخْلِفُ صِدْقَ وَعْدِهِ بِتَلَوِّيهِ
شادِنٌ اعْيا مَطال صَدِّهِ لِمُحِبّيهِ
فَتَغَنَّيْتُ لِطول بُعْدِهِ وَتَجَنّيهِ

يَتَمَنّاني اذا لمْ يَرني   يَتَمَنّاني
فَاذا راني تَوَلّى معْرضا   كَنًّ ما راني

He still breaks the sincerity of his promise
  through his restlessness.
A fawn whose prolonged indifference
  disables his lovers.
So I sang, due to his prolonged absence
  and his transgressions:
"He desires me so long as he does not see me,
  he desires me.
But when he sees me he turns his back
  as if he doesn't see me."[26]

This poem is of anonymous authorship; hence the androgyny of both its imagery and its voice is almost total: a lover sings about the disloyal disinterest of a beloved in a way that disregards any gender polarity between the two parties. The only sexual opposition at work here is that of the unsexed polarity between lover and beloved.

Returning to Nazhun's poem, we find that beyond the citation of the *ghāda*, and the conflation of her voice with that of the poetic persona, there is at least one other section of the poem that suggests that the composer writes as a woman, but in this instance the references to female identity are encoded rather than overt. I refer now to third stanza:

مَرَّ بي في رَبْرَب مِن سِرْبِه   يَقْطِفُ الزَهْرَا
وَهْوَ يَتْلُوا ءَايَةَ مِن حِزْبِه   يَبْتَغي الاجْرا
بَعْدَ ما ذَكَّرَني مِن حُبِّهِ   ءَايةَ اخْرا

What is striking about this stanza is its clever exploitation of Quranic language: principally its use of the terms *āya* and *ḥizb*. The pun on *āya* is straightforward enough: in the first instance she means "verse" as in "verse of the Quran" and in the second instance she means something like a sign or a wonder. But the wordplay she makes with *ḥizb* is not so readily apparent. On a surface reading of the text, a reading that is inevitable due to the term's juxtaposition with *āya*, *ḥizb* refers to a portion of the Quran, one 60th to be precise, a unit of recitation meant to facilitate the memorisation of the revelation. Another reading suggests itself to me, however, and this other reading may have some bearing on the sexual identities of lover and beloved in this *muwashshaḥ*: it emerges from the association between the word *ḥizb*

and the word *sirb*, the latter occupying the same syntactical position in the first line of the stanza as the former does in the second. *Sirb* refers to a flock of gazelles, and by extension, a party of women.[27] Similarly, *ḥizb* may refer to a party of men;[28] hence, if one accepts my interpretation, the beloved plucks flowers in the company of women, and recites Quranic verses in the company of men. And when we read *ḥizb* as a double entendre we find that it is not only the word itself but the whole section of the line that yields two meanings. Hence it may be translated: "while he recites [*yatlū*] a verse [*āya*] from his Quranic portion" *or* "while he follows [*yatlū*] an example [*āya*] from his male party". This second interpretation is not so far-fetched when one considers it in the context of the previous line: in the first line *he passes by me* and, in the second line, *he follows him*. Let me turn back to *marra bī*. He passed by me. The prepositional phrase "in a herd from his flock of gazelles" is ambiguous in that we are unsure as to whether it is the poet-lover who is in the herd of gazelles or the beloved himself. Is he walking by his herd, in which the poetic persona is found, or is he in the company of his herd walking by his poetic persona? This is a dilemma for us, because, in one case, the poetic persona would be marked as feminine, through her inclusion in a feminine grouping and, in the other, the poetic persona would remain neuter. Regardless of the stance of the poet, however, the stanza still evokes an intriguing gender dynamic: especially through the reference to plucking flowers. This is a rather common metaphor, and perhaps a universal one, for taking a woman's virginity – "de-flowering her" – and it is one which has been featured already in this paper. (Recall Qasmūna, who supposedly expressed her conjugal desires by comparing herself to a garden ripe for the harvest.) And it is noteworthy that, when taken as a whole, this stanza portrays the beloved as a bit of a cad, a sentiment that is also evoked in the *kharja*. Here is a male figure who seduces women and then attempts to atone for his sins through a display of piety; it is not surprising that such a man would then give the cold shoulder to one, if not all, of the victims of his charms.

There are at least two moments in the poem, then, when Nazhun would seem to conflate the voice of her persona with a markedly feminine presence: in the third stanza, where the first person positions herself amidst the gazelles and the flowers, and in the *kharja*, where her emotional complaint is echoed by the figure of the *ghāda*, the maiden or the tender young woman, introduced in the penultimate stanza of the *muwashshaḥ*. Nazhun exploits the figure of the *ghāda* to make the individual emotional experience of the poetic persona part of a communal voice. This is a recurring trope in the transition from the main body of the *muwashshaḥ* to the *kharja*. Many *muwashshaḥ* composers – male composers, that is – conflate their voices with those of their *kharja* speakers, be they feminine or masculine.

As I have made clear, the coincidence of the masculine beloved and the

conflation of the poet's voice with that of the feminine *kharja* speaker do not in any way set Nazhun's *muwashshah* apart as a specimen of women's writing. What would set it apart, and what does set it apart, in my view, is the femininity of the poetic persona. The difficulty is that that femininity is not declared overtly, but rather it is encoded in imagery and figures of speech. I have tried to convince you of this through my analysis of the third stanza, when the poet associates herself with a "*sirb*" or bevy of women at the same time that she places that "*sirb*" in opposition to a "*ḥizb*" or party of men. This is, perhaps, the easiest encoded allusion to gender to locate and substantiate, because it occurs at a site where the poet is so obviously making an elaborate play on words, using Quranic language to describe amorous interactions between the sexes.

There is, however, at least one other site in the poem where the author alludes to sexual polarity in a way that would indicate the femininity of the poetic persona. This occurs in the last line of the third stanza, the very stanza in which the *sirb/ḥizb* opposition is found, and the first line of the fourth stanza, with the repetition of the verb *dhakkara* in each. In the first instance, where it occurs in association with *āya* [verse or sign],

بَعْدَ ما ذكّرَني مِن حُبِّهِ　　　ءَاية اخْرا

it evokes a Quranic phrase:

(ومن أظلمُ مِمَّن ذُكِّرَ بِآيات رَبِّهِ ثمَّ أعْرَضَ عَنْها)

> (Who is more unjust than one who has been reminded of the signs
> of his Lord, then turns away from them?) [29]

To be reminded of the signs is to listen to God's admonitions, and to take heed of "what might soften the heart, by the mention of rewards and punishments".[30] In the third stanza, then, Nazhun paradoxically deifies the beloved, empowering him with the ability to bestow eternal rewards, at the same time that she condemns him as cruelly disloyal. Indeed this Quranic pronouncement would seem to encapsulate the sentiment of the entire poem: note that the *kharja*'s reference to the beloved turning his back (*tawallā muʿriḍan*) echoes the behaviour of the unjust who turn away from the signs of God (*aʿraḍa ʿanhā*) in the above Quranic citation.

The second time the verb *dhakkara* appears in the poem, that is in the first line of the fourth stanza,

والذي لو شاء ما ذكّرني　　　بعد نسْيان

it would seem to have more mundane connotations: the poet simply states that the beloved, if he had his way, would not have made her remember – in other words, he would rather forget the whole affair. But in each case, this

verb, which is derived from a root *dh-k-r*, and relates to the noun *dhakar*, denoting both masculinity and the male member, takes the objective personal pronoun of the poetic persona as its direct object. The verb *dhakkara*, in one of its causative senses, may mean "to make [grammatically] masculine," hence *dhakkaranī*, "he made me masculine," and *mā dhakkaranī*, "he did not make me masculine," would indicate that the speaker is at least non-masculine if not downright feminine. It may seem like a bit of a stretch to read Nazhun's *dhakkaranī* as "he masculinised me," but its repetition in such close succession would indicate to me that there is some sort of alternative meaning behind it. Furthermore, in another poem in her rather limited corpus, Nazhun makes a provocative double entendre on a word derived from the very same radical, namely *mudhakkar*.[31] One wonders: if Nazhun is in fact on one level stating that the beloved masculinises her and subsequently neglects to masculinise her, then what exactly does she mean by this? The answer is hard to substantiate but easy to surmise, especially when one considers that the second form of this particular verb, in the jargon of the date-palm cultivators, refers to the act of pollination.[32]

What makes Nazhun's *muwashshaḥ* an example of women's writing? Is it merely its attribution to a female poet? True, the beloved is clearly masculine. True, the poetic persona conflates his or her voice with that of the decidedly feminine *kharja* speaker. But both of the above are commonplaces in men's *muwashshaḥāt* as well. If the poet does present her poetic persona as a woman, it is done so indirectly: her femininity is encoded in the language and imagery, at those junctures I have highlighted above and no doubt at others which have eluded me. We cannot assert the femininity of this text definitively, because the idiom in which the poem was written is so rife with gender ambiguity, and because authorial points of view that are in many socio-poetic paradigms considered as either masculine or feminine, here, in this tradition, collapse into one another. This is a woman's text by attribution more than by textual impetus. Still, in my view, this poem proves something very exciting and illuminating; in this particular strand of the love lyric, the woman poet has neither to strike a feminine pose nor to assume a masculine posture. True, we cannot point to this piece as a definitive specimen of *woman's* writing, but we can cite it as evidence that the aesthetic tradition in which its author engaged was not *man*'s. Hence it is misleading or misguided to read the *kharja* as a feminine counterpoint to a primarily masculine form of composition.

NOTES

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Gelder, for his thorough and engaging comments on a recent draft, and to Mustafa Badawi, who provided me with invaluable insight into the text of the poem. Last but not least, my gratitude extends to Alan Jones, who discussed the poem with me prior to the event and provided me with a copy of the relevant page from the *manuscrit Colin.*

1. For studies on Arabic-language women poets in Islamic Iberia, see, for example, Mohammed Abu-Rub, "La poésie gallante des femmes poétesses", *La poésie gallante andalouse* (Paris: Editions Asfar, 1990), pp. 233-80; Teresa Garulo, *Diwan de las poetisas de al-Andalus* (Madrid: Hiperión, 1986); Muhammad Muntasir al-Raysuni, *Al-Shi*ᶜ*r al-Niswi fi al-Andalus* (Beirut: Dar Maktabat al-Hayat, 1978); María Jesús Rubiera Mata, *Poesía feminina hispanoárabe* (Madrid: Editorial Castalia, 1989); and Mustafa al-Shakᶜa, "Shaᶜirat al-Andalus", *Suwar min al-Adab al-Andalusi* (Beirut: Dar al-Nahda al-ᶜArabiyya, 1971), pp 85-217. In addition, the *The Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures*, vol. 1 (ed. Suad Joseph et al., Leiden: 2003), contains two articles which may be of interest: Suha Kudsieh's "Andalusian Literature: 9th to 15th Century" (pp. 10-15) and my own "Literature: 9th to 15th Century" (pp 42-50). For scholarship on Nazhun herself, see Alfonso Ali Ben Mohamed, "Nazhun Bint al-Qilaᶜi," *Studi Magrebini* 18 (1986): pp. 61-8 and my own "He said 'she said': Narrations of women's verse in Classical Arabic Literature – a case study: Nazhun's *hija'* of Abu Bakr al-Makhzumi", *Middle Eastern Literatures* 6.1 (2003): pp. 3-18. See also Arie Schippers, "The Role of Women in Medieval Andalusian Arabic Story-telling" in *Verse and the Fair Sex: Studies in Arabic Poetry and in the Representation of Women in Arabic Literature* (ed. Frederick de Jong, Utrecht, 1993) pp. 139-52. I need to apologise to Arie Schippers for neglecting to refer to this piece in my "He said: 'she said'" article, but I was unaware that it contained a translation of the same literary anecdote featured in my article. It should be noted, however, that the two studies approach that anecdote from very different perspectives: Schippers' piece is a comparative look at the representation of women across several literary anecdotes, and my piece is a narratological reading of the way in which one particular anecdote frames and interprets the contents of its constituent poetry.

2. Samuel Stern, "Muwashshaḥa li'l-shᶜira al-andalusiyya Nazhun", *Majallat al-ᶜUlūm al-Islāmiyya* (Aligarh, June 1960) pp. 1-8. I have only just come across this reference in Henk Heijkoop and and Otto Zwartjes, Muwaššaḥ, Zajal, Kharja: *Bibliography of Strophic Poetry and Music from al-Andalus and Their Influence on East and West* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), No. 2430, p. 292. Unfortunately, I have not been able to consult this article.

3. To my knowledge, the first published edition of Nazhun's *muwashshaḥa* appears in Sayyid Ghazi's anthology, *Diwan al-Muwashshaḥāt al-Andalusiyya* (Alexandria: Munsha'at al-Maᶜarif, 1979), 2 vols., pp. 551-2.

4. Volumes that feature the poem include: Muhammad Zakariya ᶜInānī, *Dīwān al-Muwashshaḥāt al-Andalusiyya* (Alexandria: Dar al-Maᶜrifa al-Jamiᶜiyya, [1982?]), pp. 27-9, Jallul Yalas and Amuqran al-Hifnawi, *Al-Muwashshaḥāt wa-al-Azjal* (Algiers: al-Sharika al-Wataniyya, 1975-82) 1: pp. 118-9, and Ibn Bishri, *ᶜUddat al-Jalīs* (ed. Alan Jones, Cambridge: Gibb Memorial Trust, 1992) pp. 360-1. The poem also appears in Mahmud Sobh's bilingual Arabic-Spanish anthology *Poetisas arábigo-andaluzas* (Granada: Diputación Provincial de Granada 1985) pp. 92-3.

5. Otto Zwartjes mentions Nazhun and her *muwashshaḥ* in scattered locations through-

out his book *Love Songs from Al-Andalus: History, Structure and Meaning of the* Kharja (Leiden: Brill, 1997). He places her *kharja* in its thematic and figurative contexts with brief references on pages 212, 261, and 269, and, on page 314, he lists some of the poem's manuscript sources.

6. Luis Delgado, *El hechizo de Babilonia* (Nubenegra, 2000). The work sets the Arabic verses of six Andalusian women of the 11th through the 13th centuries to music. Nazhun's *muwashshaḥ* is featured in track 2, "He longs for me", alongside some verses of Umm al-Kiram, which happen to be cited in this paper. I would like to thank Philip Kennedy for bringing this compact disc to my attention.

7. Peter Dronke lays out the views expressed in Theodor Frings' *Minnesinger und Troubadours* (Berlin, 1949) identifying certain types of songs from medieval Europe (such as the *cantigas de amigo*), or those that seemingly express a woman's point of view, as the forerunners of courtly love poetry. Dronke appreciates Frings' acknowledgement of a feminine archetype as integral to the European poetic tradition, but adds that he would clearly delineate it from the courtly archetype, which he views as decidedly masculine. See Dronke's *Medieval Latin and the Rise of European Love Lyric*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), pp. 7-9. For more on this debate, and its connection to Arabic poetry, see the introduction to James T. Monroe's *Hispano-Arabic Poetry: A Student Anthology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 16.

8. Maria Menocal, *Shards of Love, Exile and the Origins of the Lyric* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994) p. 25.

9. Ibn Bishri, *ᶜUddat al-Jalīs*, p. 128.

10. Ibn Bishri, *ᶜUddat al-Jalīs*, p. 264.

11. Leo Spitzer, "The Mozarabic Lyric and Theodor Frings' Theories", *Comparative Literature* 4 (1952): pp. 21-22.

12. Ibn Bishri, *ᶜUddat al-Jalīs*, pp. 360-1.

13. These sources include Ibn Saᶜīd al-Maghribī, *Al-Mughrib fi Hula al-Maghrib*, ed. Shawqi Dayf (Cairo: Dar al-Maᶜarif, 1953); Ibn al-Khatīb, *Al-Ihata fi Akhbar Gharnata*, ed. Muhammad Abdullah ᶜUnan (Cairo: Dar al-Maᶜarif, 1955 [?]); al-Maqqarī, *Nafh al-Tib min Ghusn al-Andalus al-Ratib*, ed. Ihsan Abbas (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1968; Ibn Bashkuwāl, *Kitab al-Sila* (Madrid: Rochas, 1883); al-Marrākushī, *al-Dhayl wa-al-Takmila li-Kitabay al-Mawsul wa-al-Sila*, ed. Muhammad Bin Sharifa (Morocco: Akadamiyyat al-Mamlaka al-Maghribiyya, 1984); Ibn al-Abbar, *Kitab al-Takmila li-Kitab al-Sila* (Madrid: Rochas, 1887); al-Balfiqi, *Al-Muqtadab min Kitab Tuhfat al-Qadim li-Ibn al-Abbar, ed. Ibrahim al-Abyari* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Amiriyya, 1957). Al-Suyūṭī's anthology of women's verse, *Nuzhat al-Julasa' fi Ashᶜar al-Nisa'* (ed. Salah al-Din al-Munajjid, Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Jadid, 1978), also contains some biographical information. One modern work that is an extremely useful source of biographical information is ᶜAbd al-Hadi al-Tazi's *Al-Mar'a fi Tarikh al-Gharb al-Islami* (Casablanca: al-Fank, 1992).

14. Ibn Saᶜīd, *al-Mughrib* 2:203. Translation mine.

15. For a summary of the debate about whether or not Qasmuna is the daughter of Samuel ha-Nagid (Ibn Naghrila) see María Ángeles Gallego, "Approaches to the Study of Muslim and Jewish Women in the Medieval Iberian Peninsula: The Poetess

Qasmuna Bat Isma^c^il", *Miscelánea de estudios árabes y hebraicos, sección hebrea* 48 (1999): pp. 70-2.

16. Zwartjes, *Love Songs*, p. 72.

17. Al-Maqqari, *Nafḥ al-Ṭīb*, 3:530. Translation mine.

18. Al-Tazi describes a third woman, one ^c^A'isha bt. ^c^Ammara, as a thirteenth-century scribe who also composed *muwashshaḥāt*. *Al-Mar'a*, 109. As to the matter of women composers of *muwashshaḥāt* in the Islamic East, I have not done any research into this area, but I do know that the sixteenth-century Damascene mystic ^c^A'isha al-Ba^c^uniyya penned at least one.

19. Al-Tazi identifies Rumayla as a composer of *zajal*s. *Al-Mar'a*, 141. The opening line of a *zajal* she is said to have composed appears in *al-Zajal fi al-Maghrib* by ^c^Abbas al-Jarrārī (Rabat: Maktabat al-Talib, 1970): p. 540.

20. For a slightly more detailed discussion of the biographical information available on Nazhun, see Hammond, "He said: 'she said'", p. 4.

21. For the text of this poem, see Ibn Maymun, *Muntaha al-Talab min Ash^c^ar al-^c^Arab*, ed. Hussayn Nassar et al (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub, 1999): pp. 113-15.

22. See Dana al-Sajdi, "Trespassing the Male Domain: the Qasidah of Layla al-Akhyaliyyah", *Journal of Arabic Literature* 31.2 (2000): pp. 121-46.

23. Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych calls the poem "a noteworthy exception to the male dominance of the qaṣīdah form". See: *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993): p. 164n. Note that there are many examples of *qaṣīda*s composed by women. This particular poem by Layla al-Akhyaliyya is unusual in that regard only by virtue of its tripartite structure and its clearly delineated journey section.

24. "In paradise" *literally*: "at Ridwan's". Ridwan, much like St. Peter in the Christian tradition, is the guardian of paradise. See W. Raven, "Ridwan", *EI*^2^.

25. See Philip F. Kennedy, "Thematic Patterning in the *Muwashshahāt*: the Case of the Gazelle Motif", *Poesía Estrofica*, ed. F. Corriente and A. Sáenz-Badillos (Madrid: Instituto de Cooperación con el Mundo Arabe, 1991): pp. 201-16.

26. Ibn Bishri, *^c^Uddat al-Jalīs*, pp. 361-2.

27. On *sirb* meaning a "party" or "bevy" of women, see E.W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863-7): *s-r-b*.

28. I am not sure that *ḥizb* (حزب), in the sense of "party" or group "of men," is necessarily exclusive of women. However given that it often refers to "partisans" or "troops" (Lane, *Arabic-English*: *ḥ-z-b*) or other words with masculine connotations, I think it is fair to say that it exhibits a certain polarity of gender with *sirb*.

29. *Quran* 32:23. The same sentence occurs with a slight variation in 18:58.

30. Lane, *Arabic-English*: *dh-k-r*.

31. See "He said: she said," where I argue that Nazhun's pronouncement that her poetry is "masculine" (*mudhakkar*) is meant to imply that her verses are more celebrated than those of the male poet who is the object of her invective. This interpretation is supported by an explicit double entendre relating the noun "penis" (*dhakar*) to the verb "to mention" (*dhakara*) that occurs in the poem's anecdotal framework.

32. R. Dozy, *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes* (Leiden: Brill, 1881), *dh-k-r*.