

Sunset in the Gardens of al-Andalus.*

By M. Ikraam Abdu-Noor

The era of Muslim rule in Spain (early 8th century to 1492), the historical moment known in Arabic as al-Andalus, was an age of great poets and great patrons, when princes in cities like Seville and Cordova and Granada competed to attract the best writers of the day. The result was an era when poetry in Arabic was liberated from many of the constraints it had previously known, producing a timeless poetic legacy. Alongside the *qaṣīda*, the classical Arabic ode written in a single meter and a single rhyme, new genres of stanzaic poetry having multiple rhymes and complex meters appeared in the late 10th century: the *muwashshaḥ* in formal Arabic and the *zajal* in colloquial Arabic. Scholars are divided on the origin of these poetic forms. Some have argued that they developed from earlier Arabic stanzaic forms known in the Middle East¹, while others² maintain that these forms were unique to al-Andalus and probably evolved from contact with non-Arabic forms native to the Iberian peninsula. Whichever view one takes on their origin, there can be no doubt that these new styles of poetry allowed the poet to experiment with rhyme and meter in unprecedented ways, to write in non-formal Arabic, and even to include non-Arabic phrases in their poems.

The expansion in the range of poetic forms in al-Andalus was accompanied by an extension of their themes, as well. Many of the ancient motifs and imagery found in the *qaṣīda* — praise (*rithā'*), wine drinking (*khamriyya*), love (*ghazal*) — persisted in the new poems, but

* Some of these translations have appeared in the magazine *Palimpsest* 2 (2005); used by permission.

¹ E.g. Hartmann, M.: *Das arabische Strophengedicht. I. Das Muwašṣaḥ* (Weimar: Emil Feber, 1897); Schoeler, G.: “Muwašṣaḥ und Zaḡal” (in *Neues Handbuch der Literaturwissenschaft. 5. Orientalisches Mittelalter*. W. Heinrichs, ed. Wiesbaden, 1990, pp. 440-464).

² E.g. Monroe, J.T.: “Which Came First, the *Zajal* or the *Muwashshaha*? Some Evidence for the Oral Origins of Hispano-Arabic Strophic Poetry.” *Oral Tradition*. 4.1-2. January-May, 1989, pp. 38-74.

were used in fresh ways. In one area, at least, the Andalusian poets outdid their forebears: one of the most widely used themes in the new poetry was description of nature. Certainly natural scenes may be found in older Arabic poetry, but rarely executed with the vividness and enthusiasm we find in many *muwashshah* and *zajal* poems. Perhaps it was due to the richness of the natural environment in Spain, perhaps simply to an animated love of versifying, fueled by the passions of wealthy patrons and princes. In any case, we find among the stanzas of al-Andalus passages of sublime feeling recalling natural scenes of striking beauty. The *muwashshah* and *zajal* reached the pinnacle of their glory in the 11th, 12th and 13th centuries with poets like Ibn Baqī (d. 1150), Ibn Quzmān (d. 1160), Ibn Sahl (d. 1251) and al-Shushtārī (d. 1269).

We cannot be certain about it today, but these new forms of poetry probably were born to be sung. Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk (d. 1211), observing the poems of al-Andalus from his vantage point in Egypt, attempted to create a way of analyzing their structure. He found, however, that he could not derive a single set of rules that governed the meters of all these poems. Indeed, he noted that many of these poems apparently “have no prosody but the melody, no meter but that of the beat...”³ In any case, we know that eventually many of these poems did find their way into songs, and this literary-musical tradition echoes today across North Africa in musical genres collectively known as Andalusian music.

The translations presented here are drawn from the Moroccan version of this musical heritage, from two songbooks: *At-turāth al-ʿarabī al-maghribī fī al-mūsīqī* (Idriss Benjallun, 1979) and *Min waḥy ar-rabāb* (ʿAbd al-Karīm ar-Rāyīs, 1982). The Moroccan Andalusian music is divided into eleven large suites, each suite (or *nūba*) being centered upon one primary musical mode. The modes, in turn, are associated with cosmological phenomena such as the rising of the full moon or the time just before sunrise. The poems here are drawn from the *nūba* called al-Māya, which is associated with the time of sunset. We see here the setting sun used to

³ *Dār at-Tirāz* (1949 edition, Jawdat ar-Rikābī, ed. Damascus: Dār al-Fikr) p. 47. To be sure, not all scholars agree on the the musical origins of these poetic forms. James T. Monroe (e.g. “Poetic Quotation in the *Muwaššaha* and Its Implications: Andalusian Strophic Poetry as Song” in *La Corónica* 14.2, 1986 pp. 230-250) and others argue that they were indeed meant to be sung, while Alan Jones (*Romance kharjas in Andalusian Arabic Muwashshah Poetry*. London: Ithaca Press, 1988) and others claim that the weight of the evidence does not support this conclusion.

describe lost love, moments of reverie and even the thanatopsis theme. In some cases we know the name of the poet, in most we do not. But we do know that in spirit and form these songs recall the glory that was al-Andalus.

A *muwashshaḥ* stanza in the meter *ar-rajaz* [al-Rāyis, p. 83]

شمس العاشيا رَوْنَقَتْ جَمَعَ الْكَتَّابِ وَالْبِطَاحُ
على الغُصُونِ أَشْرَقَتْ وَزَيَّنَتْ بِهَا اللَّقَاحُ
وبالغُلَسِ بَشَّرَتْ آهٍ عَلَى قَلْبِي الْجِرَاحُ
تَوَشَّحَتْ بِالْأَصْفَرِارِ حِينَ غُيِّبَتْ عَنْ مُقْلَتِي
وَمَنْ هَوَيْتَ ظُبِّي الْقِفَارِ عَوَّلَ يَا صَاحُ عَنْ فُرْقَةٍ

The evening sun slowly shrouds
the horsemen gathering and the plains
On the tree branches she* shines
and the leaves are adorned by her rays
And thus she announces the arrival of night ...
Ah, my heart's wound is grave!
She decorates herself in pale yellow
when she is hidden from my eye
You whom the desert gazelle enchants
grieve, friend, for she is not nigh

* In Arabic, the sun is grammatically feminine.

A *zajal* stanza in the meter *manhūk ar-ramal* [al-Rāyis, p. 84]

يَا عَشِيًّا ذَكَرْتَنِي شَوْقِي وَزَمَانَ النُّحُونِ
رَوْنَقُ الشَّمْسِ صَارَ فِي الْأَفْقِ مَائِلًا لِلْخُمُونِ
أَيُّهَا السَّاقِي جُدْ لَنَا وَاسْقِ عَلَى غَيْظِ الْعَذُونِ
انْظُرِ الشَّمْسَ كَيْفَ بَدَتْ تَصْفَرُ جَنَحَتْ لِلْأَفُونِ
جُلْنَارٌ قَدْ حَفَّ بِالْعَنْبَرِ فَتْنَةً لِلْعُقُونِ

O evening, you recall to me my longing
and hours of withering torpor
The sun's glory becomes, at the horizon,
a slope toward dark languor
O wine-pourer, pour lavishly for us, and drink
in spite of anyone's anger
See the sun, how it begins to yellow
leaning toward night
A pomegranate blossom has enveloped in amber
a temptation for the mind

A *zajal* stanza in the meter *makhla' al-basit* [Benjallun, pp. 84-85]

قُمْ وَاغْتَنِمِ سَطْوَةَ الْبَنَفْسِجِ	إِنَّ الرِّيَاضَ حُسْنُهُ عَجِيبُ
عَلَى حُضِيرَةٍ بَيْنَ صَهِيرَجِ	الْشَّمْسُ مَالَتْ إِلَى الْمَغِيبِ
الْشَّمْسُ مَالَتْ إِلَى الصَّفُورَةِ	وَذَهَبَتْ أَوْرَاقُ الْغُرُوسِ
تَطْهَرُ غُصُونُ فِي أَبْدَعِ صُورَةٍ	وَقَدْ كَسَتْ بِهَجَةِ النُّفُوسِ
وَالرُّوضُ فَرَشَ مِنَ الْخُضُورَةِ	فِي حِلَّةٍ تُشَبِّهُ الْعُرُوسِ
وَالطَّيْرُ فَوْقَ الْغُصُونِ يَحْرَجُ	فِي مَنْبَرِهِ كَأَنَّهُ خَطِيبُ
عَلَى حُضِيرَةٍ بَيْنَ صَهِيرَجِ	الْشَّمْسُ مَالَتْ إِلَى الْمَغِيبِ

Stop, and snatch the violet's audacious pride

how wondrous is the beauty of the garden-bed

Over a courtyard, in the little pool of water

the sun declines toward darkening sunset

The sun declines toward the yellow twilight

and gilds the leaves of climbing vines with gold

Branches appear in unexpected forms

and dress up the happiness of souls

While the garden spreads forth its verdure

in raiment which rivals a bride's clothes

A bird, ensconced in the branches,

he is like a Friday preacher on his pulpit

Over a courtyard, in the little pool of water

the sun declines toward darkening sunset

A stanza in the meter *manhūk as-sarī*° [ar-Rāyis, p. 93]

مَهْلًا عَلَى غَرَضِي	شَمْسُ الْعِشْيَا بِاللَّهِ
وَاللَّيْلِ فِي غَمَضِي	ضَوْءُ النَّهَارِ كَسَاهُ
قَدْ غَابَ عَن لِحْظِي	يَا حَسْرَتِي يَا أَوَاهُ
قَدْ حَلَّتْ الْفُرْقَا	وَمَنْ هَوَيْتُ قَالَ لِي
وَاشْتَدَّتْ الْعِشْقَا	سَكَبْتُ دُمُوعَ نَجْلِي

The evening sun, by Allāh	irresistibly bending down
The bright of the day clothing it	but the night, darkening down
What a shame! O alas!	from my sight it has withdrawn
One who loves said to me,	“The separation has us unbound.”
Tears poured from my wide-open eye	and love became grief without bounds

Six lines in the meter *al-kāmil* by Ibn Maraj al-Kahl al-Andalusī [ar-Rāyis p. 97]

وَعَشِيَّةٌ لَا زِلْتَ أَرْقُبُ وَقْتَهَا سَمَحَتْ بِهَا الْأَيَّامُ بَعْدَ تَعَذُّرِ
 نَلْنَا بِهَا كُلَّ الْمُنَى فِي رَوْضَةٍ تُهْدِي لِنَاشِقِهَا شَمِيمَ الْعَنْبَرِ
 وَالطَّيْرُ يَشْدُو وَالْأَرَاكُ تَنْشِي وَالشَّمْسُ تَرْقُصُ فِي قَمِيصِ أَصْفَرِ
 وَالرَّوْضُ بَيْنَ مَفْضُضٍ وَمَذْهَبٍ وَالزَّهْرُ بَيْنَ مَدْرَهَمٍ وَمُدْنَرِ
 مَا أَصْفَرَّ وَجْهَ الشَّمْسِ عِنْدَ غُرُوبِهَا إِلَّا لِفُرْقَةٍ حُسْنِ ذَاكَ الْمَنْظَرِ

Many an evening have I remained, watching closely the moment
 The days grant them generously after much difficulty
 In a garden, we obtain from them every desire
 when you breathe it, it gives the scent of ambergris
 The birds sing, and the lawn-seats are folded up
 while the sun dances on in a yellow chemise
 The gardens float between adornment in silver and gold
 and the flowers, becoming dirhams and dinars
 The face of the sun yellows as it westers
 only because it departs from the beauty of that scene

A stanza in the meter *majzū' ar-ramal* by the poet Muhammad b. Ali al-Awsī, better known as al-^cAqrab ("The Scorpion") [Benjallun pp. 83-84]

قُمْ تَرَى شَمْسَ الْعِشْيَةِ	كَالذَّهَبِ فَوْقَ الرِّيحَيْنِ
أَكْسَتْ بِحُلَّةٍ يَهْيَةِ	وَوَشَحَتْ كُلَّ الْبَسَاتِينِ
يَا مُدِيرَ كَاسِ الْحُمَيَّةِ	قُمْ اغْتَنِمِ هَذِهِ الْمَحَاسِنِ
يَوْمَنَا يَوْمٌ عَجِيبٌ	زَاهِرٌ ذُو نَفْحَاتٍ
وَالْحَبِيبُ مَعَ حَبِيبِهِ	وَالزَّمَانُ أَقْبَلَ مَوَاتِي

Wait a moment, you will see the evening sun
like gold above the foliage fragrant
Adorning the whole garden
and dressing it in splendid raiment
O master of the wine-glass
stop and seize these charming moments
This day of ours is a wonderful time
a shining time, full of fragrance
And the lover is with his beloved
as the time draws closer to my end

A *zajal* stanza [Benjallun, p. 100]

شَمْسُ الْعِشْيِ لَبَسَتْ نُحُورُ	قَبْلَ الْأُفُورِ	أَنْبَاتُ بَالْسُلُورِ
الْدَّهْرِ بِهَا يَصُورُ	وَهُوَ يَقُولُ	ذَهَبَتْ جَمِيعُ الْأَحْزَانِ
أَهْلُ الْجَمَالِ لَا تَزُونَ	تَسْبِي الْعُقُورِ	كَأَنَّهُمْ غَزَلَانِ
مَا بَيْنَ مَحَافِلِ ظُرَافِ	وَنَفْسِ لُطَافِ	فِي وَادِي فَاسٍ جَلَسِ
وَلَيْسَ فِيهِمْ خِلَافِ	سِوَى الْعَفَافِ	زَهْوِ الْغِنَاءِ وَالْكَاسِ

The evening sun wears wasting
before it sets
it announces glad forgetfulness
The moment rules over it,
and now it says
“All the sadness has fled.”
Beautiful people carry on
stealing my sense
like gazelles of the desert
We find in parties elegant
genial friends
sitting by the River Fez
There is no discord among them
except abstinence:
the pleasure of song and goblet

A *muwashshah* stanza [Benjallun p. 101]

شمس العشي قد غربت واستعبرت عيني من الضرقا
 على الشفق سظرت حين غيبت زاد العشي شوقا
 حتى الطيور قد غردت وترنمت ترتي على الورقا
 جاوبتها باشتها قف نعتبر بالله عليك مهلا
 قال المليح زين الصغار فز بالنظر كب المدام واملا

The evening sun has gone to the west

and tears my eyes shed

from our separating

They trace lines, out of fear;

when she is made to disappear

the lover still longs in waiting

Until the birds have chattered,

chirped and twittered

among the leaves, lamenting

I replied to her, all openly:

Stop! I warn plainly —

go slow, by Allāh's will!

Said the little ornament, the beauty:

This view you now enjoy,

pour the wine and have your fill!