

**“POETRY, FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE,
AND NATURE IN MODERN SOUTH
ARABIAN POETRY”**

Sam Liebhaber

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“Language and Nature in Southern and Eastern Arabia”

University of Qatar, Doha

From the *mu'allāqa* of Imru' al-Qays

As far as we could tell the right hand of its downpour rose over Qaṭan and its left over al-Sitār and Yadhbul

عَلَا قَطْنَا بِالشَّيْمِ أَيْمَنُ صَوْبِهِ
وَأَيْسَرُهُ عَلَى السِّتَارِ فَيَذْبُلِ

It began shedding its load of rain around Kutayfa, flattening the *kanahbul* trees to the ground.

فَأَضْحَى يَسُحُّ الْمَاءَ حَوْلَ كُنَيْفَةِ
يَكْبُ عَلَى الْأَذْقَانِ دَوْحَ الْكَنْهَبِلِ

...

At Taymā' it did not leave [standing] the trunk of a single palm nor any large building except [one] built of stone.

وَتَيْمَاءَ لَمْ يَتْرُكْ بِهَا جِدْعَ نَخْلَةٍ
وَلَا أُجْمًا إِلَّا مَشِيدًا بَجَنْدَلِ

...

In the onslaught of its deluge Thabīr was like an elder of the people wrapped up in a striped cloak.

كَأَنَّ ثَبِيرًا فِي عَرَانِينَ وَبَلِيهِ
كَبِيرُ أَنْاسٍ فِي بَجَادٍ مُزْمَلِ

In the morning the top of the peaks of al-Mujaymir was like the whirl of a spindle from the torrent and the debris [swirling round them].

كَأَنَّ ذُرَى رَأْسِ الْمُجَيْمِرِ غُدْوَةً
مِنْ السَّيْلِ وَالْأَغْثَاءِ فَلَكَّةٌ مِغْزَلِ

...

In the morning the finches of the valleys had been given drink of the finest wine – wine fiery as pepper – [no noisy were they],

كَأَنَّ مَكَكِيَّ الْجَوَاءِ غُدْيَةً
صُبْحَنَ سُلَافًا مِنْ رَحِيقِ مُفْلَلِ

...

In the evening the beasts of prey were [lying] there drowned in its furthest reaches like bulbous plants uprooted [and twisted in unreal shapes].

كَأَنَّ السِّبَاعَ فِيهِ غَرَقَى عَشِيَّةً
بَارُجَائِهِ الْقُصْوَى أَنْابِيشُ عُنْصَلِ

Gunfight in Ništawn

1) *ʿāšer šeh drīyet lā // be-rḥōyeb d-ğarbēt // we-ttāḥawdī d-mesḵōt*

I have a friend who doesn't know // living in the western towns // at the edges of Maskōt

2) *we-mḥabbī hayya beh // has yqōbel we-šhēr // zmī waḵb de-šfōt*

My friend, I say “welcome” // when he draws near and shows up // “Give me a summary of the news!”

3) *ʿāmūr wezmenk men ešidḵ // hel d-ber ġrōh ḥlōk // ān tẓōt mnī ḥlōt*

He says: I'll give you the truth // of everything that happened there // if you'll take the story from me

4) *neğm ertābūb w-hen // men ḥōmer d-ḥeklī // nēweh ʿādeh ān t'būt*

The rain-star about to burst and thunder // at the edge of the eastern clouds // the downpour is about to come

5) *ḥemlet arḵās // men eremš de-kšē // yeḥlīl enebyūt*

They fall upon Arḵās // from mouths of the black thunderheads // they come through the roofs of the houses

6) *ār ḥlūṭem šeh nğūm // men ʿāsef de-ryih // we-tḵawleb d-bīlōt*

Other rain-stars have arrived with them // on the storms of winds // that become like those of desert

7) *we-mḥōyel l-arḵās // we-mzōbī w-mekleyt // we-hzōyem d-mešlōt*

It rains on Arḵās // and Mzōbī and Maklayt // and Hzōyam and Mašlōf

8) *šeyyet y'ağībem bīs // w-yešlūles bād eğed // we-k-ğēma de-ğḥōt*

They enjoy their reputation // they carry it from their ancestors // and from every direction

9) *šahfāyīn nšōrem tēs // hel eğēma de-dwēl // we-b-sets wešlōt*

Journalists broadcast it // in every country // when the news comes on at its hour

10) *w-ğrāyed b-sūḵeyn // ke-d-nūka d-īstōm // šōref de-mḥarēh drōt*

The newspapers in the markets // everyone who comes buys them // about the fame of Mahra that keeps on coming around

11) *we-ḵbōyel de-mḥarēh // ġrōysen ʿākīd // mīwet mōh w-law ḥyōt*

The tribes of al-Mahra // their word is certain // whether dead or alive

12) *w-el-ktīr ber šeh ḥbēr // men ʿāšer ḥawlī // ġōhez be-ssəyeryōt*

The Kathīrī also have the news // from the very moment it happened // and are ready with their cars

13) *we-d-berh mḥektīb // men hel bālī meḥḥaṭeyt // we-mḵeyyed b-eyyōt*

That which is, is written // written in ink by our God // and bound by His *āyāt*

14) *we-šrōma we-krēm // šī mğawnī men eḥawf // b-kermeym ḥawrōt*

And now, O Generous One, // I have a refuge from fear // in the Black Mountain [of Karmeym Ḥawrōt]

From the poem “Atop the Peak of Tarbūt”

17) *fōn eġawreb ezernīw // bāl ezōyed de-ġbēr //*
zehmōten le-ġrūb

18) *edhībeh yeṭmūm // le-ġdēd ebelyōt // we-k-*
ṣamt yekbūb

19) *we-ġzāb eżeymet kā // we-ġyīm l-ḥār wāḥ // w-hel*
men eṭma ksūb

I’ve known from before the thundering rain clouds // the one that brings great quantities of dust // sheets of rain from water-buckets

Its flood covers the earth // even up to the ancient highlands // with violence (the flood) rolls down

Its roiling surge encompasses the land // sending clouds over all of humankind // and snatches away everything that is valuable.

From the poem “A Three Way Conflict”

28) *tbeššīren beh mābūr // we-mhawfī d-mehrūt*

Wādī Mābūr rejoices in it, and so do the ends of Wādī Mahrūt.

29) *w-bir āmer yeḥmōl // wet eššōret lebdūt*

The son of Āmr is steadfast when evil befalls him,

30) *ekdeyr brek eṣawl // we-ṭmōnet tekkərfūt*

[Even] muddy water in a ravine, the thirsty drink it.

31) *w-šūmīt w-heḡzā // seh w-fōrī hal ḡgūt*

Wādī Šūmīt and Wādī Haḡza, whenever they and Wādī Fōrī are assembled,

32) *bīsen emderrākīn // we-kkəwesseb de-šmūt*

In them are men who shoulder their responsibilities, victors in raids who stick together.

From the poem “The Battle of ’Ākəbbōt”

1) *hel ysūken bir s’īd // beyn bwōdī we-hrīt // we-kkwōrī de-mhārūt*

Where the son of S’īd lives // between the deserts of Hrīt // and the feeder ravines of Mahrūt

2) *we-ḵṣeylet ’ōfyōt // we-dġawt əmāmālēt // le-ḵnawṭer de-zhūt*

The cease-fire expired // the “field has sprouted” // at the irrigation channels, it has grown tall (and abundant)

3) *nūka be-ḥbēr drey // le-mġawma de-ḥḥəġīr // tōba be-štīrfūt*

They brought strange news // to all of those assembled // the possessors of excellent, exalted virtues

4) *fōn heġs ertəbūb // d-īšṣawten le-ffəlēk // hebtā w-lē sbūt*

And after the passion [of S’īd] became dense [like the stars] // he listens carefully for the appointed time // whether it is delayed or comes earlier

5) *tē ḥbēr ġrōh w-fār // sōyer ke-mneddābīn // we-ṣfeth ṭeyrūt*

Until the news came and spread // going with the messengers // and its information flew all around

From the poem “Atop the Peak of ʿArbūt”

7) *we-ylēbī w-ṭerbūt // w-bālīt helfəlōf // we-kwōrī d-ātūb*

At Wādī Ylēbī and the mountain of ʿArbūt [where the Ğēdeḥ tribe lives] // that of the narrows and broad expanses // (whose) feeder-canyons are joined together

8) *we-freḥsen zhōb // men kēṭer de-dġā // tē bweššer ertābūb*

Their happiness is readied // from the quantity of its strength // when the good news reaches them, they are eager.

9) *we-šrōme hōh šrifk // l-fertēk enēzḥeyt // šīs trōkeb we-slūb*

Now I’ve changed places // to towering Fartak [where the Kelšāt tribes lives] // She has gotten ready and has her ways (of fighting).

10) *ber āmōr eḥāwlō `ī // men khēn mhawwāyīn // bōlī men škī w-ḡūb*

Their women and children have said // they are fearless from long ago // a people of the sword and shield.

11) *w-rezḥeyt w-hāḥyōt // šim etābel we-fkāt // we-ntōšī meḡlūb*

Wādī Reẓḥeyt and its hills // turned out beating on their war drums // the once-conquered are dancing.

The Desire of the Four Poets

1a) *sād dā-līḥawfed // nḥālī ḡōyef*

If only [I were] the one following the tracks underneath Ḡōyef

1b) *ām sēn de-ḡtōma // we-ḡyūḡ d-īdōlef*

When [if] they are gathering [fem. pl] and the men are playing the jumping game.

2a) *sād dā-līḥawfed // nḥālī žālā*

If only [I were] the one following the tracks underneath the *wādī*'s side walls

2b) *yehžāž eḥḥəbeybet // tettōba eḥālā*

He picks up the traces of his special she-camel, as she goes from tree to tree

3a) *sād dā-līḥawfed // yermah w-ḡellenseh*

If only [I were] the one following the tracks at Wādī Ramāh and of its collected material and debris

3b) *yešbeyled ḥōdī // d-mōn ḥellenseh*

Getting information at the *wādī*'s edges of those who are its inhabitants.

4a) *sād dā-līḥawfed // nḥālī bir šbōneh*

If only [I were] the one following the tracks beneath Bir Šebōneh

4b) *'ākā del-īzōmel // we-ykūn be-mkōneh*

A land that doesn't migrate and remains in its place.

The Battle of 'Ākəbbōt

- 36) *we-ṣrōma we-krēm // hēs əlēhen ərtaḇūb // w-mehṣāt l-ḡārəffūt* And now *ōdī we-krēm krēm //* when the melodies gather // a reservoir that can't be emptied by scooping
- 37) *men ta'mērem ənsəkōt // d-'ār ḥmō brək sōs // w-mehṣāt mhaḥsūt* [Beware] of saying that it has dried up // indeed there is water in its deepest bedrock // and the reservoir has been re-dug
- 38) *wet nkūšes tentəkūš // ke-mḥawreḡ de-rbā // we-mdīt dōtəyūt* If it is searched for, it is found // [as though it were a well] at the time of the departure of Rbā // and the *mdīt* of Dōṭa
- 39) *kem men ṭīṭ w-seh ṭmīt // mnōhel ṣedrūt* How many she-camels when she [sic] is thirsty // goes forth from the streams [quenched of thirst]
- 40) *wet ṭwōren thāḡawb // beyn ərāmel we-ḥṭāt // hēs əbīr messənūt* Sometimes the “muse” migrates // between the sandy plain and the pasture land // like a spring from which people habitually draw water
- 41) *w-adh ḡēza medḥeyḡ // we-bḡāt d-šāḡawt* And Wādī Ḡēza is still well-travelled // and the place of Šāḡawt
- 42) *hād ṣeydet de-ḥḥəlē // dīk tehyūm 'ākā // le-hnefs we-ḥlūt* No one but the desert gazelle // the one who roams the land // by herself in the desolate waste
- 43) *bēr thawzer əlebbōd // ke-rdōten d-rīḥeyn // wet əḡēs əškerfūt* She has known the hunter // when the wind blows back and forth // when she smells his sweat
- 44) *tehrīren b-āzīb / tē men hāl ḡeyṭāṭ / we-ḥrō əḡteybūt* She takes off at a run // until she has disappeared // and her head has completely disappeared.