

doit prendre pour ne pas se laisser tenter par la corruption due à son statut et servir en quelque sorte de médiateur entre le pouvoir et la fin de celui-ci, la "ruine" qui ici doit être considérée comme "ruine" politique³⁷.

A travers les quelques exemples tirés des *ʿUyūn al-aḥbār*, nous pensons que les sources dites "littéraires" constituent une catégorie de textes indispensables pour qui s'intéresse à l'histoire du politique et des structures du pouvoir en Islam médiéval. Nous sommes cependant conscients, qu'au gré de la lecture du texte d'Ibn Qutayba, le lecteur familiarisé avec ce type de littérature se rendra compte que les emprunts à d'autres écrivains sont assez nombreux. De plus, il serait indispensable de ne jamais perdre de vue la quantité et la qualité des données contenues dans les *ʿUyūn al-aḥbār* au sens où, comme dans bien des oeuvres d'*adab*, il faut essayer de faire la différence entre les notices relevant de la fiction et celles en relation avec le fait réel³⁸. Il n'en reste pas moins que l'ouvrage d'Ibn Qutayba représente une source de choix, à mi-chemin entre littérature et encyclopédisme, qui fournit plusieurs informations sur certaines institutions politico-administratives musulmanes.

³⁷ Le motif littéraire de la "ruine" matérielle relative à la continuité, ou non, dans l'exercice du pouvoir et la démonstration de ses représentations monumentales, a fait l'objet d'études intéressantes. On verra par exemple, J. Dakhliā, *Le divan des rois*, pp.155-189 dans un chapitre intitulé : "Topologie politique du bâti et de la ruine".

³⁸ Sur cette question que l'on peut considérer comme étant à mi-chemin entre littérature (fiction) et histoire (réalité), voir H. Kilpatrick, "The 'Genuine' Ash'ab. The Relativity of Fact and Fiction in Early *Adab* Texts", dans S. Leder (ed.), *Story-Telling in the Framework of Non-Fictional Arabic Literature*, Wiesbaden 1998, pp. 94-117.

BARBARA MICHALAK - PIKULSKA

Fī kaffī 'Uṣfūra zarqā'
(THE BLUE SPARROW ON MY PALM) -
THURAYA AL-BAQSAMI'S POETICAL TEXTS

It is no easy task to write about the poetry of Thuraya Al-Baqṣami, it constituting no mean challenge. Thuraya has been writing poetry almost since childhood. During her period of study in Moscow she even wrote poetry in Russian, and upon returning to Kuwait she had her own poetry column entitled 'Nuqūsh' (Sketches) within the pages of the *Al-Waṭan* newspaper. Since 1994 she has published her texts in the journal *Al-Qabas* in a column entitled 'Nuṣūṣ wa rīsha' (Texts and Brush). She herself illustrates her poetry with drawings. The verse that is found in the daily press is hugely popular because of its specific and symbolic vision of feelings and human desires as well as for the criticism of Kuwaiti and Arab society that it contains.

Thuraya Al-Baqṣami, so it appears, has yet to develop a definite attitude towards the phenomenon of her own poetical creativity. These works can be neither considered poetry nor prose. The matter is left open for the reader. It seems that they are works written in poetical prose in which one may perceive the beauty of poetic language, while the author herself feels herself a poet. Thuraya writes as such in the forewords to her first volume of poetry published in Kuwait in 1999 and entitled *Fī kaffī 'Uṣfūra zarqā'* (The Blue Sparrow on My Palm): 'These are the travel memoirs of a woman upon whose palm sang a blue sparrow. In her hair there grow wild mountain flowers. It is a pleasant game with a text which drags me from a warm bed in order to seat me at my desk for work. How often I escaped to this game when the brushes, colours and canvases of my pictures were helpless to express my feelings. In the 1990s I travelled a lot in connection with my exhibitions all over the world. Airports and planes replaced the cool of the room. I wrote my texts amidst the noise of these trips, and this writing became my enjoyable everydayness and my primary work.'

These texts came to life on the cold plastic benches of various airports and stations, the insides of a crazy carriage that subdued English meadows, as equally the lanes of Brussels. They were texts dedicated to a man who carried my love like a talisman and to a woman whom I created from a dream, that I surrounded with pain and gave her back the sun after I had placed a bracelet on her legs.¹

There is no narcissism in Thuraya's poetry, there are mysteries though. Her thoughts create an image which changes into experience. An experience that can relate to all and everywhere in the world. The author tries to relate every poem to the definite time and place it arose in. She writes poetry everywhere, as is borne out by the footnotes under the works. The volume under analysis covers works written in the period from 1994 to 1999 in various places in the world: from Kuwait through Europe and America.

I would like, in realizing the lack of temporal perspective in viewing this form of artistic utterance on the part of Thuraya Al-Baqsamī, to here embody besides the dryness of analysis the magic of the first moments spent on reading the poetry.

Who therefore is Thuraya Al-Baqsamī writing for?

'I write for the woman who is the most important thought for me. I assembled these thoughts on board aeroplanes. I write for the young maiden who fell from the sky through an ozone hole, for the masks which fell on Sūq an-nakhāsa, for the saint who intoxicated me with the wine of his eyes.'² She also does not forget about men. As Muḥammad Bāssām Sarmīnī writes: 'Thuraya attempts to paint with the brush of an artist the throne of masculinity in the way she imagines it and desires it abundant in love and holy desires.'³

The whole volume of poetry is divided into four subsections:

1. *Ji'tu lil'alām fī muḥara ṣāmīta* (I Came to the World in a Silent March) (p. 15),

2. *Imrā' 'ājīza bijināḥ kabīr* (The Helpless Woman with a Huge Wing) (p. 85),

3. *Qalb mumaddad 'alā maṣṭabat maḍbaḥ* (The Heart Spread on the Slaughtering Platform) (p. 127),

4. *Ḥina tajū' al-'aṣfīr* (Where the Sparrows are Hungry) (p. 163).

¹ Thuraya Al-Baqsamī, *Ḥikāya nuṣūṣ*, Kuwait 1999, pp. 10-13.

² *Ibid.*

³ Muḥammad Bāssām Sarmīnī, *Fī kaffī 'uṣfūra zarqā'*. *Khaṭ'at Thuraya Al-Baqsamī al-laḍīda*, "Al-Kuwayt", No. 200, Kuwait 2000, pp. 24-25.

Through the beautifully poetic title of the whole volume *Fī kaffī 'Uṣfūra zarqā'* (The Blue Sparrow on My Palm) the author hopes to present us with a guide through her collection that is the little blue sparrow which is her inspiration.

The largest number of poems devoted to a woman are to be found in the first part. It is worth looking at the interesting work *Qarār imrā'* (A Woman's Decision)⁴

*Another woman, who
lives within me
decided to leave
she sold her lottery tickets
and next year's tights
Took the coffee dregs
from the bottom of the cup
and read her future in the tail
of the cloud
she took fear...
lost faith
and cancelled her decision to leave*

Kuwait 1997

This poem could only have been written by an emancipated woman who fears neither defeat nor risk. The work reminds one of European poetry existentialist in mood. It is a short poetical report on the state of a woman who reveals some other personage - her alter ego, who yearns to achieve on her own account her life plans. She thrashes about, checks the appropriateness of the decision, she reads the coffee dregs trying to penetrate the sentence of fate yet gives up on the attempt. This poem forcibly confirms the existence of another I in man, who prompts, gives pointers, believes in fortune telling and calls forth various psychological and emotional states in what would appear to be ordinary life.

The work entitled *Lugha khaṣṣa* (A Remarkable Tongue)⁵ is a poetical impression relevant to the fascination with somebody.

*Your eyes are a remarkable tongue
engraved on a stone slab
the song*

⁴ Thuraya Al-Baqsamī, *Fī kaffī 'uṣfūra zarqā'*, Kuwait 1999, p. 38.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

*sung by the young girls of spring
the legend
which was created amidst the winter stoves
your eyes
I am tired with describing them
I have hidden them
in the saddle of my she camel
beyond the rays of your eyes
extracted like a flash of lightning
from the dome of the sky*

Bahrain, November 1994

The matters here presented are unclear, the expression of fascination genuine, yet the point of enchantment or charisma is hidden, it adds magic and the impressive feature of struggle or adventure in the search for meaning. Though it seems to be an allegorical image of eyesight than an actual experience.

A filigree miniature composed of a mere four lines is the work entitled 'Awda (Return).⁶ Although it was written in Muscat it recalls in its construction a Japanese haiku. The surprising culminating point and the condensed content oscillate around youth, forgetfulness and recollection.

*I will return to my youth
which I have forgotten
in the depths of the cupboard
of sandalwood*

Muscat, May 1999

Another poem entitled *Wilāda* (Birth)⁷ appears to be an autobiographical song of Thuraya herself who was conceived in a womb filled with ink.

*I was not born in one moment
I did not steal time nor wasted
a minute
I came to this world in a silent march
I learnt to cry
under the skin
and cry in a womb*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

filled with ink
Kuwait, April 1996

This work is existential reflection. It contains reflections concerning human births renewed by the latest experience. It talks of the courage of unlost time, hidden by the cry, shout and determination of the fragile future of human existence.

Janāza mulawwana (The Colourful Funeral)⁸ is an impressional poem saturated to its core with elements of quick-wittedness. Here is striking the linking of feminine quick-wittedness with the association of maritime phenomena, even sea holiness. The poet understands himself and his feelings in the slightly archaically comprehended sphere of Venus. This is not superficial shrewdness, but a phenomenon of unity with the whole live world. The author in basing herself on sensual feeling not on the reality of the real world and oscillates between despair and joy, the fear of lose and the delight of living sensation right up to death.

*I place on the border of the lips
of the funeral
coloured paper
white doves
broken wings
* * **

*I am dying from the insensibility of small kisses
the warmth of these kisses escalates the spirit of dreams
I celebrate
the sacred sea
* * **

*I am dying breathing out of yearning
the breath of love
I embrace the earth's bosom
I feel the mud in the non-existent river
I cleanse myself with drops of warm rain
Madly I seek your lips
to officially announce
the ceremony
of my colourful funeral*

Cairo, July 1995

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

The poem *Qaddīs* (The Saint)⁹ may surprise more than one reader. In Europe one does not think of men in such terms, besides which sensitivity is not totally associated, or understood, in relation to the purity of a saint. Through the sensitivity of desire there beats however the fear as to the durability of the fervour of feelings.

*You are a saint
And I, a woman, give into great passion
You are a saint
And your face is crowned with love
You saw in the field
Swarthy sheaves
You are a saint
And I, a woman, am a binder of desire
I dreamt of your touch
I feared that the heat
of the passion in your eyes
would die*

Doha, Qatar, January 1994

The next poem entitled *Shawq al-wisāda* (The Thorny Pillow)¹⁰ is its own form of triptych where the individual parts are closely linked forming a thematic and consistent whole. It talks of the yearning and restlessness of expectation. A woman, as if in reality, as if in a dream, sees a man, and the thorns are as if the symbols of expectation, the desire for something new, the bestowing of sense to life and the submersion within it. We see a vision or may be a taster of the vision of the Angel which is waiting in order to overcome all of life's suffering.

*The pillow you sleep on
is a case of thorns
The thorn wounding my cheek
has bloodied my afternoon nap
* * *
My eyes are open
like the lips of an empty cup
on its edges are settled the remains of black coffee
And I am taken by a strange sensation*

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

*for I saw a man
who had forgotten to button his shirt
* * **

*The thorny pillow
wounded my other cheek
Instead of blood the smell of old perfumes that issued forth
revived my memory
I dream about the angel of dreams
Beating its celestial wings
created far away and smashing the ceiling of the room
filled with suffering
grows from the body
of the pillow*

Kuwait, April 1994

Another poem entitled *Hikāya min madīna* (Story from the Town)¹¹ is a poetic note upon the moment, an account of its fulfilment and appears to be an ordinary description of the meeting of a woman and man. Ordinary, yet extraordinary in the delicacy of the lovers' feelings. There is no tragedy here, and life extends a friendly hand.

*Man and woman
Met
On a crowded street
At a bus stop
In wide open doors
They left behind them a long queue
They met
In the theatre auditorium
Embracing at the table laid for supper
The woman was radiant
While the man made eyes
The town fell silent
The crowd dispersed
The hawkers voices dropped
She swallowed loudly
And the moon returned a kiss
Delicately... friendly*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

*On the woman's forehead
And the man left a trace of his reflection
On the surface of the tarmacked street*

Doha, Qatar, January 1994

Kitābāt majnūna (Crazy Notes)¹² is a work creating the impression of the noting of a real experience, richly characterized by the delight and elation containing lush poetic ties and far-reaching, even historical relations. One can clearly see the subtle, though clearly sensual motif, seeking definitions of states in the beauty of nature and things.

*In your eyes there is reflected the magic
of former kingdoms
the golden sands of the desert
the wine of longing
which matured in the barrels
the wine of longing, which made my head spin
I yearn to touch you
I fear
that you will change into a date god
that you will run between my fingers
like a river of wine
and I'll be intoxicated by your sweetness*

Doha, Qatar, January 1994,

In the short poem entitled *Falsafa* (Philosophy)¹³ she somewhat perversely talks at length about philosophy, in a woman's, though unusually mature way. Philosophy capitulates before love despite the consciousness of the unreality of fulfilment.

*Come and talk of our feelings
We will tug at the embrace of the night
the necklace of our kisses has been stolen
Come we will cover ourselves in our passion
dawn will dispense us
and the loud sigh of love
Come I will love you for the thousandth time
My dreams*

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 73.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

Are an unfulfilable reality
Doha, Qatar, January 1994

Al-'ashā' al-akhīra (The Last Supper)¹⁴ is the next poem to deal with some difficult moment in the life experiences of man and woman. The mysterious declaration of a man's love is presented in symbolic language. 'Young virgins' being at the bottom of memory characterize the primordial world of love. The world, lasting in the memory of events, is keenly returned to. Something from the border of reality, fantasy and dreams. So also is the poetic, melancholic, beautifully painted end of the poem.

*I love you
He said three times
and immersed himself to the depths of memory
where young virgins
crouched
in dark corners
* * **

*The basalmes flowers
The yellow leaves
Climb on the balcony
* * **

*Which the drops of rain cleansed
the remains of the candle flame
painted the picture
of their last supper.*

Bahrain, June 1994

The work *Mu'ādala* (Equal Rights)¹⁵ is saturated with love. The reality of life is here not taken into consideration. A tree is here a beautiful symbol - the tree of wisdom, and possibly the tree that is the inspiration upon which the symbols of love are engraved. And as if with the motto *Amor vincit omnia* - love overcomes all - the poet leaves the past forgotten.

*We were three
We embraced the tree
We carved in its bark
a heart
an arrow*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

*our initials
One of us
left from the frame of the picture
we were left a twosome
We embraced
And forgot
about the tree.*

13th February 1996

We become acquainted with the rich personal world of the author's imagination inspired by the religious and cultural distinctness of Macedonia in the poem *I'atirāf* (Confirmation).¹⁶ The mood is confessional and lofty. Despite the nostalgic introduction, the undertone is rather optimistic. Everything can come to the aid of suffering, memory, the marriages of hearts when cited in the name of love, even if buried.

*I acknowledge the names
of all the angels
hovering around
my sanctuary
maintaining their nuptials
on the gate of my heart
they have lit candles
around the grave of my love
I acknowledge
those saints
with begging eyes
on the one hand suffering
exerting an impression
on the cheeks
the breaking dawn
stretched over the surface
over the houses of Ochryt*

Macedonia 1994

In the poem *As'ila ṣaghīra* (Little Questions)¹⁷ there are asked questions full of yearning and love. Although the mood of the poem does not generate sadness it however saturated with melancholy and a certain sense

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

of impossibility, or equally unfulfillment. For what can be more cheerless than 'the caravan will not reach the oasis'.

*In what way
If you do not find time
to write on the plaits of the cloud
fiery words of love
How will you send me pages
whose letters show sorrow
Why
Why will the seriously thirsty
Caravan
Not reach the oasis
Will not bring the incense
Will not seek shade under the tent top
But dreams of the shade of the palm
Washington, November 1994*

In the poem *Zuhūr al-azqa* (The Side Street Flowers)¹⁸ there blossom the immortal flowers of poetry, love and passion despite the sense of being lost within the stone desert of loneliness.

*I sow my loneliness
on the pavement
of the stony side streets
and my memories of his eyes
raised to my hand
his lips
left
a forgotten song
my troubled heart
crazy
hurries
in the winding side streets
on the walls of houses
that are grey
he draws the symbols
of his burning love
* * **

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

*The gypsy flower seller
loves my poetry
she gives me a red flower
my beloved's eyes
shine
with the former longing
shinning
like two deserted stars
the red flowers
creeping between the sides
of the stone side streets.*

Brussels, May 1994

In the poem *Nīsyān* (Oblivion)¹⁹ a woman complains about her man who forgets about everything, even about the lifelong pledge of love symbolized by a blue stone. In desiring to maintain everything and to recall it the woman gives herself over to reminiscences. She recalls the terrace with the view of the sea and the rapturous state of experiencing great love.

*It seems that you have forgotten
The shapes of the town's minarets
The name of your mother
Date of birth
The streets of one's youth
The blue stone
You have put aside child's clothes
How could you forget
the dreams of my town embroidered
like the skirt of a gypsy dancer
I saw your eyes
At the bottom of the cup of morning coffee
I have not forgotten
what the date looked like
bathed in rain
Your eyes
stole their shine
The sinful dream*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.

*The head is heavy in a dreamy prison
Leaning towards your shoulders
I still remember
The old song
The terrace with the view of the sea
The blue stone
burning candle
birth certificate
night of love.*

Brussels, May 1994

The poem *Ḥakibat al-musāfira* (A Traveller's Bag)²⁰ is the author's impressions from a journey. This concerns not only an actual journey of the author's but travel in general. The heroine knows how to travel, and moreover possesses the gift of the creative existence in it. Yet she does not hide also a feeling of loneliness. She understands the imperfection of the life she discovers while travelling, in the world and in herself.

*The great crowd of the town
swallows small bodies
a woman travelling
possessing bags and a passport
with a permanent stamp
ugly towns and others
beautiful
A helpless woman with a great wing
new faces
with blue confusion
with which she washes the dissatisfaction
of the night
* * *
she dreams of towns without soldiers
of an airport without barriers
of women without make-up
and men without ties
she dreams of a greater wing
she flies...
she is flying high*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88.

*in escape from the fall
into the bag of the travelling woman
The airport in Istanbul, October 1994*

The poem *Imrā' likulli al-fuṣūl* (A Woman for All Seasons)²¹ tells of a woman and her courageous love like from The Thousand and One Nights. It talks of a woman who yields to love fully, without fear, full of the joys of existence and fulfilment.

*You are a woman for all seasons
You get made-up
you bravely
tell your mirror fairy tales
about the woman who sailed the boat
of desire
planted the flower of love
in the poetry of night
came without an appointment
showed her love in disarray
she clasped her hands
when her beloved appeared
at dawn.*

In the Plane from Kuwait to Paris, May 1994

The next richly metaphoric poem entitled *Wahaj unthā* (Female Flame)²² can be interpreted as a song about a great beautiful love, freedom and bewitchment

*A woman was born from the flame
of the sun
her waist was surrounded by the shackles
of love
a red rope
from the sun's plaits
the honey of her eyes gleams
with a glowing
shine
like the light of a frightened star*

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 120.

*escaping from the embraces of the sky
Shariqa 1995*

Akhtām al-hujra (The Suffering of Separation)²³ is equally a poem with elements of sensual, passionate love. Everything is so saturated with love - as the poem states that one's real lot is of no consequence. The future is also without significance, while the experiences of loneliness still do not darken the moment of elation.

*All the seats
of the Sofa
Stuffed cushions
make up the contents
of the Room
* * **

*The cold bed
warmed bodies
Meet
so the Moon
is full
* * **

*The warm woman touches the lucky card
Searches for the face of the king
the discarded sceptre
In order to lie next to the body of another woman
full of love
rounded like the forbidden fruit
Her soul has yet to experience suffering
loneliness*

Kuwait, April 1994

The short poem *Maḥzūra* (The Forbidden)²⁴ is allegorical in character. In a veiled way it shows the blush of the innocent romantic frolics of lovers.

*Night descends
on the cheek of dawn
It leaves a pert kiss*

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

*The cheek reddens
The other remains
Embarrassed
And awaits
the forbidden
Kiss*

10th of February 1996

Thuraya Al-Baqsamī draws intensely not only on Arab cultural experience. In the work 'Ayd al-'ushshāq (The Lovers' Feast)²⁵ she describes valentines, their mood and accompanying love, which 'sows its peace among the cafes'. The poem is simple and very realistic in expression. It could have arisen anywhere geographically, for everywhere there are girls and red roses.

*On Lovers' Day
Valentines awoke
Hearts blossomed
School boys gave out
Red flowers
to spring maidens
Their cheeks reddened
with embarrassment
Love sowed
its peace
among the street
cafes
Love played out
its eternal symphony*

Kuwait, February 1996

The short four-line poem entitled *Hikāya* (A Tale)²⁶ strikes one with its artistry of poetic contraction of methods. We observe economy of image and metaphor. The women lack beauty, while the men courage in utterance, children whereas have a threatened perspective for childhood. All of which is accompanied by an ominous heat wave. The poem appears as a valuable and apt characterization of contemporary times. Times which

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

neither suit by their nature the author, nor bear well for future generations.

*Women without lashes
men without mouths
children have sold their childhood
to the burnt sun with powder.*

The poems included here show Thuraya Al-Baqsamī as someone freely moving within the poetic genre. She likes, and wants, to write about everything that she values, does not shun personal reflection and her own feelings. Her poetic output is richly endowed in subjects and feelings. She is bold in her assertions, and in the poetic trance she undertakes the subjects that surround her. She speaks poetically about ordinary life, for which there is no recipe. Muḥammad Bāssām Sarmīnī thus characterized the works contained in the volume: 'There texts move within ecstasy, love and subjectivism. The writer has liberated herself through her sensitivity from the imprisonment of all that is personal for the sake of all that is human. The poet uses well the art of irony, and particularly irony directed towards the world which looks at life with half an eye. Thuraya sharply criticizes modern times full of falseness and consumption, where man himself kills the beauty of feeling. The author places the greatest emphasis upon woman, defends her doggedly with claws and fights for her freedom, she describes that beautiful female world.'²⁷

Another Arab critic Maḥmūd Mursī evaluates the volume as follows: 'The texts are something more than a poetic display. They are images that transcend the customs and traditions of displays. They are free from the frames of place and the external light which as if find their specific presence. They are saturated with colour yet remain words.'²⁸

²⁷ Muḥammad Bāssām Sarmīnī, *op.cit.*

²⁸ Muḥammad Mursī, 'Uṣfūra fī al-trānzīt, Kullu Al-'Usra, "Sharjah", No. 359, 30 Aug. 2000.