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“Deal gently with the young man”*: Love of Boys in Medieval Hebrew Poetry of Spain

By Norman Roth

Medieval Hebrew secular poetry apparently had its beginning in Muslim Spain under the direct influence of secular Arabic poetry, which reached its zenith in Iraq and continued to develop in al-Andalus. The secular Hebrew poetry produced elsewhere, in Egypt, North Africa, and Italy, was very likely influenced by the poetry written in Spain. This development of secular poetry was part of a conscious renaissance of the Hebrew language, itself a reaction to Muslim influences.¹ Hebrew poetry and literature in Spain was not, of course, confined to the Muslim period, but its greatest peaks of development occurred then. Accordingly I shall concentrate on that era, giving particular attention to the four greatest Hebrew poets of Spain: Samuel Ibn Nagrillah, Solomon Ibn Gabirol, Moses Ibn Ezra, and Judah ha-Levi.

Medieval Hebrew poetry demands of the modern reader a monumental effort of patience and erudition; the language is difficult, the imagery highly allusive. This is particularly true of the poetry written in Spain, not least because the Bible was so well known there. As is evident from a variety of sources, knowledge of the Hebrew Bible by heart was far from uncommon, and not only among the highly educated. The most ordinary documents are replete with direct biblical citations and allusions. A text like the Song of Songs, elsewhere allegorically interpreted if cited at all, was commonly known in Spain and understood also on the literal level.² Even in the late fourteenth century, for example, Isaac b. Sheshet, rabbi of Saragossa, received a query about Song of Songs 1.2, “for your love is better than wine.” Every schoolchild knows the passage, he was told; why then was it necessary for Rabbi Akiva to be questioned about its meaning in the Talmud (*Avodah Zara* 29b)?³

* 2 Sam. 18.5

¹ “Jewish Reactions to *‘Arabiya* and the Renaissance of Hebrew in Spain,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* (forthcoming).

² See the commentary of Abraham Ibn Ezra in standard editions of the rabbinical Hebrew Bible (i.e., with commentaries), and in the critical edition with English translation by Henry J. Mathews (London, 1874); and particularly Joseph b. Judah Ibn ‘Aqnin, *Hitgallot ha-sodot ve-hofe’at ha-meorot*, ed. (Judeo-Arabic) and trans. (Hebrew) A. S. Halkin (Jerusalem, 1964), a commentary that has undeservedly been ignored.

³ Responsa of Isaac b. Sheshet Perfet, No. 284.

The idiom of the Hebrew Bible must be thoroughly familiar to the student of the Hebrew poetry written in medieval Spain, and the biblical text itself must be supplemented by the many medieval Hebrew grammatical works and commentaries on the Bible, particularly those of Spanish provenance. It would be naive to assume that the meaning of the biblical allusions can be understood without reference to contemporary interpretations of the particular texts. Other sources pertinent to the poems are the Talmud and numerous midrashim. Finally, the Arabic influence on the Hebrew poets makes it imperative that the whole tradition of Arabic literature and the customs of medieval Muslim society be taken into consideration.

Possibly because of the difficulty of the task, surprisingly few scholars have turned their attention to the study of medieval Hebrew secular poetry (the religious poetry, in part because the language is easier by far, is something of a different story).⁴ Critical editions of the collected poetry (*divans*) of the major Hebrew poets have only recently begun to appear, following their discovery and the first efforts at publication in the second part of the nineteenth century. The secondary literature, even in Hebrew, is far from exhaustive, and in other languages there is a paucity of literature.⁵

Hebrew secular poetry emerged in Spain at the end of the tenth century under the influence of Arabic poetry. Both the meters and the themes of Arabic poetry were imitated, although the Hebrew poets soon surpassed their mentors in this respect, making use of a greater variety of meters and themes (they were not, of course, restricted by the conventions of Arabic poetry). No systematic attempt has yet been made to analyze the themes, or to distinguish the motifs and topoi, employed in medieval Hebrew poetry. At present, let it suffice merely to indicate some of the typical themes: panegyric, nature, wine drinking, separation from friends, poetry itself, apologies for an assumed insult, satire, debate, self-praise, humor, war, and love. The love poetry may be stylistically subdivided into self-contained poems, that is,

⁴ Some of the more important literature, in languages other than Hebrew, includes: Leopold Zunz, *Die synagogale Poesie des Mittelalters* (Berlin, 1855; Frankfurt a. M., 1920); idem, *Literaturgeschichte der synagogalen Poesie* (Berlin, 1865); Ismar Elbogen, *Studien zur Geschichte des jüdischen Gottesdienstes* (Berlin, 1907) and *Der jüdische Gottesdienst* (Berlin, 1913, and repr.); Michael Sachs, *Die religiöse Poesie der Juden in Spanien* (Berlin, 1845; 1901); José María Millás Vallicrosa, *La poesía sagrada hebraicoespañola* (Madrid, 1940; 1948). English translations of some selected religious poems may be found in Judah ha-Levi, *Selected Poems*, trans. Nina Salaman (Philadelphia, 1928); *Selected Religious Poems of Solomon Ibn Gabirol*, trans. Israel Zangwill (Philadelphia, 1923); and Moses Ibn Ezra, *Selected Poems*, trans. Solomon Solis-Cohen (Philadelphia, 1945).

⁵ In English, one may consult Shalom Spiegel, "On Medieval Hebrew Poetry," in Louis Finkelstein, ed., *The Jews, Their History, Culture and Religion* (Philadelphia, 1949, and subsequent editions) 2:528–66; Jefim Schirmann, "The Function of the Hebrew Poet in Medieval Spain," *Jewish Social Studies* 16 (1954), 235–52; my own articles, such as "The 'Ubi Sunt' Theme in Medieval Hebrew Poetry," *Hebrew Studies* 19 (1978), 56–62; "Satire and Debate in Two Famous Medieval Poems from al-Andalus: Love of Boys vs. Girls, the Pen and Other Themes," *The Maghreb Review* 4 (1979), 105–13; " 'Sacred' and 'Secular' in the Poetry of Ibn Gabirol," *Hebrew Studies* 20–21 (1979–80), 75–79; and "The Lyric Tradition in Hebrew Secular Poetry of Medieval Spain," *The Hispanic Journal* 2 (1981), 7–26.

poems the entire subject of which is love, and the so-called “erotic” introductions (Arabic *nasīb*) to an ode or eulogy (Arabic *qaṣīda*). Thematically, they are divided into those dealing with love of girls or young women and those dealing with love of boys.

It was Jefim (Ḥayyim) Schirmann who, continuing the pioneering work of Heinrich Brody in the publication and study of this poetry, first pointed out the theme of love of boys in Hebrew poetry.⁶ His rather cautious treatment of the subject provoked an immediate reaction, and some of his critics refused to acknowledge that such a theme, so common in classical Greek and in medieval Muslim and Christian poetry, could exist in Hebrew verse.⁷

An apparently serious objection which has been urged, and the only one which merits consideration here, is the lack of any reference to activity involving sexual contact with boys in the responsa (legal rabbinic) literature of Spain. However, there are several things to be considered in this regard. In the first place, the state of the texts of the responsa as they have come down to us (at least, in printed editions) is such that they often lack the precise details most of interest to the historian, such as the names of people and cities and the particular details of the case being discussed. Thus, it is often difficult to know specifically what is being reported. Furthermore, the editors of the collections of responsa tended to include only those which had continuous relevance as legal precedent. Cases that appeared too specific and limited in scope might well have been excluded from such collections. Finally, the fact is that we have almost no responsa at all from the period of Muslim Spain in which our poetry was written.

In spite of all this, it is nevertheless not true that the surviving responsa contain no references to such activity. In a responsum which is undoubtedly (for reasons that cannot be detailed here) from Joseph Ibn Abitur, a rabbi in Spain and himself a poet, the case of a *kohen* (priest) who had been removed from his office as a cantor due to his lascivious conduct with Gentile prostitutes and even with Jewish women is discussed. At first, the elders of the congregation paid no attention to the reports about him, but finally his reputation increased so that the Gentiles were ridiculing him and them. It was also reported that he had sexual relations with an adolescent boy (*na'ar*, “youth”). It is apparent from the report that it was not his activity with the boy that caused his removal, but rather his general reputation as one who had illicit contacts with women. Indeed, in his reply Ibn Abitur, who upholds the decision to remove him from office, does not even refer to the incident with the boy.⁸

⁶ “The Ephebe in Medieval Hebrew Poetry,” *Sefarad* 15 (1955), 55–68.

⁷ E.g., Nehemiah Allony, “ha-Ṣevi ve-ha-gamal be-shirat Sefarad,” *Oṣar Yehudei Sefarad* 4 (1961), 16–43, and “The ‘Zevi’ in the Hebrew Poetry in Spain,” *Sefarad* 23 (1963), 311–21. On the other hand, Eliyahu Ashtor accepts the existence of this theme in poetry; see his *Qorot ha-yehudim bi-Sefarad ha-muslimit* (Jerusalem, 1966) 1:256 and 258 (English translation, *The Jews of Moslem Spain* [Philadelphia, 1973] 1:396 and 399).

⁸ *Teshuvot geonei mizrah u-ma'arav*, ed. Joel Müller (Berlin, 1888), p. 41, No. 171.

This is not the only evidence we have of the reality of this activity among medieval Jews. There is a statement in Hayya Gaon's poem, cited by Schirmann.⁹ Furthermore, in the controversy between Sa'adyah Gaon and the exilarch David b. Zakkai (tenth century), Khalaf Ibn Sarjada accused the gaon of homosexual acts, even in the presence of the sacred scriptures, and stated that the youth of Nehardea (in Iraq) had wearied themselves in pursuing him (cf. Isaiah 58.13 for the meaning of this expression).¹⁰ Khalaf, it should be noted, was an important dignitary who sat in the first row of the yeshivah (academy) at Pumbedita and later became its gaon, and his accusations against Sa'adyah were based on reliable testimony which the latter never attempted to refute, although he carefully refuted all the other charges against him.¹¹

Aside from the previously mentioned sources, medieval Hebrew poetry appears to be the only evidence we have for the love of boys among the Jews. Jewish law, of course, followed the Bible in condemning homosexual intercourse among adult males. The punishment was death, and even though the death penalty was normally suspended among Jews following the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E., in Spain the death penalty continued in effect for many offenses. The chief talmudic source for the prohibition is Sanhedrin 54b, and this is followed closely by Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot issurei biah*, ch. 1, hal. 14. If the intercourse was with a boy nine years of age or older (to age thirteen, when he is an adult), the adult male was punishable and the boy exempt. If the boy was under nine, both the adult and child were exempt — but Maimonides adds that the court should punish the adult with lashes. While technically the prohibition, therefore, applies only to anal intercourse, it should be noted that there is a general prohibition against

⁹ "The Ephebe," p. 64 (the important story which Schirmann discusses following this quotation is to be found in vol. 3 of *Ginzey Schechter*, not "Vol. II," which is a misprint in his note 29). Schirmann's reading, translation, and interpretation of the line in the poem are absolutely correct, and all of Allony's objections over the years are groundless.

¹⁰ Abraham Harkavy, *Zikharon le-rishonim* 5, 230, cited by Ellis Rivkin, "The Saadia-David ben Zakkai Controversy," in Meir Ben-Horin et al., eds., *Studies and Essays in Honor of Abraham A. Neuman* (Leiden, 1962), p. 418.

¹¹ Sa'adyah devotes chapter four of the tenth article of his *Kitāb al-amanāt wa-l 'i'tiqādāt* (*Emunot ve-de'ot*) to a discussion of passion (*ishq*). There he mentions the views of those who believe that if the "ascendant zodiacal sign" (cf. Abraham bar Hayya, *Megillat ha-megalleh*, ed. Julius Guttmann, p. 120) of two men is equal, then their loving each other is astrologically determined. In spite of the fact that he rejects these views in strong terms, it is interesting that he uses as an example of erotic passion two males; even in his refutation he says that if this view were correct, it would not be possible that Zayd ("Reuben") would love 'Amr ("Shimeon"), but rather both would love each other equally (see the new critical edition of the Judeo-Arabic text with Hebrew translation by Yosef Kafih [Jerusalem, 1969], pp. 301–2; the first edition of the medieval Hebrew translation by Judah Ibn Tibbon, *Sefer ha-emunot ve-ha-de'ot* [Constantinople, 1562; repr. Jerusalem, 1972], pp. 158–59; the English translation by S. Rosenblatt, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions* [New Haven, Conn., 1948], p. 373 ff. I was not able to compare the original edition of the Arabic text by Landauer [Leiden, 1880], but this is unnecessary in view of Kafih's new edition. I am grateful to Prof. John Boswell for calling this passage to my attention.)

"emission of semen in vain" in any manner (*ibid.*, ch. 21, hal. 18). Maimonides, here as elsewhere, followed his own rather severe attitudes regarding sexual activity of any kind, but nevertheless based his rulings for the most part on talmudic authority.¹² The question of the extent to which Maimonides' code was strictly enforced in al-Andalus cannot, of course, be readily answered. Furthermore, a great deal of our poetry was written in the period before Maimonides produced his code. Yet it must be emphasized that while there are some apparent allusions, in none of the Hebrew poetry so far discovered are there any actual references to sexual activity other than kissing. On the other hand, Arabic poetry from the same period, country, and general social environment is full of explicit sexual acts with boys.

The phenomenon of older males being attracted to adolescent boys is attested to in many societies throughout history. K. J. Dover has observed that "a society in which young men pursue their juniors for a period of some years before 'settling down' in marriage is by no means unimaginable."¹³ Ancient Greece was one such society (although the activity was by no means exclusively confined to young or unmarried men pursuing adolescent boys).¹⁴ For the medieval Christian world, in addition to the poetry which has long been known, we now have a very important study.¹⁵ Unfortunately, there is no comparable study of this phenomenon in medieval Islam (including the Jewish aspect), and the most readily available references are still the Arabic poetry and literature of various Muslim countries.¹⁶

The ancient Greeks produced poetry describing their passion for boys, often as scatological in nature as the later Arabic poetry.¹⁷ The temptation would be great to assume that the Muslim poets "borrowed" this theme as a mere literary device from the Greeks, just as it has been suggested that the Jews "borrowed" it from the Muslims, but for the fact that the Muslims had absolutely no awareness of the existence of Greek poetry.¹⁸ In this respect, at

¹² Michael Goodich, *The Unmentionable Vice: Homosexuality in the Later Middle Ages* (Santa Barbara, 1978), pp. 46–49, gives an adequate summary of Jewish law, although he is incorrect on some details regarding Maimonides; it must be objected *contra* Goodich, p. 48, that the Jewish tradition did not condemn homosexuality, etc., as "sins against nature."

¹³ "Eros and Nomos," *University of London Institute of Classical Studies Bulletin* 11 (1964), 31.

¹⁴ See K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978). Even Dover's work does not by any means exhaust the literary and historical sources.

¹⁵ John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago, 1980).

¹⁶ Some specific examples of these will be cited below. See also Boswell, *Christianity*, pp. 194–200 (who is mistaken in saying, p. 195 n. 96, that contemporary Spanish translators of Muslim poetry from al-Andalus "almost invariably" suppress the homosexual meaning of the poetry. Nor is his statement accurate that al-Maqqari is the "chief source" of this poetry [p. 196 n. 101]). An important anthology, of which Boswell seems unaware, is referred to in n. 34 below.

¹⁷ Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, pp. 57–59, gives a less-than-satisfactory sketch; see for further details *The Greek Anthology* in the Loeb Classical Library edition by W. R. Paton.

¹⁸ Although this is now accepted by all students of medieval Arabic poetry, it is true that Gustav von Grunebaum, in an early article, "Greek Form Elements in the Arabian Nights,"

least, Arno Karlen was sensible in his observation that “homosexuality is not an infectious disease, and people who do not practice it are unlikely to borrow it from military invaders, like children presented with an irresistible sweet.”¹⁹

In medieval Christian Europe, too, pederasty — sexual attraction to adolescent boys — was not uncommon.²⁰ This is also reflected in the poetry, examples of which are a famous poem by the monk Gottschalk and the poem to which Curtius refers as one of the pearls of medieval poetry, addressed to a boy who has abandoned the poet (a priest) for his rival. Particularly noteworthy are the closing lines:

Joy that was mine is my rival's tomorrow,
While I for my fawn [*cerva*] like a stricken deer sorrow!²¹

This uses, without any question of “borrowing,” the precise image (“fawn”) used for the boy in Arabic and Hebrew poetry. Of interest, too, is a letter from Walafrid Strabo to Bodo when the boy was studying at the court at Aix-la-Chapelle, which closes with the tender words: “Farewell, dear fair one, always and everywhere most beloved, my little blonde lad, my blonde little lad.”²² Bodo later converted to Judaism and fled to Spain.

Medieval cathedrals were decorated frequently with carved reliefs and

Journal of the American Oriental Society 62 (1942), 277–92, conjectured that there were possible Greek influences on some of the motifs in the “Arabian Nights.” He was only able to make some very conjectural comparisons, however. Nor can his supposition (p. 283) that some “Hellenistic love conception” contributed (“probably”) to pre-Islamic poetry be taken as proof of an otherwise unsubstantiated claim. In any event, whatever a “Hellenistic love conception” is supposed to be, it does not dislodge the fact that Muslim poets knew nothing of Greek poetry (nor does von Grunebaum claim otherwise). Cf. Adolph Schack, *Poesía y arte de los Arabes en España y Sicilia*, trans. Juan Valera (Buenos Aires, n.d.), p. 77; S. A. Bonebakker, “Aspects of the History of Literary Rhetoric and Poetics in Arabic Literature,” *Viator* 1 (1970), 75–95; and William Heinrichs, “Literary Theory: The Problem of Its Efficiency,” in G. E. von Grunebaum, ed., *Arabic Poetry, Theory and Development* (Wiesbaden, 1973), p. 42; and Vicente Cantarino, *Arabic Poetics in the Golden Age* (Leiden, 1975), p. 65.

¹⁹ “The Homosexual Heresy,” *Chaucer Review* 6 (1971), 45; similarly, Boswell, *Christianity*, p. 52.

²⁰ Throughout chapter seven of Boswell’s book, as well as in earlier sections, there are frequent specific references to sex with adolescent boys. An important source for Visigothic Spain, overlooked by Boswell, is the *Regula* of St. Leandro, bishop of Seville (ca. 536–600); Julio Campos Ruiz, ed. and trans., *San Leandro, San Isidoro, San Fructuoso: Reglas monásticas de la España visigoda* . . . (Madrid, 1971), pp. 39–40. On the distinction between pederasty and pedophilia, see Boswell, *Christianity*, p. 139 n. 8.

²¹ Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1953), pp. 114–15; note the other poems there and on p. 116. Gottschalk’s “Ut quid iubes, pusiolo” is in Frederick Brittain, *The Medieval Latin and Romance Lyric to A.D. 1300*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Eng., 1951), pp. 83–85, and in Boswell, *Christianity*, p. 192. (Boswell conveniently provides texts and excellent translations of several such poems, p. 370 ff.)

²² MGH Poet 2:386; translated by Allen Cabaniss in *Jewish Quarterly Review* 43 (1952), 315. See Boswell, *Christianity*, pp. 30 and 191–92, in light of which there can hardly be any doubt as to the nature of this letter (although it was apparently unknown to Boswell).

paintings or stained glass windows of lecherous priests and others in various stages of undress, and the cathedral apse of an abbey in Savoy (near Geneva) has a fresco portraying sodomy. Other homosexual scenes are not uncommon.²³ Muslims, too, may have at least symbolically depicted their preferences. A pillar of the Alhambra palace in Granada has on its base a bas-relief which in fact comes from Cordoba during the caliphal period; the original inscription has been replaced by one indicating that Badis took it for his palace in Granada (which means that Samuel Ibn Nagrillah undoubtedly saw it, and perhaps his son Yūsuf brought it to the Alhambra). The figures represented are gazelles being mounted by lions. Castejón, who has reproduced the figures in his article on them, notes the “vaguely anthropomorphic aspect” of the lions with their heavy mustaches.²⁴ The lion is, of course, a universal symbol for royalty and aristocracy, and the position of the animals certainly suggests sexual imagery.

Among the Muslims, hashish, together with wine (which was not then prohibited to the Muslims), was often used to aid in the seduction of reluctant boys; even more frequently it was used by boys trying to seduce men. There were special localities in Cairo, and no doubt elsewhere, where boys could readily be picked up. Also, there was the custom of *dabīb* (“creeping”), that is, attacking sleeping boys in public caravan resting places. Somewhat like the famous verse of the *Rhubiyat* is the verse attributed to Abū Nuwās:

A handful of hashish, a pound of meat,
A kilo of bread, and the company of a willing boy.²⁵

Arabic poetry, particularly of the earlier period, was often conventional and filled with clichés. Yet there is much to be commended in the view of Andras Hamori, who specifically denies that these were mere “ossified metaphors” of formula, arguing that the erotic metaphors function both to establish a reality and to transport the mind into a “shadowy world” of poetic perception.²⁶ This is particularly relevant to the *nasīb*, or “erotic prologue,” of the *qaṣīda* (“ode”). In an early study on Arabic love poetry, Blachère concluded that it is possible, though by no means certain, that the erotic themes

²³ See James Cleugh, *Love Locked Out: A Survey of Love, License and Restriction in the Middle Ages* (London, 1963), pp. 22–26, and also the illustrations in Boswell, following p. 206, Nos. 7 and 8. There is still no adequate survey of this theme in medieval art, sculpture, and iconography.

²⁴ Rafael Castejón, “La nueva pila de Almiria y las representaciones zoomorfas califales,” *Boletín de la Real Academia de ciencias, bellas letras y nobles artes de Córdoba* 16 (1945), 198; see also E. Lévi-Provençal, *Inscriptions arabes d'Espagne* (Leiden, 1931), p. 199; and A. R. Nykl, “Inscriptions arabes de la Alhambra y del Generalife,” *Al-Andalus* 4 (1936), 446. Samuel and his son were both prime ministers of Granada, and the latter built the original Alhambra. (Although referred to in Hebrew poems as “Yehosef,” the name of Ibn Nagrillah’s son was Yūsuf, and he is so called in all the sources.)

²⁵ Franz Rosenthal, *The Herb: Hashish versus Medieval Muslim Society* (Leiden, 1971), pp. 66, 67, 82, 83; see also the poem on page 157.

²⁶ *On the Art of Medieval Arabic Literature* (Princeton, 1974), pp. 74–75. Some interesting examples of this type of poetry are translated and discussed there; see, e.g., pp. 102, 107.

of these prologues are merely literary devices.²⁷ Yet it is certain that even the earliest period of Islamic Arabic poetry had examples of real homosexual poetry.²⁸ With poetry of the later period, and certainly in the poetry of al-Andalus, there is no longer any possible doubt as to the authentic nature of the activity so graphically (and pornographically) described: one entire anthology of poetry from al-Andalus is devoted exclusively to the love of boys.²⁹ Al-Jāḥiẓ had originally held the view that *'ishq* ("passion, lust") could only be applied to the love of women, but later he seems to have changed his mind and allowed it also for the love of boys, provided that the element of passion was really present.³⁰ He also tells us that the price for young boy slaves was so high because of the *'ishq* of the purchasers, who sometimes sold their property to acquire a particularly desirable boy.³¹

The earliest examples of this kind of poetry vary from the relatively chaste and even fearful expression of desire to the kind of scatology so characteristic of Andalusian poetry of the later era. An example of the first kind is a poem by Saif al-Daula, ruler of Aleppo and patron of the poet al-Mutanabbi (948–957):

I kissed him [a boy] in fear as
A bird drinks in fear.
It sees water and wants it
Fearing the result of fear
And seizes occasion and comes
But does not enjoy in fear.³²

A poem by Abū Nuwās, actually less explicit than much of his work, is an example of the second kind. I quote only the opening lines:

My penis settled on the behind of Sam'ān
It wanted hospitality, that had two sides.
I never had a host better at hosting than
The behind of the boy Sam'ān.³³

²⁷ R. Blachère, "La poésie érotique au siècle des Umayyades de Damas," (Algiers, Université) *Institut d'études orientales: Annales* 5 (1939–41), 111.

²⁸ E.g., the ninth-century poet Di'bil b. 'Alī: "'Alī's penis is his tool, and Amr's anus his mistress. / At times he encounters a dart, and at other times a quiver" (Leon Zolondek, ed. and trans., *Di'bil b. 'Alī* [Lexington, Kentucky, 1961], pp. 21, 97 [No. 37]).

²⁹ Ibn Sana al-Mulk, *Dar al-tiraz*; some of the less explicit of these poems are translated in Linda Fish Compton, *Andalusian Lyrical Poetry and Old Spanish Love Songs* (New York, 1976).

³⁰ Lois Anita Giffen, *Theory of Profane Love among the Arabs: The Development of a Genre* (New York, 1971), p. 86; al-Jāḥiẓ, "Risāla al-qiyan," trans. Charles Pellat in *Arabica* 10 (1963), 140. Unfortunately, Giffen does not discuss the theme of boys at all, except to call attention to an important collection (apparently still in manuscript) of Ibn Abī Ḥajala (14th century), which includes stories of the men of this time "who were sorely afflicted with love through seeing a woman or a boy" (pp. 135–36).

³¹ Charles Pellat, "Les esclaves — Chanteuses de Ḡaḥiẓ," *Arabica* 10 (1963), 138.

³² *Dhikra Saif al-Daula*, trans. Arthur Wormhoudt (Oskaloosa, Iowa, 1975), p. 16.

³³ *Diwan*, trans. Arthur Wormhoudt (Oskaloosa, Iowa, 1974), pp. 80–81.

Andalusian Arabic poetry, however, offers the most complete representation of this genre. Among the numerous examples that could be cited, two are here presented. The first is by Muḥammad Ibn Mālīk, secretary to Muḥammad b. Sa'd, king of Murcia (1124–1172):

I saw a shapely youth in the mosque,
 beautiful as the moon when it comes out.
 Those who see him bending to pray say:
 "All my desires are that he prostrate himself."³⁴

The metaphor of "moon" or "sun" to describe the beautiful boy or woman, a cliché of Arabic verse, was borrowed by the Hebrew poets. The second poem is by Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Gālīb al-Ruṣāfī (Valencia, d. 1177):

He is a little gazelle [*ghuzayyil*] whose fingers
 do not cease to play in spinning [*ghazal*], as
 My thoughts do not cease, in seeing him,
 to play with erotic poetry [*ghazal*].³⁵

The triple paronomasia of this poem about a weaving boy serves as a reminder of the close association in Arabic between the word for erotic poetry (*ghazal*) and the word for gazelle (*ghazāl*), which was a term of endearment for the beloved boy in Arabic poetry. The gazelle imagery may well have come from the Bible, Song of Songs 2.9 (the Bible, of course, was available in Arabic translation to the Muslims). Furthermore, I would suggest that the Hebrew term *ševi*, "gazelle," used for the beloved boy in Hebrew poetry, carried connotations of the Song of Songs, of Arabic *ghazal/ghazāl*, and also of Arabic *ṣabī*, "boy." In other words, to the Arabic-speaking Jew of al-Andalus, the word *ševi* in a poem immediately brought to mind the ideas "boy" and "erotic poem."

This is not the place for an extensive discussion of the metaphors of Arabic poetry about boys, but mention should be made of one other important element, the link between love and wine. Generally, this is found in one of two forms: the boy is a cupbearer (*ṣāqī*), or the boy is given wine to drink at a party with the hope that he will become drunk and so give up his resistance to the advances of his would-be lover. Contrary to popular mis-

³⁴ Alī ibn Mūsā Ibn Sa'īd al-Maghribī, *El libro de las banderas de los campeones*, ed. and trans. Emilio García Gómez (Madrid, 1942), p. 245 (my translation here). This important anthology of Arabic poetry of al-Andalus has many examples of such poetry. The abridged and bowdlerized version by A. J. Arberry, *Moorish Poetry* (Cambridge, Eng., 1953) gives little indication of the nature of the work.

³⁵ Ibid.; these lines are quoted also by al-Shaḡundī, *Risāla*, trans. Emilio García Gómez, *Elogio del Islam español* (Madrid-Granada, 1934), p. 77 (my translation). Other examples of love poetry about boys may be found in A. R. Nykl, *Hispano-Arabic Poetry* (Baltimore, 1946), and James Monroe, ed. and trans. *Hispano-Arabic Poetry* (Berkeley, 1974). Neither Nykl nor Monroe included any of the more scatological poems found in Ibn Sa'īd's anthology (n. 34 above).

conception, the drinking of wine was not always considered a sin in Islam; even where it was, the prohibition was frequently violated.³⁶

Jews drank wine and engaged in wine parties exactly as did the Muslims, often together with them. Jewish law prohibited, however, the drinking of wine touched by a Gentile (lest it be defiled by use for idolatrous libations). In this regard, a responsum of Maimonides is of interest. He mentions that it was the practice of the great rabbi Joseph ha-Levi Ibn Megash and many other great scholars of Spain to mix honey into their wine when Muslims joined them to drink, so that the wine would be unfit for libations and thus be exempted from the law.³⁷ This was perhaps the practice followed by Samuel Ibn Nagrillah, an otherwise generally observant Jew who is known to have drunk wine with Muslims.

Relationships between Muslims, Jews, and Christians were not always hostile in the Middle Ages, and certainly passion knew no religious limits. Thus, we find that al-Ramādī (b. ca. 926) was in love with a Christian boy, and even wore the belt (*zunnār*) prescribed for Christians and made the sign of the cross over wine before he drank it. Abū Nuwās also was in love with a Christian boy, and wrote:

If only I were the priest, or the metropolitan
of his church, or else his Gospel and Bible;
Or if only I were the sacrifice he offers
or his cup of wine, or a bubble in the wine.

Another such poem deserves further comment here:

I visited his bed just before morning, when dawn
had been announced by the sound of gongs,⁽¹⁾
He said: "Who is it?" I said: "The priest has
come to visit; your monastery⁽²⁾ must have
the ministrations of priests."^{(3) 38}

(1) Clappers of wood (see Prendergast's note).

(2) Or "convent" (*dawar*), with obscene connotations.

(3) *Wa-lā buddun li-dayrika min tashmīsi qissīsi*. As Prendergast observed, the poet has used the Hebrew *tashmish* (< *shamash*, "to serve"), which means "to have intercourse" in rabbinic Hebrew (cf. *Berakhot* 8a; *Yoma* 73b).

³⁶ There are several articles on this subject; see especially E. Yarshater, "The Theme of Wine-Drinking and the Concept of the Beloved in Early Persian Poetry," *Studia Islamica* 13 (1960), 43–53. In G. Marcais, "Les figures d'hommes et de bêtes," *Mélanges d'histoire et d'archéologie musulman* 1 (1951), 83 ff., may be seen sculptured figures of Muslim noblemen with slaves (?) pouring wine, and also various illustrations of lute and other instrument players and male and female dancers.

³⁷ *Teshuvot ha-Rambam*, ed. Alfred (Abraham) Freimann (Jerusalem, 1934), No. 382.

³⁸ For al-Ramādī, Nykl, *Hispano-Arabic Poetry*, p. 59; complete translation of Abū Nuwās in Hamori, *Art*, pp. 120, 123–24. The second poem is cited in Badi' al-Zamān al-Hamadhāni, *Maqāmāt*, trans. W. J. Prendergast (London, 1915; rept. 1973), p. 140, which Hamori apparently did not see. Prendergast's notes are important.

Schirmann has also discussed examples of Arabic love poetry written about Jewish boys in al-Andalus, and in this article I shall present instances of Hebrew verse about Muslim boys (because of which, and indeed generally in our poetry, it is impossible to agree with Schirmann's statement that "we have no evidence that any of [this] verse reflects personal experiences").³⁹

This is the background against which the Hebrew *ševi* poetry, the theme of which is the love of boys, must be seen. Before beginning a discussion of what is necessarily a small representative sample of these poems, it is perhaps appropriate to say a word about their interpretation. All of the translations are my own. Because the study of these texts is so difficult, and the field as a whole so relatively new, there is little solid tradition to guide us. Almost none of the traditions of European literary criticism can be validly applied to the interpretation of medieval Hebrew poetry, and the only real assistance comes from the study done on Arabic poetry. The notes, often extensive, of the editors of the Hebrew texts are of course helpful, but often one reluctantly comes to the conclusion that they are wrong or that another interpretation is possible. The translator of this poetry is faced with the extremely difficult task of attempting to render the verse into a language completely different from the original. Having no pretensions to being a poet, I have chosen to err on the side of literalism and to provide translations that reproduce as faithfully as possible what the original Hebrew text says. Explanations are provided in notes only where absolutely necessary, with full realization that additional or different interpretations are sometimes possible. Yet there can be no doubt as to the overall intention of the poems or, I believe, the accuracy of the translations within the limits of language. I take as my motto the apology of a great medieval Hebrew grammarian:

I do not say that in all which I have mentioned the understanding of it is withheld from someone else and that no one has approached it but me. For the words which I have explained can sustain other explanations. Furthermore, it is possible to give an explanation which has not been revealed to me but has been revealed to others.⁴⁰

Apparently the first Hebrew poet to have written a poem in this genre was Yišḥaq ben Mar-Saul (Lucena, eleventh century). Schirmann, who first edited a fragment of the poem and later the complete text, observed that the term *ševi* ("gazelle") is not to be explained as a synonym for the feminine form *ševiah*, as is sometimes but rarely the case in Hebrew poetry, for here "the poet compares his beloved to men known from biblical stories —

³⁹ Schirmann, "The Ephebe," p. 66.

⁴⁰ Abū Zakharya (Yaḥya) b. Daūd (Yehudah Ḥayyuj), in Neḥemiah Allony's introduction to the reprint edition of P. Kokovsov, *Mi-sifrei ha-balshanut ha-ivrit bi-yemei ha-beinayim* (Jerusalem, 1970), p. 11, lines 9–12.

Joseph, Adoniah, David; and from this it is evident that the *sevi* here is also a male.”⁴¹ Following is my translation, based on Schirmann’s final edition:

Gazelle desired in Spain,⁽¹⁾
wondrously formed,
Given rule and dominion
over every living thing;⁽²⁾
Lovely of form like the moon
with beautiful stature:
Curls of purple⁽³⁾
upon shining⁽⁴⁾ temple,
Like Joseph in his form,
like Adoniah⁽⁵⁾ his hair.
Lovely of eyes like David,⁽⁶⁾
he has slain me like Uriah.
He has enflamed my passions
and consumed my heart with fire.
Because of him I have been left
without understanding and wisdom.
Weep with me every ostrich
and every hawk and falcon!
The beloved of my soul has slain me —
is this a just sentence?
.....
Because of him my soul is sick,
perplexed and yearning.
His speech upon my heart
is like dew upon parched land.
Draw me from the pit of destruction
that I go not down to hell!⁽⁷⁾

(1) *Ispamiah* (“Spain”) rather than *Sefarad*.

(2) Hebrew: male and female living thing.

(3) I.e., beautiful (cf. Song of Songs 7.6 and the commentaries).

(4) *Peninyah*, a word coined from *peninim* (“pearls,” or jewels generally, in medieval Hebrew). The meaning here seems to be “shining” or “pure.” Ibn Gabirol borrowed the term in his *Keter malkhut* (*Selected Religious Poems of Solomon Ibn Gabirol*, p. 101, line 297; Schirmann, *ha-Shirah ha-Turit bi-Sefarad u-vi-Provens* [Jerusalem, 1954], 1:271, line 234).

(5) A son of David; Ibn Janah, a student of the poet, explained that this means here Absalom, who was famous for his fine hair.

(6) Cf. 1 Sam. 16.12 and the line by the Muslim poet Ibn Khafājah (Valencia, 1058–1139) describing a beautiful boy: “See Joseph in his clothing, lovely of form / and hear David singing in him.”⁴²

(7) See Isa. 38.17 for this expression.

⁴¹ Schirmann, *Shirim ḥadashim min ha-genizah* (Jerusalem, 1965), p. 157; cf. Schirmann’s earlier article “Yiṣḥaq ben Mar Shaul ha-meshorer mi-Lusinah” in M. D. Cassuto, et al., eds., *Sefer Assaf* (Jerusalem, 1946), p. 513.

⁴² Cited by Judah Ratzaby, “Shirat ha-yayin le-R’ Shemuel ha-nagid,” in H. Z. Hirschberg, et al., eds., *Sefer H. M. Shapiro* (Bar Ilan University) *Sefer ha-shanah* 9 (1972), 442 n. 135. The motif

Already contained in this poem are many of the images that were standard in both the Arabic and Hebrew poems, nearly any of which could be selected at random for comparison. Typical are these lines by 'Abdallāh, one of the sons of the Cordoba caliph 'Abd al-Raḥmān II:

My woes come from a dark-eyed fawn:
His kind makes men lose self-control!
His cheeks are like a blooming rose
Mixed with sunbeams and lily white;
His body is lithe like a bough of *bān*.⁽¹⁾
In his bright eye a dark pupil turns:
To him I pledge my purest love,
So long as night alternates with days!⁴³

(1) The ben-tree, which is tall and fragrant.

In both poems there is present also the theme of "love-sickness"; the passion of the lover for his beloved, especially when unrequited, nearly drives him mad.⁴⁴

Another early example is by the great scholar Yosef Ibn Ṣaddiq (born in Cordoba ca. 1075; died there 1149). He was religious judge (*dayyan*) of Cordoba all of his life and the author of an important philosophical work.⁴⁵ The poem is one of the numerous Hebrew *muwashshahāt*, with the final couplet (*kharja*) in Romance or in Arabic.⁴⁶

Desire remains in the heart like fire
Because of the eyes of a beloved ever since I first saw him.
As he hates my soul, I hate it,
For it is the counsel of wickedness to love what the gazelle hates!
My beloved does not favor me when I speak
Graciously to him,⁽¹⁾ and answers me harshly; when I kiss his foot
He only afflicts me without cause, but my heart will not
Consider it to him a trespass that he has afflicted.⁽²⁾
Lo, I am sold to you, my fawn, without redemption.⁽³⁾
Take a present — my heart — and do not in vain tread⁽⁴⁾
On me, until I drink from your palate the honey I shall take.⁽⁵⁾
Also when I thirst, I find coolness in your saliva.

of Joseph as the ultimate symbol of the beautiful young man in Jewish, Muslim, and Christian sources is the subject of a separate study, which I hope to do in the near future.

⁴³ Nykl, *Hispano-Arabic Poetry*, p. 22.

⁴⁴ Space does not permit a lengthy discussion of this motif; cf. briefly Nykl, *Hispano-Arabic Poetry*, p. 123, and note also the interesting observation of Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago, 1963), p. 627 (3.51). In Abū Nuwās's aforementioned poem about the Christian boy, the opening line is: "My body is diseased, gaunt with grief, while my heart flutters, blazing like fire" (Hamori, *Art*, p. 120).

⁴⁵ *'Olam qatan*, ed. S. Horovitz (Breslau, 1903).

⁴⁶ See on this S. M. Stern, *Hispano-Arabic Strophic Poetry* (Oxford, 1974), especially p. 78 ff., and p. 120 for the *kharja*.

This alone is my sun — the beloved who has enslaved my heart;
 From being free, he has pierced my heart and profaned it.⁽⁶⁾
 My soul knows that in you to slay me there was no
 Guile, but God brought it to your hand.⁽⁷⁾
 From weeping for brothers the tears on my cheeks⁽⁸⁾
 Descend moistly, warm like the coals of a furnace.
 Please let the wretched one couch among apple trees,⁽⁹⁾ and to
 the pomegranate
 Of a maiden's breast for a shield direct my heart.⁽¹⁰⁾
 The day when at her door the gazelle⁽¹¹⁾ waits and knocks,
 In the chamber of her dwelling she lifts her voice, and leans
 Upon her that bore her⁽¹²⁾ — I am not able to restrain myself.
 "What shall I do, Mamma?
 My beloved stands before the gate!"⁽¹³⁾⁴⁷

- (1) Cf. Prov. 26.25. Paronomasia: *yehannēni* ("favor me"), *aḥannēn* ("speak graciously").
- (2) Paronomasia: *ya'neni* ("he answers me"), *yea'nneni* ("he afflicts me"). Is there an allusion to Deut. 21.14 here? The next line seems to make this a certainty.
- (3) Cf. Lev. 19.20!
- (4) Or: "subdue."
- (5) "Drink" in the sense of become drunk. Paronomasia: *tirddeh* ("tread"), *erddeh* ("take", as Judg. 14.9, cf. Targum); *eshkar* ("present"), *eshkar* ("I drink").
- (6) As the ear of a perpetual slave is pierced (Ex. 21.6); "profaned," possibly because the poet was a Levite?
- (7) The boy did not intend this suffering; it was accidental.
- (8) Bdehllium; there is a whole series of paronomasia here: *bedolahim* ("bdehllium," tears), *lehi* ("cheek"), *lahim* ("moistly").
- (9) Song of Songs 2.5; as Schirmann observed, the poet proposes to find comfort from his frustrated pursuit of the boy with a woman.
- (10) Paronomasia and contrast: *šinnah* ("shield"), *šinnah* (line 12, "coolness"; cf. Prov. 25.13).
- (11) The poet himself is here referred to as a "gazelle," a lover.
- (12) Cf., perhaps, Song of Songs 6.9. This leads up to her "song" to her mother in the *kharija*.
- (13) Spanish and Arabic: "Que faray mamma? / Meu'l habib estad yana!" (*yana*, "gate" in Mozarabic). For another poem, also a *muwashshah*, that similarly combines praise of a beautiful boy and a woman and her "gazelle" (lover), see the Arabic poem by al-Abyad, ed. and trans. S. M. Stern, *Al-Andalus* 23 (1958), 353–54.

Samuel Ibn Nagrillah (993–1056) was one of the most creative and prolific of the Hebrew poets of Spain. A large section of his *Divan*, in the fine edition by Dov Jarden, contains love poetry. However, poems in which the subject is the beloved boy (*sevi*) or girl (*seviah*) are to be found elsewhere in the *Divan* as well. The total number of poems in the first category is twenty (including one poem not in Jarden's edition), and in the second category, eighteen. It cannot, of course, be concluded from this that the poet necessarily loved boys more than girls or women, but it does represent a slight bias

⁴⁷ Schirmann, *ha-Shirah ha-Tvrit*, 1:547–48 (No. 2).

towards the former in the poems written. A sampling of these poems follows.

- Lovely gazelle, heaven-sent blessing
 on earth,⁽¹⁾ remove me from the snare.⁽²⁾
 Sate me with beneficence⁽³⁾ from your tongue,
 like a jar⁽⁴⁾ filled with good wine.
 What advantage have you that you crush hearts,
 with shining face and dark hair,
 And roving⁽⁵⁾ eye, black as night,
 on ruddy cheek?
- 5 How do you ply your craft upon the feelings
 and hearts — without knowing craft?⁽⁶⁾
 You prevail over heroes, and not with weapons,
 and over swords, without an army.
 You cure the mortally wounded without medicine
 or any healing on the wound.
 Tell me, is there an end to your roaming,
 and how long? How, oh how
 Can you stand among friends and shoot them
 with your arrows and bent bow?
- 10 And how can you choose death for the righteous,
 when their life or death is in your hands?
 You exult in their ills like an enemy —
 why does one like you do so?
- 48

- (1) Or, "May God make you a blessing on earth," according to the interpretation of Judah Ratzaby in *Tarbiz* 43 (1973), 186.
 (2) The snare of passion in which he has trapped the poet.
 (3) I.e., his saliva. The Hebrew *šedaqah* is similar to Arabic *šadaqa* ("gift, charity") and also to *šadāqa* ("friendship").
 (4) Jarden understands *šapihit* as intending *šapaḥat* ("jar, flask"). On the other hand, *šapihit* can mean "nectar" according to some, in which case the line might mean: "like nectar mixed in wine" (sweet). It is hard to imagine Samuel making the error suggested by Jarden.
 (5) Correcting *kebokhah* (meaningless) to *nebukhah* ("wandering astray"). Jarden, of course, is unable to explain the nonexistent word, whereas the rhyme structure requires a word ending in *-ukhah*.
 (6) "Feelings," literally, "inward parts," the seat of emotion. The boy is too young to be suspected of intentionally enticing his lovers.

This poem is of the type known as *qašīda*, or panegyric ode, written in honor of some famous person or patron of the poet. Unfortunately we cannot determine who was honored in this poem, which is of importance in the history of Samuel's activities. The usual transition verse, which subtly shifts from the opening section, the *nasīb* or love poem, to the real subject of the poem is strangely missing here. In its place are the famous lines:

⁴⁸ *Divan Shemuel ha-nagid*, ed. Dov Jarden (Jerusalem, 1966), pp. 221–22 (No. 75).

My friends, hear my poem; my soul,
 you know, clings to the fear of God.
 And its meaning is like that of Solomon's
 "My beloved is radiant" and "eyes like pools."

The reference is to Song of Songs 5.10 and 7.4, and it is this which has misled many scholars into thinking that the poet intended that all his love poems be interpreted as allegory.⁴⁹ Ratzaby already noted the weakness of these lines as a "transition verse" and argued that Samuel was not always particular about the transitional lines. But this is a weak explanation; indeed the example Ratzaby uses to support his claim (No. 131, pp. 280–83, in Jarden's edition) is not a *qaṣīda* at all, but a wine poem. If the lines in question are not, as I rather suspect they are, interpolated by the hand of a later editor, then the meaning seems rather to be that *this particular nasīb* is a mere literary device, like the poetry of the Song of Songs. We cannot learn from this that *all* of his poetry is mere allegory.

There remain a few more points of interpretation. Ratzaby takes the blessing in line 1 to mean the "land" (earth) where the boy has gone; since he has left the poet, only in the land to which he has gone is he a blessing. However, this seems rather forced. Nothing in the poem leads us to think the boy has left the poet. On the contrary, his presence is a constant source of anguish to the poet and to all the boy's would-be lovers.

The idea of drinking saliva from the mouth of the beloved is certainly common to love poetry everywhere. It is not necessary to assume that this has been borrowed from Arabic poetry; see, for instance, Song of Songs 4.10–11.

The reference to the boy's "roaming" in line 8, which may have caused Ratzaby to conclude the boy had left for another land, seems rather to refer to his roaming from one lover to another. Not that the boy gives in to any of the advances made to him, of which he seems blissfully unaware (line 5), but that he teases and torments each of his pursuers in succession. Somewhat lighter in tone is the following independent *ṣevi* poem:

True, the gazelle who gathers roses in your garden I have loved —
 therefore you turn your anger against me.
 If you would see with your eyes whom I have loved,
 then your beloved would seek you and not find you!
 He who said: "Give me, please, the honey of your words" —
 I answered: "Give me honey from your tongue."
 He became angered and said with wrath: "Shall we sin
 to the living God?" I replied: "On me, sir, be your sin."⁵⁰

The poet has become smitten by a boy, perhaps a slave, who works for a

⁴⁹ Most recently, David Segal, "Ha'arah le-ma'amar 'ha-Ahavah be-shirat R' Shemuel ha-nagid'," *Tarbiz* 41 (1971), 238–40, to which Judah Ratzaby replied, *ibid.* 43 (1973), 185–87.

⁵⁰ *Divan*, p. 297 (No. 162); also in Schirmann, *ha-Shirah*, 1:154 (No. 2).

friend of his. He has thereby incurred the anger of the friend, and Samuel rebukes him by suggesting that if he only realized the beauty of the boy, he would give up the boy he loves and also pursue this one. The boy has asked Samuel either for instruction or to recite his poetry (the term “honey” as a metaphor for learning is common in medieval Hebrew). The insolent reply of the poet is to request permission to kiss the boy. The outraged response when the boy suggests the sin of such an act is typical of medieval Hebrew verse and adds to the delight of the poem as a whole.

The following is equally carefree:

God, change, please, the heart of the dove who stole
 My slumber — and restore to my eyelids a little sleep.
 The beloved who came by Thy oath [with Thy permission] and gave me
 His heart's love, without force, as a gift
 Has been treacherous, and so every boy is treacherous.
 But now, forgive his sin — or if not, punish me!⁵¹

Similar to this is the following:

O moon, created to rule the earth
 by day and night, gently rule over hearts!
 How do you judge the star [the boy], whom I thought of as a brother,
 yet through no fault [of mine] he turned cruel to me?
 Buy me a boy — whom all boys will envy
 for his beauty — for all the wealth I have acquired,
 And I will see if he has eyes like the eyes of the boy who fled
 after he twice came willing and slept with me.⁵²

These two poems are about boys who consented to sleep with the poet (actual sex may not have been involved). However, the main point of most Arabic and Hebrew love poetry is the unhappiness of love. Even here, the point of the first poem is that the boy has now deceived his lover (“and so every boy is treacherous”), with whom he once gladly shared a bed. Paronomasia was a favorite device of this poetry, an example of which is found in line 1 of the first poem, reminiscent of (I do not say “influenced by”) al-Ruṣāfī's poem quoted above (at note 35, in the text); *gozal* (“dove”) and *gazal* (“stole”), calling to mind (connotative meaning) Arabic *ghazāl* (“gazelle”) and *ghazal* (“love poetry”).

Finally, there is a very interesting poem in which Samuel has borrowed an Arabic motif, that of the stuttering boy:

Where is the stuttering boy, where has he gone,
 gazelle perfumed with pure myrrh and frankincense?
 The moon has concealed the light of the stars —
 the graceful beloved conceals the light of the moon!

⁵¹ *Divan*, p. 301 (No. 172).

⁵² *Divan*, p. 303 (No. 176).

He chirped with soft speech and relied upon
 Him who gave voice to the turtle-dove and swallow at their time⁽¹⁾
 He meant to say "bad" and said to me "touch";⁽²⁾
 I touched him as his tongue declared.
 He desired to say "go" and said "belly";⁽³⁾
 I hastened to his belly, fenced with roses.⁽⁴⁾ 53

- (1) Cf. Jer. 8.7, "at the time of their coming"; i.e., they know to sing at the proper time.
 (2) *Ra'* ("bad"), *ga'* ("touch").
 (3) *Surah* ("go"), *sugah* ("belly").
 (4) Cf. Song of Songs 7.3; the reference is to the pubic region, surrounded by hair.

The cuteness of the lisping boy, with its endless possibilities for puns, was a common theme in Arabic poetry. Ratzaby cites the verse of Abū Nuwās: "My heart melts because of the boy (*ṣabī*). I loved in him / the forming of the *r* in his mouth when he speaks."⁵⁴ Similar, too, are the fragments mentioned by Ibn Khallikān:

The letter *r* cannot hope for union (with you), nor can I:
 Avoidance includes us both and makes us equal (in misfortune)!
 When I am alone, I write *r* on the palm of my hand,
 I weep lamenting, and so does the letter *r*.⁵⁵

Indeed, according to al-Jāḥiẓ the mispronouncing of *gh* as *r* was a common error that even learned people were likely to make.

Solomon Ibn Gabirol (b. ca. 1021) was Samuel Ibn Nagrillah's contemporary and protégé and may have borrowed some ideas from him, as perhaps in the opening of the following:

He steals⁽¹⁾ the sleep of my eyes and I'm unaware —
 the like has never been seen or heard!
 I draw his heart, slowly, lest he be weary —
 and he draws my heart, slowly, lest I pine away.
 If dawn comes to me—gently,
 take pity on me—perhaps the evil will end.⁽²⁾
 Although I have not embraced you, nevertheless for you is my love —
 strangers devour what I embrace.⁽³⁾
 I was asked to describe his form and said
 "Your soul has torn the spheres of the earth!"⁽⁴⁾
 Come, let us sing to the vine a song
 and in it bow to God and to Him bend down.
 56

⁵³ *Divan*, p. 296 (No. 160); Schirmann 1:156.

⁵⁴ Judah Ratzaby, "ha-Ahavah be-shirat R' Shemuel ha-nagid," *Tarbiz* 39 (1969), 149.

⁵⁵ Nykl, *Hispano-Arabic Poetry*, p. 59.

⁵⁶ Schirmann, *Shirim ḥadashim*, pp. 175–78. The rest of the poem is in praise of wine, to which he turns to help him forget the boy.

- (1) *Yigzol*; see my remarks above on Samuel's poem "God, change, please . . ."
- (2) Plea addressed perhaps to God, perhaps to his friends: if I pass another sleepless night, pity me.
- (3) Possibly, following Schirmann's suggestion: others enjoy your passion (but not me).
- (4) I.e., it is impossible to describe the boy.

Ibn Gabirol was too great a poet to be content with mere repetition of standard clichés in his poetry. Here is a series of short poems in which he describes all the usual beautiful features of a boy, but in each case he adds a freshness and originality to his verse:

I will be a ransom for the gazelle of love,
 in whom all who grieve find happiness;⁽¹⁾
 Whose cheeks are like white marble,
 and ruddy [as though] anointed with the blood of lovers.⁽²⁾
 The fruit of his lips⁽³⁾ are like swords
 and his eyes like arrows to the heart.⁽⁵⁷⁾

- (1) Even those who sorrow rejoice in him.
- (2) For want of a better word; the Hebrew word *ḥosheq* was coined by the medieval poets (from *hesheq*), analogous to Arabic *ʿashiq* (from *ʿashīqa*, *ʿishq*).⁵⁸ Both the Hebrew and the Arabic mean, basically, "to join together"; hence, "passion, lust." The topos of the martyred lover was standard in Arabic poetry.
- (3) Speech (Isa. 57.19), not "teeth" as Jarden thought; his soft speech "slays" lovers, as do his glances.

The poem turns the conventional description of the boy's beauty into something much more poignant. His cheeks are ruddy, but from the blood of his would-be lovers. The "fruit of his lips" is not the usual sweet saliva, but his words, which are like swords in rejecting those who court him. That the glances of the beloved are like arrows was a standard conceit, but here the arrows take on a more sinister meaning, for they pierce the heart of those who adore him.

Say to him whose hair embraces his cheek:⁽¹⁾
 How can noon embrace the morning!⁽²⁾
 Do not consider it a sin to Agur⁽³⁾ in saying
 That beauty is vanity and grace a lie.
 It is sufficient that your cheeks testify the truth,
 For the deeds of God are unfathomable.⁽⁵⁹⁾

⁵⁷ *Shirei ha-hol le-rabbi Shlomoh Ibn Gabirol*, ed. Dov Jarden (Jerusalem, 1975), p. 370 (No. 317); *Shlomoh Ibn Gabirol, shirei ha-hol*, ed. Hayyim Schirmann and H. Brody (Jerusalem, 1975), p. 32 (No. 57).

⁵⁸ See on the interchangeable Arabic and Hebrew terms the important article of Alfred Guillaume, "Hebrew and Arabic Lexicography," *Abr-Nahrain* 1 (1959–60), 1–35; 2 (1960–61), 5–35; 3 (1961–62), 1–10; 4 (1962–63), 1–18. This significant study deserves to be issued as a monograph.

⁵⁹ Ed. Jarden, p. 371 (No. 218); ed. Schirmann-Brody, p. 112 (No. 186).

- (1) Dark hairs have begun to appear on his cheeks.
- (2) A contradiction; i.e., how can he be both a youth and an adult?
- (3) Solomon (Prov. 30.1), a hint also to the poet's name.

The theme of the adolescent whose approaching adulthood, signalled by the appearance of down on the cheek, brought an end to his desirability as an object of love was common in Greek, Arabic, and Hebrew poetry.⁶⁰ In Arabic, these poems are called *mu'adhdhār* poems (from *'idhār*, "down"). In Spanish, the youth who first began to show signs of a beard was called *mancebo*, and such poems are referred to also as *barbiponiente*. These poems are particularly common in the Arabic poetry of al-Andalus, as the following examples will show:

"He himself recited to me in Seville concerning a youth, of white face, on which down appeared:

Oh, you of white cheeks! They were filled with light
until the down came to darken your beauty.
You have remained like the candle in which,
on extinguishing the flame, the wick is blackened."⁶¹

"With the nascent down the beauty of this boy
was thinned, and our hearts also were made thin,
of love of him. It is not that the blackness has
covered his cheek, but that it has
thereby discolored his black eyes!"⁶²

"You were the full moon, until one night
you were infected by decay.
When the down sprouted, I said:
"Love is finished. The black raven of down
has announced separation!"⁶³

Spain was almost unique among the European countries of the Middle Ages for the heterogeneity of its population and the cosmopolitan atmosphere of its larger centers of culture. Indeed, these characteristics actually predate the Muslim conquest of Spain in 711 and go back to the time of the Roman occupation and Phoenician settlement. Romance, called "Ladino" or "Latino" in Arabic and then in Hebrew, developed earlier in Spain than in

⁶⁰ See, e.g., K. J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality*, p. 215; Boswell, *Christianity*, p. 29 n. 55. The *Greek Anthology* is filled with examples of this motif. Among Hebrew poets, Judah ha-Levi particularly wrote many poems on this theme.

⁶¹ Ibn Sa'īd al-Maghribi, *Libro de las banderas*, p. 150, citing the poet Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm Ibn Sahl al-Isrā'īlī of Seville (a converted Jew; d. 1260).

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 170 (Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh Ibn Sāra; 12th century).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 245 (Abū-l-Ḥasan Ya'far ibn al-Ḥāyy (Lorca, 12th century). There are, of course, numerous earlier examples as well: e.g., *The Diwan of Abū Nuwās*, trans. Arthur Wormhoudt, pp. 105 (No. 253), 109 (267), 125 (515), etc.

other countries.⁶⁴ Undoubtedly, according to the currently popular theory, oral poetry and songs in Romance existed from an early period. Among the Muslims of Spain there emerged, subsequently, a form of poetry known as the *muwashshahah* which had a final rhymed couplet in Romance written in Arabic characters. The Hebrew poets, too, wrote this kind of verse, except that the final couplet might be either in Spanish or in Arabic. The important thing was that the final couplet was taken, apparently, from popular sayings or perhaps even from verses that were common among the ordinary people. The poem builds up to a climax which seems to find its natural conclusion in the vulgar final couplet.⁶⁵ Many of these Hebrew poems are of the *ševi* genre, as the following by Ibn Gabirol:

He wounds me, whose necklace is the Pleiades⁽¹⁾
 and whose neck is [white] like the light of the moon.
 In opening the loops of his mouth⁽²⁾ he reveals
 the light of his pearls⁽³⁾ like the sun from its abode.
 I answered him: "Take my soul and slay [it];
 or if not, heal me, please heal!"
 He replied with the sweetness of his mouth:
 "There is no cure for an old wound."
 "Is my wound old, my friend?
 It is fresh — not more than a year old."
 He answered: "Drink my cup, and sing to me
 as on a day of parting, let there be no exaltation."
 And my beloved sang to me in Arabic:
 "In memory of the man whose appearance I love."⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Romance is also often referred to in Arabic sources as "*al-jāmi'a*." The original, and correct, form is "*al-lafīnī al-jāmi'a*" (the last word simply means "the community"), and *Latino* or *Latīnī* (the former a Romance form in Arabic characters) always meant "Romance" in al-Andalus (see, e.g., Ibn al-Baitar, as cited in J. Simonet, *Glosario*, p. 26; *Primera crónica general* 1.632, col. b; Ibn al-Qutīyah, in J. Ribera, *Discursos leídos ante la Real Academia de la Historia* [Madrid, 1915], p. 109 and p. 19 n. 1). For Jewish sources for "*latino*" as Romance, see Moses Ibn Ezra, *Kitāb al-muḥādara w'al-mudhākara*, ed. and trans. A. S. Halkin (Jerusalem, 1975), p. 42. (I am preparing an English translation of this work.) That Romance appeared in Spain prior to other countries is not subject to doubt. The *muwashshahāt* are themselves the first written evidence of this, and, in addition, certain Castilian dialects were already in use locally as early as the early ninth century (see Stanley Payne, *A History of Spain and Portugal* [Madison, Wisconsin, 1973] 1:39), and in court documents already by the eleventh century (*ibid.*, p. 79). The earliest manuscript of vernacular poetry of France dates from 1088. German, of course, is earlier. (See generally Robert K. Spaulding, *How Spanish Grew* [Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1962].)

⁶⁵ In addition to Stern's previously cited book (above, n. 46), see James Monroe, "Hispano-Arabic Poetry During the Caliphate of Cordoba," in G. E. von Grunebaum, *Arabic Poetry, Theory and Development*, pp. 125–54, and *idem*, "Formulaic Diction and the Common Origins of Romance Lyric Traditions," *Hispanic Review* 43 (1975), 341–50, two of the most exciting articles on the subject. The literature on this topic is vast, but these articles and Stern's book (actually a collection of earlier articles and papers) provide a good introduction.

⁶⁶ Ed. Jarden, p. 361 (No. 205); Schirmann-Brody, p. 62 (No. 110); unfortunately, Stern seems not to have known of this poem.

- (1) The constellation (frequently used in Arabic and Hebrew poetry); the meaning here is that his neck is so lovely only the stars can be its ornament.
- (2) *Edyo* (from *'adyi*, *'adah*). For the meaning "mouth," see Ibn Janah, *Sefer ha-shorashim*, s.v. *'edah*. The old English translations of Ps. 32.9 in fact read "his mouth," and so should Ps. 103.5. However, *'adyi* can also mean "ornament," its primary meaning.
- (3) His teeth.

The dialogue form is very common in Hebrew poetry, though not at all in Arabic. It is very unusual, however, if not unique, to have the language of the final couplet indicated ("in Arabic"). This may show that the poem is an early example of its genre in Hebrew. It need hardly be mentioned, of course, that the fact that the boy sang the line in Arabic does not necessarily mean he was a Muslim, although he may have been.

One of the finest of Ibn Gabirol's poems is the following:

Branch⁽¹⁾ who has exalted⁽²⁾ my heart with its blossoms,
 and bough of myrtle which passion⁽³⁾ has planted in its thoughts,
 Standing as a pillar of ivory, lovely in the eyes of every
 lover, and like a lover very poor are his gifts.⁽⁴⁾
 The secret of love he understands from the hearts: when
 you raise your heart to him, he will raise his eyes to you.⁽⁵⁾
 Lovers have wept for me, but have not [truly] wept;
 for like the cooing⁽⁶⁾ of a dove I will moan before his eyes.⁽⁷⁾
 His cheeks are like apples of gold in a setting
 of silver, and a word fitly spoken.⁽⁸⁾
 The moon is shamed when it sees the light
 of his cheeks, and the sun sets in his face⁽⁹⁾
 His breast is like golden pomegranates fastened with silver;
 would that I could suck his pomegranates!⁶⁷

- (1) *Amir* ("upper branch," sometimes "treetop"), also an Arabic name and so could hint at the name of the boy. Boys were often referred to as "branch" in Arabic poetry because of their grace and leanness.
- (2) *He'emir*, according to Ibn Janah, *Shorashim* (s.v. *amr*) means "exaltation, lifting up." Indeed, he says "therefore the upper branch is called *amir*," which exactly shows the intent of the poet; note the paronomasia here. In Arabic *amara* has as a meaning "command, exercise power over," while *amir*, of course, means "ruler, military commander." Thus, on a secondary level of meaning, the boy has ruled over the poet's heart.
- (3) As earlier noted, *hesheq*, under influence of Arabic *'ishq*, has a stronger meaning than biblical "desire, love."
- (4) There is the possibility of a double meaning in the second hemistich: *dallu* can mean "poor" (from *dal*) and *matenaw* "his gifts," in which case the meaning is that he is very sparing in giving satisfaction to his lovers. However, *dallu* proper means "wave, swing" (from *dalal*) and *matenaw* can as easily be a form of *matenayim*, "loins, waist" (e.g., 1 Kings 2.5). The meaning then would be: "and like a lover (passionate one) his loins (or waist) swing(s)." The thin-waisted boy, compared to a myrtle branch undulating in the wind, is common in Arabic.

⁶⁷ Ed. Jarden, p. 362 (No. 206); Schirmann-Brody, p. 72 (No. 123).

- (5) When you raise your heart, hoping to have him, he will "raise his eyes" haughtily. The first hemistich is somewhat obscure, and I am uncertain as to the translation.
- (6) Actually, "moaning" (a dirge); cf. Ezek. 7.16.
- (7) *Yonah* as "eyes": Song of Songs 4.1; because of his beauty.
- (8) Prov. 25.11. This quotation of a full verse from the Bible is unusual and not very effective poetically.
- (9) This line appears only in Schirmann's edition. It may be a substitute for the above line because of the problem I noted.

Before leaving Ibn Gabirol (who wrote many more love poems about boys), I should mention in passing an article by Aaron Citron, who notes that "the question that immediately arises," if we are to assume that all such poems are really about women, "is why a greater vice would be depicted to mask a lesser one."⁶⁸ In other words, why would the poets have selected boys, supposedly a completely illicit object of sexual desire, as a device to conceal their less objectionable love for women? The point is, of course, well taken, but Citron goes astray when he claims to have invalidated Schirmann's conclusions by discovering a certain "innocence" or "sanctity" in a poem that he describes as Ibn Gabirol's "lament on the death of a young boy," his lover.⁶⁹ In fact, the poem is a lament on the death not of his lover but of his own son! In any case, a significant number of Ibn Gabirol's love poems deal quite obviously with boys.

Moses Ibn Ezra (1055–ca. 1135/40) is often considered the greatest of the Hebrew poets of Spain. Certainly his poetry is characterized by a complexity that is at once its greatness and the quality that makes it at times maddeningly difficult to comprehend. Practically all of the genres and most of the motifs of medieval Hebrew poetry are represented in his work, and it is impossible any longer to label him with such simplistic titles as "the penitent" (*ha-salḥan*), as was often done in the Jewish community because of his liturgical poetry. The dangers involved in failing to recognize the motifs of medieval Hebrew poetry, prominent among them the love of boys, can be seen in the theory of the nineteenth-century scholar Gustav Karpeles, who believed that Ibn Ezra fell in love with his own niece and for this reason was exiled from his home in Granada. This view was based solely upon his German translation of the following poem, in which he deliberately changed the subject from masculine to feminine!⁷⁰ The late David Yellin's belief that Ibn Ezra wrote love poems only to boys and never about women⁷¹ aroused the indignation of Dan Pagis, who points out that Ibn Ezra was married and

⁶⁸ "Aspects of Love in the Hebrew Poetry of Moslem Spain," *Literature East & West* 11 (1967), 119–25 (generally of little value). Similarly, Dan Pagis, *Shirat ha-ḥol ve-torat ha-shir le-Mosheh Ibn 'Ezra u-vene'i doro* (Jerusalem, 1970), p. 271 n. 42, asks the same question about poetry concerning boys. (Yet, as we shall see, Pagis was not consistent in his views.)

⁶⁹ Translated by Citron, pp. 123–24.

⁷⁰ *Geschichte der jüdischen Literatur* (Berlin, 1886) 1:504–5.

⁷¹ Yellin, *Ketavim nivḥarim* (Jerusalem, 1939) 2:341.

a father, as though this automatically precludes his being able also to love boys.⁷² Ibn Ezra did, in fact, also write poems about women, but some of his finest poems were about boys, as the following:

To every man our wondrous love⁽¹⁾
 shall be an example in the world to all.⁽²⁾
 I strengthen myself against my oppression⁽³⁾ and you
 are more perverse than all gazelles.⁽⁴⁾
 I shall hide from men what is in my heart
 lest they say it is a disease of folly.
 Know that the sickness of love⁽⁵⁾ is in my heart
 and you increase the illness in keeping away;
 And that the world is like a firm seal⁽⁶⁾ because of your wandering
 and its breadth, without you, like a prison;
 And that men, were they most noble,⁽⁷⁾
 without sight of you⁽⁸⁾ I consider wild animals.
 In your mouth are streams of flowing honey⁽⁹⁾
 and I faint in my pain among the thirsty;
 Your scent is myrrh in the nostrils of strangers and I pant
 like the jackals in the dry wind of the desert.⁽¹⁰⁾
 To you — youth who understands hidden things,⁽¹¹⁾
 and a fawn, but who hunts, gently, lions;⁽¹²⁾
 Who gives life to all lovers and my life⁽¹³⁾
 without fault makes hang before me⁽¹⁴⁾ —
 To you, greeting: Know that my love
 greatly increases⁽¹⁵⁾ while you increase sin,
 And that your dwelling is in my eye and heart;
 although men who dwell in them fear
 Since in this⁽¹⁶⁾ a flame burns
 and from that⁽¹⁷⁾ clouds draw⁽¹⁸⁾ water.
 And that your wrath is [as] the favor of God in my eyes,
 and though my illness is strong I do not envy the healthy.
 I will not turn from my path until the ground
 pours out dew and the heavens bring forth vegetation.
 Revive [me], my fawn, as is the desire of my heart,
 while the swallow yet twitters among the branches.⁷³

(1) *Ahab* as a noun meaning “love” was coined by Ibn Nagrillah.

(2) To future lovers, who will talk of our love.

(3) Cf. Amos 5.9, and also Jer. 8.18: “I strengthen myself against sorrow.”

⁷² “Nosē, nissuah ve-tabnit: sugei shirat ha-hol bi-Sefarad,” *ha-Sifrut* 1 (1968–69), 43–62.

⁷³ Moses Ibn Ezra, *Shirei ha-hol*, ed. H. Brody (Berlin, 1935), pp. 15–16 (No. 11). Note the dramatic contrast between the “know” of line 4, introducing a series of almost breathless statements (which is why I have retained the otherwise awkward “Ands” in the translation) in which the poet seeks to inform the boy of his suffering, and the “know” of line 11, which introduces a series informing the boy that his love for him increases in proportion to the increase in suffering. The first part is all reproof, while the last exhibits the lover’s desperate passion. (Again, note the similarities in some respects to the poems in Boswell, *Christianity*, p. 370 ff.)

- (4) With only a slight change of vowel points we get the word 'ul ("suckling, youngster"). Could the poet have intended the pun?
- (5) See note (1) above.
- (6) Cf. Job 41.7 and 8.
- (7) Brody suggested correcting here: *ke-'ayyalim* ("gazelles"), and in the manuscript the Arabic word *al-ṣabī* does appear in the margin. However, aside from the fact that no such masculine plural form exists, the word 'ayil (pl. 'elim) as written, literally "rams," means "mighty ones" (e.g., Ex. 15.15), and in Semitic languages nobles were often referred to with various names of animals: lions, gazelles, etc. It was sometimes used in this sense in medieval Hebrew; see, e.g., Hayyim Gallipapa at the beginning of Isaac b. Sheshet's responsum No. 394.
- (8) The word is undoubtedly meant to be *marah* ("vision, sight of someone").
- (9) Cf. Ps. 19.11.
- (10) Cf. Jer. 4.11.
- (11) Paronomasia: 'elem ("youth"), ta'alumim ("hidden things").
- (12) I.e., his lovers, whom he "hunts" (entices) in a guileless way.
- (13) Paronomasia: hayyē ("gives life, revives"), hayyai ("my life").
- (14) Cf. Deut. 28.66.
- (15) Alternatively, "you increase" (the form is the same).
- (16) The heart.
- (17) The eye.
- (18) Cf. Jer. 10.13.

I have noted that Muslim poets, both in al-Andalus and elsewhere, sometimes wrote love poetry the subject of which was a Christian or a Jewish boy. Jewish poets, too, wrote poems about Muslim boys and women. The following brief poem on this theme is from Ibn Ezra's *'Anaq*:⁷⁴

My heart mourns⁽¹⁾ because of a son of Qedar,
A fawn lovely of appearance, young of years.
His cheeks are like scarlet and black⁽²⁾ his hair,
And his lips are like crimson.

- (1) Paronomasia: *hiqdir* ("to darken, mourn"), *Qedar* (an Arab; cf. Isa. 21.17). An alternative reading of the line could be: "A son of Qedar darkened my heart."
- (2) *Tekhelet*; often thought of as "blue," but the word was interpreted as referring to a black color by many commentators.

Many poems (Arabic and Hebrew) celebrate the beauty of the boy cup-bearer (Arabic *sāqī*), whose duty it was to fill the cups of wine in the tavern or at an all-night drinking party. Sometimes these boys were also the object of passion:

By my soul!⁽¹⁾ The night of companionship there rose in him,
in spite of fate, the sun of my joy.
In the night the word of my fawn was my choice fruit⁽²⁾
and his mouth was my cup and the wine of his saliva my juice;⁽³⁾

⁷⁴ Brody, p. 351, No. 49. (The *'Anaq*, meaning "necklace," is a collection of short poetic epigrams.)

And the beauty of his face my lilies, and the rows
on his cheeks were considered as branches of my myrtle.⁽⁴⁾
When his eyes pierced⁽⁵⁾ my heart,
quickly to the balm of his breast [I took] flight.⁷⁵

- (1) I will ransom the night with my soul when . . . (an Arabic expression).
- (2) Song of Songs 7.14 (referring here to the fruit that was tasted to enhance the drinking of the wine).
- (3) Song of Songs 8.2.
- (4) Rows, probably of fine down on the cheek, which is often compared to myrtle leaves in Arabic poetry (the myrtle, or another spice, was inhaled with the wine). Not all references in Arabic or Hebrew poetry to down on the boy's face are negative.
- (5) Brody's reading is incorrect here, and it must be *yishku* (from *sokhah*, "to pierce, to see").

The following poem combines the greatest imaginable pleasures — a cup of wine and a boy:

Desire⁽¹⁾ of my heart and delight of my eyes —
A fawn⁽²⁾ beside me and a cup in my hand!
Many admonish me, but I do not heed;
Come, O gazelle, and I will subdue them.
Time will destroy them and death shepherd⁽³⁾ them.
Come, O gazelle, rise and feed me⁽⁴⁾
With the honey of your lips, and satisfy me.
Why do they hold back my heart, why?
If because of sin and guilt,
I will be ravished by your beauty — God is there!⁽⁵⁾
Pay no attention to the words of my oppressor,
A perverse man — come and try me!
He was enticed, and we went up to his mother's house,
And he gave his shoulder to my burden.⁽⁶⁾
Night and day I was only with him.
I undressed him, and he undressed me;
I sucked his lips and he sucked mine.⁽⁷⁾
When I left my heart as a pledge in his eyes,
The burden of my guilt was also weighed in his hand.
He sought enmity,⁽⁸⁾ and inflicted his anger,⁽⁹⁾
And angrily cried, "Enough; leave me!
Do not force me, and do not entice me."
Do not be angry with me, gazelle, to destruction —
Extraordinary is your will, my dear, extraordinary!
Kiss your beloved and fulfill his desire.
If it is in your soul to give life, revive me —
Or if your desire is to kill, kill me!⁷⁶

- (1) The word also means "lust."
- (2) Boy ('*ofer*).

⁷⁵ Brody, pp. 158–59 (No. 159).

⁷⁶ Brody, pp. 161–62 (No. 149); Schirrmann, *ha-Shurah*, 1:367.

- (3) "Gather" them to it.
- (4) *Havrieni*; "feed me, fatten me."
- (5) *Eshgeh*; "I will be ravished." The word also has the meaning "to err, unintentionally to sin." "God is there" is ambiguous — either "there" (to forgive), or "there" (in the boy's beauty).
- (6) Cf. Gen. 49.15 (the context there implies that, possibly, the boy was paid; at least he consented willingly).
- (7) Literally, "he sucked me" (*yanag*, which only means "suck"); however, I have no reason to believe that it means anything other than kissing.
- (8) Cf. Job 33.10.
- (9) Job 35.15 (*paqad* there means "inflict; visit upon").

The following short poem concludes the selection from Ibn Ezra:

A bunch from the offspring of rows⁽¹⁾
 in the hand of a fawn, and pleasant plants.⁽²⁾
 I thought him, when he was near my side,
 like the moon at the edge of a rainbow.⁽³⁾⁷⁷

- (1) A bunch of flowers from the rows of the garden; *aguddah*, "bunch," can also mean "band" (of men).
- (2) Cf. Isa. 17.10, and see verse 11 there (does the poet, therefore, refer to the fleeting youth and beauty of the boy?)
- (3) *Qeshet 'ananim*; cf. Ezek. 1.28, which is a vision of God!

Judah ha-Levi (1075–1141), like Ibn Ezra, is perhaps more generally known for his religious than for his secular poetry; yet both poets in fact wrote more secular verse. Many of ha-Levi's poems are of the *ševi* genre; not all of these are to be found in the section devoted to love poetry in Brody's edition of his *Divan*, but are scattered throughout. The following is a *muwashshah*, a favorite form used by ha-Levi for love poems:

Inquire of my fawn⁽¹⁾ my well-being, / he will say what profit there is in
 my blood:⁽²⁾
 Speak to him flattery,
 That he despise the gain of oppression.⁽³⁾
 His — to my weakened eyes⁽⁴⁾ —
 His to restore a bit my well-being / perhaps my dream will behold him:⁽⁵⁾
 The gazelle whom I ransom with my soul;
 Let the death of man seize upon me,⁽⁶⁾
 He is the keeper of my paradise and my fire.
 From his cheeks is the garden of my spices / as from his eyes my poison:⁽⁷⁾
 So with the arrows of his eyes he oppresses;
 The heart of his fellow he smites once and again.
 [But] those who rejoice at calamity⁽⁸⁾ I answer:
 Even if my companion is changed into my enemy⁽⁹⁾ / the yoke of his love
 is dominion to my shoulder:⁽¹⁰⁾

⁷⁷ Brody, p. 152 (No. 150).

With all the delights of the world I will ransom
 The night when my lust was fulfilled⁽¹¹⁾
 By the gazelle of loveliness, and I scraped
 From his lips the flowing wine of his vineyard / and I kissed his ruddy
 cheeks:⁽¹²⁾

Of the bdellium⁽¹³⁾ of his mouth he gave me drink
 Blood of grapes in crimson lips —
 Until he awoke and answered me:
 “How long, how long / will I give you to drink wine from my mouth?”⁷⁸

- (1) *Ofer* (Song of Songs 2.9 and 4.5)
- (2) Ps. 30.10; here the meaning is: he will tell what advantage there is to my life when I am dying of love of him.
- (3) Isa. 33.15.
- (4) Ps. 6.8; weakened by sorrow.
- (5) Perhaps he will restore (or: he is obligated to restore) a bit of sleep to me and I will see him in a dream.⁷⁹
- (6) Ps. 55.16 (the *qeri: yashi' mavet*).
- (7) I delight in the loveliness of his face (cf. Song of Songs 5.13), yet his glances have the power to slay me.
- (8) Prov. 17.5.
- (9) *Qami*, apparently coined from *qum*, in the sense of “rise up against me.”
- (10) Cf. Isa. 9.5.
- (11) Literally, “he pressed my breast.” Derived from Ezek. 23.2 and 8, but the general context there of sexual passion is intended. As to Brody’s confusion over the meaning of *bo*, I fail to see the difficulty. Obviously it is a pronoun, the antecedent of which is *leil* in line 15: “the night in which. . . .”
- (12) The apparent first person suffixes are necessitated by meter.
- (13) Often translated as “pearl” and used poetically to mean “teeth,” but it really is a fragrant gum, like myrrh (cf. Num. 11.7).

There are many other *sevi* poems by ha-Levi, but two more examples must suffice:

Cheeks like coals of fire on a pavement of marble,⁽¹⁾
 Embroidered round about in myrrh like embroidered linen.⁽²⁾
 He increases⁽³⁾ fire in my heart in approaching me,
 For he pities once and is treacherous six times!⁽⁴⁾ ⁸⁰

- (1) The poem is based throughout on various plays on words; here, *rispah* meaning both “coal” (Isa. 6.6) and “pavement” (Esther 1.6). The meaning, of course, is ruddy cheeks on pale skin.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Judah ha-Levi, *Divan*, ed. H. Brody (Berlin, 1894–1930) 2:14 (No. 11).

⁷⁹ The theme of the image of the beloved appearing in a dream is a major topos of the love poetry. I have dealt with this in my article “Satire and Debate in Two Famous Medieval Poems from al-Andalus: Love of Boys vs. Girls, the Pen and Other Themes,” *The Maghreb Review* 4 (1979), 105–13, which contains a translation of the famous poem of Yūsuf Ibn Ḥasday and the reply by Ibn Nagrillah.

⁸⁰ *Divan* 2:31 (No. 28).

⁸¹ This line, I should point out, also contains an allusion to Song of Songs 8.6: *reshafeyah*

- (2) His cheeks are “decorated” with fine down, like myrrh (not yet dark enough to constitute the beginnings of the dreaded beard).
- (3) *Yosef*. Possibly the emphatic placing of this verb form, the same as the name “Joseph,” at the beginning of the line is a hint to the name of the boy.
- (4) For every one time he lets me have my way with him, six times he refuses. Again, the theme of the deceitful boy.

In addition to borrowing themes and language from Arabic poetry, some poets also translated or adapted Arabic poetry into Hebrew. An example by ha-Levi:

The day when I fondled him on my knee
And he saw his image in the pupils of my eyes,
He kissed my eyes — little deceiver,
His reflection he kissed, and not my eyes!⁸²

This is a reworking of a rather weak poem by the famous al-Mutanabbi:

A beauty who as long as I was alone with her
saw her visage in my vision.
She kissed my eyes and she cheated me,
for she kissed her own mouth in that.⁸³

Besides the obvious general improvement of the poem in ha-Levi's transformation of it, he has made it much more believable and delightful by changing the subject from a woman to a young boy, of whom we can more easily imagine such behavior.

We have as yet relatively little poetry from Abraham Ibn Ezra (1092–1167), who must have been one of the greatest and most prolific of the medieval poets; even so we have some outstanding examples of the *sevi* genre from his hand. The following is on the theme of the “spy,” who objected on moral grounds to love affairs with boys:

Spy of the lovely gazelle, heal me:
[let me] see the glowing cheeks!
[But] he was angered and his eyes kept watch
like a serpent by the road.⁽¹⁾

rishpei esh, “its [love's] coals are coals of fire”; *reṣef* and *reṣef* are the same word. I am very grateful to Prof. Boswell for his very insightful note here, which I reproduce in full with his kind permission: “The word *shesh* can mean “marble” (as here), “fine linen,” as in line 2, or “six,” as in line 4. The entire poem is constructed on puns and the repetition of the same sounds with different meanings [note: this is what we call paronomasia]. It is impossible to convey in translation the effect of reading the same word each time, but being forced by the context to understand it differently. As but one of many layers of richness achieved by this technique one might note that the repetition of the same word (*shesh*) in reference to the boy three times with three entirely different meanings evokes an image of the boy himself as containing many different qualities, or perhaps being of a highly changeable nature.”

⁸² Schirmann, *ha-Shirah* 1:446 (No. 2); cf. Jer. 31.19 and Isa. 66.12.

⁸³ al-Mutanabbi, *Diwan*, trans. Wormhoudt, p. 322.

Beloved, I desire that you turn to me,
 my weeping and misery do not forsake.
 My heart comforts me: perhaps
 his hard heart will soften.
 [Perhaps] he will not be angry at the words of my speech;
 but, because of his guardian,⁽²⁾ he is silent.
 To him my words are strange,
 for he has become lame with the affliction of his age.⁽³⁾
 Winking to me by design,
 he acts humbly⁽⁴⁾ and "tears down the house of the proud."⁽⁵⁾
 Consent, beloved, to meet in secret
 for I shall love to lie with you —
 And to the name of the prince of all Israel⁽⁶⁾
 we will drink and take a cup of wine.
 I will ask that God show
 favor to the seller of wine.⁽⁷⁾
 Joy to my right and my left —
 a fawn⁽⁸⁾ and spiced wine.
 Wealth or health⁽⁹⁾ for drinking
 I will give, and it will take all!⁽¹⁰⁾ 84

(1) Gen. 49.17.

(2) The "spy"; no legal relationship is implied (a common theme in Arabic).

(3) See Ex. 12.27 and 2 Sam. 4.4.

(4) Deceitfully, pretending to be circumspect.

(5) Thus, he dashes the hopes of his lover (Prov. 15.25).

(6) The Jewish notable in whose honor the ode was written.

(7) Literally, "golden water," white wine, considered superior to red.

(8) The boy.

(9) Both words unclear in the manuscript; perhaps *hon* ("wealth") and *basari* ("my flesh").

(10) This is the "transition verse"; remainder of the poem is praise of the "master" of the boy (was he a Muslim slave?).

Abraham Ibn Ezra's son Isaac (twelfth century), who later converted to Islam and then returned to Judaism, also wrote several *ševi* poems, of which the following *muwashshah* is perhaps one of the best:

The secret of love, how can it be contained?
 The heart and the tear are talebearers.⁽¹⁾
 The heart is restrained from what it seeks,
 Shut up and by passion of him besieged,
 Unable to obtain its desire.
 If it presumes to attain to the stars,
 Its pride is brought down, laid low.⁽²⁾
 Beloved like a hart,⁽³⁾ with heart of a panther,⁽⁴⁾
 If you desire to slay,
 My heart is in your hand as clay.

⁸⁴ Schirmann, *Shirim ḥadashim*, pp. 272–74.

But do not summon wanderings upon it,⁽⁵⁾
 For in its midst your name is sheltered.
 Beloved, like a scarlet cord his lips,
 Burning like fire for they are his censer,⁽⁶⁾
 And in them is the work of his signs.⁽⁷⁾
 Live by them, for it waits⁽⁸⁾ for them —
 A heart long suffering because of them.
 How my fate has hardened its⁽⁹⁾ spirit.
 A while, and separation will cause it to be odious
 To my friends who knew its thoughts.
 If wandering has separated us,
 It has increased love.
 I will watch for the gazelle
 To leave in the garden my pleasures,
 Although my rebuker stands to accuse me.⁸⁵

(1) They reveal the secret of his love, cf. Prov. 11.13.

(2) Cf. Isa. 25.12.

(3) *Ofer* (fawn; the boy).

(4) Although lovely of form, his heart is hard.

(5) Based on the Arabic theme of the wandering lover: if you command my heart to "wander" (to stop loving you), know that thoughts of you have already "made a tent" in it and cannot be erased.

(6) Cf. Lev. 16.12.

(7) Cf. Deut. 11.3; the poet means his lips are a "miracle" of beauty.

(8) Or "withers in pain"; cf. Ps. 55.5. He can only live by the beauty of the boy, even though it has long caused suffering.

(9) The subject is still the heart of the poet.

It is perhaps fitting to close with this poem, in my opinion one of the finest of medieval Hebrew poetry. Since this article is limited to a discussion of the poets of the "classical" period of Muslim Spain, the *ševi* poetry of later poets, such as Judah al-Ḥarizi and especially Todros Abulafia, has not been included. The discussion of the poetry of the latter would require another article at least of the same length. The purpose of this article has been to show that there exists a significant and important body of poems of the *ševi* genre in medieval Hebrew poetry, of which only a small sample has here been translated and analyzed for the first time, and that these poems are hardly "allegory" or mere literary devices.

Research on medieval Hebrew secular poetry and literature is still so much in a stage of infancy that it is difficult to make comparisons with other poetry and even to draw solid conclusions about such things as Arabic influence. Certainly the Bible was a major source for the terminology and even the themes of medieval Hebrew poetry, and in the understandable desire to discover Arabic parallels to the poetry this obvious fact is often neglected.

⁸⁵ Isaac Ibn Ezra, *Shirim*, ed. N. Ben-Menahem (Jerusalem, 1950), pp. 21–22 (No. 8).

There is yet no satisfactory study of the use and interpretation of the Bible by the Hebrew poets.

No particular civilization has had a monopoly on themes and idioms of poetic expression. It is perhaps most of interest, therefore, simply to note the similarities of this poetry to ancient Greek and medieval Muslim and Christian poetry dealing with the love of boys. Only a complete analysis of medieval Hebrew poetry, which has not yet been attempted, can reveal the full significance of this genre, but there can be no doubt that it was of major importance (note, for example, my statistical observations with regard to the love poetry of Ibn Nagrillah). This may partially explain the relative obscurity into which medieval Hebrew secular poetry fell after the Middle Ages until its rediscovery in the last century. Such poetry was not in the spirit of the almost exclusively religious culture which emerged among European Jews outside of the Iberian peninsula, and by the same token it continues to arouse the indignant denials of religiously oriented scholars today. However, the full measure of a civilization can only be taken from a comprehensive study of its culture, including the secular as well as the religious aspects. For the historian, therefore, this poetry is a significant source for understanding the culture and daily lives of the Jews of medieval Spain. For the student of literature, I hope that it will open a small window onto the panorama of a nearly forgotten and unknown world of medieval Hebrew literature.

One final word needs to be said about the significance of this poetry in its own age. In our time it is often popularly assumed that the poet is somehow sheltered from the world and lives in a kind of aesthetic paradise of his or her own. The medieval Jewish poet of Spain, however, was totally involved in the life and problems of the community. Some, like Ibn Nagrillah, were statesmen; others, like Judah ha-Levi, doctors; still others, like Ibn Gabirol, philosophers. All led active lives and were widely known throughout the Jewish communities of Spain. This must make us cautious about any assumption that their poetry reached only a relatively small aristocratic class. There were, in fact, many manuscripts of the complete works and of individual poems of these authors, whose wide popularity is further attested by the frequency with which later Jewish authors of Spain cited them. Thus we may with real confidence conclude that this poetry does provide us "a mirror held up to nature," one that reflects the emotions and the lives of the "Golden Age" of Spanish Jewry.

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