

FORMAL STRUCTURE IN THE LYRIC POETRY
OF ‘ABD ALLĀH IBN AL-MU‘TAZZ

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Abstract

This dissertation studies the lyric poetry of ‘Abd Allāh Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, the ‘Abbāsid poet, literary critic, and caliph of one day, with the aim of contributing to scholarly understanding of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s poetic practice in particular and lyric poetry in general. In surveying the lyric corpus, we identify some structural trends that broadly apply to short poems. First, certain formal features (such as direct address) tend to gravitate towards the beginnings of such poems, while others (such as similes) tend to gravitate towards the ends. Second, formal features are found to occur in a mostly complementary distribution between a class of genres dubbed “argumentative” and a class dubbed “descriptive”. Combining statistical techniques with traditional close-reading, we demonstrate these trends and consider their implications within the corpus and beyond it. The introductory chapter introduces and situates both Ibn al-Mu‘tazz and the major themes of the thesis. The first chapter identifies and closely examines the aforementioned structural trends as they occur in lyric couplets. The second chapter expands these findings to poems of all lengths, observing a distinction between short poems (where these trends are evident) and long poems (where they are not). The third chapter applies the same findings to anthology corpora, providing evidence that some of the structural trends found in short poems of the lyric corpus are also found in the short lyric selections that were transmitted in classical anthologies; it also examines *qaṣīdas* by Ibn al-Mu‘tazz and finds some limited applicability of the trends beyond the lyric genres. The fourth chapter returns to a close-reading of lyric poems by Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, demonstrating how the baseline expectations supplied by a statistical corpus study can be used to analyze an individual poem as literature.

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Introduction

This dissertation comprises a structural study of the lyric poetry of ‘Abd Allāh Ibn al-Mu‘tazz. As such, it seeks to fulfill a triple function. First and primarily, it seeks to contribute to understanding of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s poetry by examining the structural tendencies evident in his lyric poems. Second, it seeks to use the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz to produce a case study of poetic structure which may contribute to the greater understanding of structure in Arabic poetry generally. Relatedly, it seeks to raise the profile of short lyric poems and the study thereof, and to make a case for the relevance of the structure of short lyric poems to the study of *qaṣīda* poetry. This introductory chapter endeavors to set the stage for all three of these purposes. Section 1 will introduce the life, times, and reception of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz. Section 2 will locate the present study within the context of the larger study of poetic structure in classical Arabic poetry as practiced by modern Western scholars, and discuss the role played by short lyric poetry. Section 3 will briefly lay out the component chapters of the dissertation to follow. ‘

0.1 ‘Abd Allāh Ibn al-Mu‘tazz: Life, Times, and Reception

0.1.1 The Life of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz

‘Abd Allāh Ibn al-Mu‘tazz was among the last of the great classical Arabic poets and among the first of the great classical Arabic literary critics. An archetypical poet-prince of the Arab-Islamic tradition, he lived out his life in the shadow of the deadly dynastic politics that were both symptom and cause of the ‘Abbāsīd caliphate’s decline; ultimately

after becoming caliph for “a day and a night”, he was assassinated at the age of 47. His poetry is renowned for its lavish descriptions, often linked with the luxurious life he lived¹. His criticism reflects a concern with establishing the rhetorical flourishes typical of ‘Abbāsid poetry within a continuous tradition dating back to pre-Islamic poetry and the Qur’ān.

In order to understand Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s life and death it is necessary to understand the historical backdrop against which he lived². By the latter half of the 9th century CE, the ‘Abbāsid caliphs had lost much of their original power to regional governors, Shī‘ite rebels, a bloated bureaucracy, and the Turkish-dominated military. The Turkish guards, in particular, came increasingly to play the role of king-makers, deposing caliphs and reinstating other members of the imperial family in their stead. Though al-Mutawakkil (who ruled 847-861) made a credible effort to reduce the power of the Turkish guards, ultimately his enemies in the military conspired with his own son and heir al-Muntaṣir to assassinate him; al-Mutawakkil was assassinated one month after his grandson Ibn al-Mu‘tazz was born.

Al-Mutawakkil’s assassination was followed by a decade of dynastic chaos, in which time central control over the provinces weakened, military control over the government increased dramatically, and five caliphs ascended the throne in quick succession. Among these was Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s father, al-Mu‘tazz. al-Mu‘tazz spent much of the first five

¹ For examples see (Abū al-Faraj 1969, 3738), (Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī 2000, 987)

² Unless otherwise noted, the reference materials for this historical section come from articles in (Encyclopaedia of Islam 2011), including (Lewin 2011), (Lewis 2011); and articles on the various caliphs mentioned.

years of his son's life imprisoned because he was seen as a viable contender for the throne. Following a bloody succession struggle, he became caliph in 866, with the young Ibn al-Mu'tazz his declared heir.³ In 869, at the age of 24, al-Mu'tazz was deposed and murdered in a military coup. The 7-year old Ibn al-Mu'tazz was passed over for the caliphate in favor of his cousin al-Muhtadī, and Ibn al-Mu'tazz was sent along with his mother and grandmother to Mecca, far from the center of power.⁴

The caliphate steadied to some extent after al-Mu'tamid's ascension to the throne in 870. al-Mu'tamid remained caliph for thirteen years, and although he himself was a virtual figurehead, his brother al-Muwaffaq, and later al-Muwaffaq's son al-Mu'taḍid, ruled in his stead, forging a working coalition with both the military and the bureaucracy. Ibn al-Mu'tazz was permitted to return to Iraq, and when al-Mu'taḍid succeeded his uncle in 892, he invited Ibn al-Mu'tazz to settle in Baghdad. The ten years of al-Mu'taḍid's reign must have been some of the most politically comfortable of Ibn al-Mu'tazz's life; the longest poem in his *dīwān* by a factor of three is a praise poem in honor of al-Mu'taḍid⁵, and he is also the author of numerous poems honoring the vizier 'Ubayd Allāh Ibn Sulaymān and his son and successor al-Qāsim⁶. But this friendly relationship with al-Mu'taḍid and al-Qāsim did not prevent the latter from imprisoning Ibn al-Mu'tazz during the period of transition after al-Mu'taḍid's death in 902, until his son and heir al-Muktafi could arrive in Baghdad (upon al-Muktafi's assumption of the throne he ordered that Ibn

³ (Heinrichs, Ibn al-Mu'tazz 2005, 165)

⁴ (Heinrichs, Ibn al-Mu'tazz 2005, 165)

⁵ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 568, #443)

⁶ E.g. (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 523, #419; v. I, pg. 557, #438; v. I, pg. 560, #440; v. III, pg. 19, #1155; v. III, pg. 30, #1164; v. III, pg. 58, #1184)

al-Mu‘tazz be released with a gift of 1000 dinars; nevertheless the incident serves to underscore the ongoing insecurity of the caliphal succession, and the accompanying distrust in which all members of the royal family were held.)⁷ After al-Mu‘taḍid’s death Ibn al-Mu‘tazz returned to a life of retirement while al-Muktafi continued his father’s successful policies of financial management and military reconquest in the provinces. Al-Qāsim Ibn ‘Ubayd Allāh continued in his role as vizier until his death, at which point he was followed by al-‘Abbās Ibn al-Ḥasan.

In 908, with al-Muktafi dying, al-‘Abbās took counsel with the three other department heads to ask who should be selected to succeed him⁸. Muḥammad Ibn Dāwūd Ibn al-Jarrāḥ recommended Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, citing his merits. ‘Alī Ibn Muḥammad Ibn al-Furāt (whose family were rivals of the Banū al-Jarrāḥ) counseled that al-‘Abbās instead select al-Muktafi’s 13 year old brother Ja‘far on the grounds that he would do what his viziers told him without looking into their affairs, whereas the older and more experienced Ibn al-Mu‘tazz would be his own man. The third counselor, ‘Alī Ibn ‘Isā, declined to suggest a nominee, and al-‘Abbās was convinced by Ibn al-Furāt’s arguments and made Ja‘far caliph under the regnal title al-Muqtadir.

Muḥammad Ibn Dāwūd Ibn al-Jarrāḥ and al-Ḥusayn Ibn Ḥamdān (whether motivated by a patriotic desire for a strong caliph or by familial rivalry) formed a plot to depose al-Muqtadir and replace him with Ibn al-Mu‘tazz. Ibn al-Mu‘tazz is said to have agreed to

⁷ (Heinrichs, Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 2005, 165)

⁸ (Ibn Miskawayh 1965, v. I, pg. 2)

the plot “on condition that no Muslim be killed because of me”.⁹ Overlooking this provision, al-Husayn Ibn Ḥamdān proceeded to assassinate al-‘Abbās Ibn al-Ḥasan, and start a palace coup to instate Ibn al-Mu‘tazz in his place.¹⁰ The coup seemed to be initially successful, with al-Muqtadir hiding in the palace and Ibn al-Mu‘tazz appointing new viziers; however, the supporters of al-Muqtadir rallied and attacked the supporters of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, scattering them and putting them to flight. Ibn al-Mu‘tazz was found hiding in the house of Ibn al-Jassās the Jeweller. Al-Muqtadir handed him over to the guard commander Mu’nis al-Khāzin, who strangled him.¹¹ A further weakened al-Muqtadir was restored to his throne, having been rendered deeply indebted to both the vizier Ibn al-Furāt and the guard commander Mu’nis al-Khāzin. Al-Muqtadir’s long and ineffectual rule further cemented the decline of the caliphate, which by 945 had been reduced to figurehead status.

The history of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz the man of letters nevertheless shines out through the harsh framework of historical tragedy. He is described as a handsome man, tall, with a dark complexion and chiseled features, and who dyed his hair black.¹² As a boy he studied with Tha‘lab, a philologist of the Kufan school, and with his rival al-Mubarrad of the Basran school, as well as Aḥmad Ibn Sa‘īd al-Dimashqī. After his father’s death, he was raised primarily by his paternal grandmother Qabīḥah, who was reportedly displeased by his decision to focus on poetry.¹³

⁹ (Kutubī 1973-1977, v. II, pg. 240)

¹⁰ Accounts of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s regnal name vary, but they include al-Murtaḍī, al-Muntaṣif, al-Ghālib, and al-Rāḍī, (Ibn Khallikān 1948-1950, v. III, pg. 72, #341)

¹¹ (Ibn Khallikān 1948-1950, v. III, pg. 73, #341)

¹² (Kutubī 1973-1977, v. II, pg. 240)

¹³ (Yāqūt 1993, v. IV, pg. 1523)

His grandmother's concerns aside, it requires only a little imagination to conjecture as to why a talented young man whose very existence posed a credible threat to powerful and justly paranoid relatives should have chosen a literary career rather than the career in public life to which his birth entitled him; it requires only a little more to guess why such a poet should have made his name writing elegant descriptions of lush surroundings rather than turning his hand to political poetry, even while writing in a tradition that privileged the latter. His contemporaries noted his ability to improvise verses on the fly, drawing inspiration from the specifics of an occasion.¹⁴

Although much of his poetry was devoted to conventional themes of love or description of gardens and hunting, it seems safe to suggest that the events of Ibn al-Mu'tazz's life find emotional expression in his poetry. The elegy he wrote for al-Mu'taḍid evokes the fragility of an existence of which all the benefits—not just wealth and status, but his very life—was contingent upon the health and good will of a particular individual. Of the poem's 25 lines, 16 begin by asking a question that begins with "where". The repetition creates a haunting refrain: Where? Where? Where did it all go?¹⁵

Ibn al-Mu'tazz's poetry reveals a sentimental attachment to the caliphal city of Sāmarrā', which was built in the time of the caliph al-Mu'taṣim and abandoned by the caliphs in 892, when al-Mu'taḍid returned the capital to Baghdad. The verdict of history may be that Sāmarrā' symbolized caliphal extravagance, withdrawal of the imperial family from

¹⁴ (Yāqūt 1993, v. IV, pg. 1521)

¹⁵ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. III, pg. 19, #1156). This poem is translated and analyzed in chapter 4, pg. 137

the common people, and concession to the Turkish guards; however, for Ibn al-Mu‘tazz it was a place wrought through with glory and nostalgia, and its abandonment is represented as a tragedy in several of his lyric poems. He refers to it as *surra man ra’ā*, a folk etymology for Sāmarrā’ meaning “whoever saw it was made happy”. Sāmarrā’ is the topic of the short poem that follows:

Poem 1¹⁶

*1 Forsaken abode—the one who leaves her cannot give her up—*¹⁷

*Her buildings are desolated, as are her fields*¹⁸.

2 The owl weeps in its dwelling places

It’s as though its homelands were its graves.

Ibn al-Mu‘tazz also maintained an interest in advocating in verse for the ‘Abbāsids’ claim to the caliphate over the descendants of ‘Alī, as observed by al-Kutubī¹⁹— an understandable preoccupation in a world where Shī‘ite dissidents were gaining traction in the provinces. In the poem that follows, Ibn al-Mu‘tazz is shown in a defensive mood, arguing that the ‘Abbāsīd and Shī‘ite progenitors (‘Abbās and ‘Alī) were equally distinguished by kinship with the prophet.

¹⁶ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 525, #1020). “About Surra Man Ra’ā”. See also v. I, pg. 279-80, #163; v. I, pg. 345-6, #259; v.II, pg. 469-70, #977. Of these 4 citations, 2 are *ghazal* poems and two *wasf* poems.

¹⁷ The deserted castle is being compared with a temporary encampment—a lover’s sorrow at the departure from such encampments is a trope of Arabic poetry.

¹⁸ The contrast here is being drawn between the cultivated and the uncultivated lands of Surra Man Ra’ā—both are likewise laid waste now.

¹⁹ (Kutubī 1973-1977, v. II, pg. 241-2)

1 *Oh wrongful in speech*

Speak the truth, that you may be rightly-guided:

2 *‘Alī is like ‘Abbās*

As a hand is like its mate’.

3 *Don’t say ‘this one is the right hand and that one is the left hand’*

*For they both belong to the most blessed one*²¹.

In addition to composing poetry, Ibn al-Mu‘tazz was prolific in the composition of prose. His major critical work, *Kitāb al-Badī‘*, inaugurated a tradition in the classification of rhetorical features, while again taking on the role of defending the legitimacy of the status quo with reference to the classical past. His *Ṭabaqāt al-Shu‘arā’* anthologized poets of the modernist period—the notable exclusion of Ibn al-Rūmī from its ranks is believed to reflect a personal grudge arising from Ibn al-Rūmī’s composition of poetic invectives against Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s father.²² He also wrote *Kitāb al-Adab*—a book composed largely of pithy sayings. Yāqūt reproduces a selection of such sayings in his entry on Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, including such utterances as “Wisdom is a tree that grows in the heart, and flowers on the tongue”, and “As intelligence grows, speech shrinks”.²³ Other works include the *Fusūl wa-Tamāthīl fī Tabāshīr al-Surūr*, a manual of wine-drinking etiquette, and *al-Muwāzana bayn Shi‘r Abī Tammām wa-al-Buḥturī*, his view on a popular critical controversy of the time.

²⁰ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 281, #849) See also v. III, pg. 32-35, #1169, at the end

²¹ i.e., both were like the hands of Muḥammad

²² (Heinrichs, Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 2005, 167)

²³ (Yāqūt 1993, 1524)

Al-Kutubī transmits a touching account surrounding Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s death, which, whether or not historically true, speaks to the legend of the poet-prince.²⁴

One of [Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s] servants said: He went out one day for a walk, along with his drinking companions, headed for the Bāb al-Ḥadīd and the Garden of al-Nā‘ūra, at the end of his life, and he took a piece of pottery and wrote on it with plaster:

A drink for the rest of my time,	And my blessed life
It has turned away like a night of love	Before a morning of rejection. ²⁵

And he said: And fate took its blow, then I returned after the killing of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, and I found that his line had been effaced, and under it was written:

Alas for the rest of my time	And my ill-fated life
I have separated from my family and friends	And my companions and my loved ones
And those I cared for have spurned me	In obedience to one who envies me
Oh my God, death! Or if not	Repose from rejection!

0.1.2 The Literary Context

Ibn al-Mu‘tazz lived and wrote towards the end of the golden age of ‘Abbāsid poetry—in his capacity as a critic, this gave him the perspective to write retrospectively about the poetic tradition in which he had been raised; in his capacity as a poet, it gave him the ability to refine and build upon the innovations of his predecessors.

²⁴ (Kutubī 1973-1977, v. II, pg. 241)

²⁵ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v.1, pg. 277, #159) The second variant is not included in the Dīwān.

The early ‘Abbāsīd empire oversaw a period of cultural flowering, of which a new blossoming in the classical poetic tradition was one facet. This flowering was ushered in by profound social changes which had begun with the Arab expansion out from the Arabian Peninsula a century earlier and culminated with the establishment of the new dynasty’s capital in Baghdad. Arabic poetry, once the literature of tribal nomads, was now inherited by a large and multiethnic urban upper class which had been broadly educated in Islamic law, Greek philosophy, and Persian courtly etiquette. The poetry of the Arabs, which had once served as an oral register of tribal memory and self-promotion, now grew in stylistic complexity and cultural interreferentiality.

The traditional polythematic *qaṣīda* developed from tribal praise-poem into an elaborate vehicle of courtly praise and legitimation for regional governors, high-ranking ministers, and the caliph himself. This development came hand in hand with the rise of a class of professional poets who gathered at the courts of the powerful to praise them in hope of generous rewards. Abū Tammām distinguished himself in the composition of highly mannered panegyrics, in the process inaugurating a critical debate over whether such stylistic complexity was altogether appropriate.

At the same time, other sorts of poems began to proliferate as well—monothematic poems that bore a strong thematic resemblance to traditional *qaṣīda* motifs now began to stand alone and become identified as independent genres with their own conventions. Love poems (*ghazal*) and wine poems (*sharāb*), whose development had begun in the ‘Umayyad dynasty, were joined by hunting poems (*tarad*), penitential poems (*zuhd*), and

assorted others. The new poems were often set to music before being performed by professional singers among cultured gatherings of literati and patrons. Abū Nuwās stands out for his contribution to the shorter, “lighter”, genres, being the most prominent composer of both the *sharāb* and *ṭarad* genres.

While “modernist” or *muḥdath* poetry had evolved a great deal from its pre-Islamic roots by the time of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, it retained a firm ideological attachment with its early origins. Pre-Islamic poetry had always been of interest to religious scholars, who identified it as a linguistic corpus roughly contemporary with the Qur’ān and thus valuable as a comparative reference for understanding God’s lexicon. Islamic philologists therefore took a leading role in preserving and dating orally transmitted poetry, and doubtless contributed thereby to the view that the most authentic Arabic poetry was the pre-Islamic *qaṣīda*. This view can be found reflected in the critique of Abū Tammām’s poetry for being too artificial, and it can also be seen in Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s own *Kitāb al-Badī‘*, which sought to defend the modern style by demonstrating the pre-Islamic antecedents of modern literary devices. In so doing, Ibn al-Mu‘tazz introduced into common usage the term “*badī‘*” to characterize these newfangled techniques, and provided a listing of them (including metaphor, paranomasia, antithesis, repetition, and the impossible-to-gracefully-translate sophistic discourse) which would, with some adjustments, become standard in subsequent critical literature.

0.1.3. Reception of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz

How was Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s poetry received by the classical tradition after his death? What sorts of his poems—or fragments of poems—were popular, and which if any neglected?

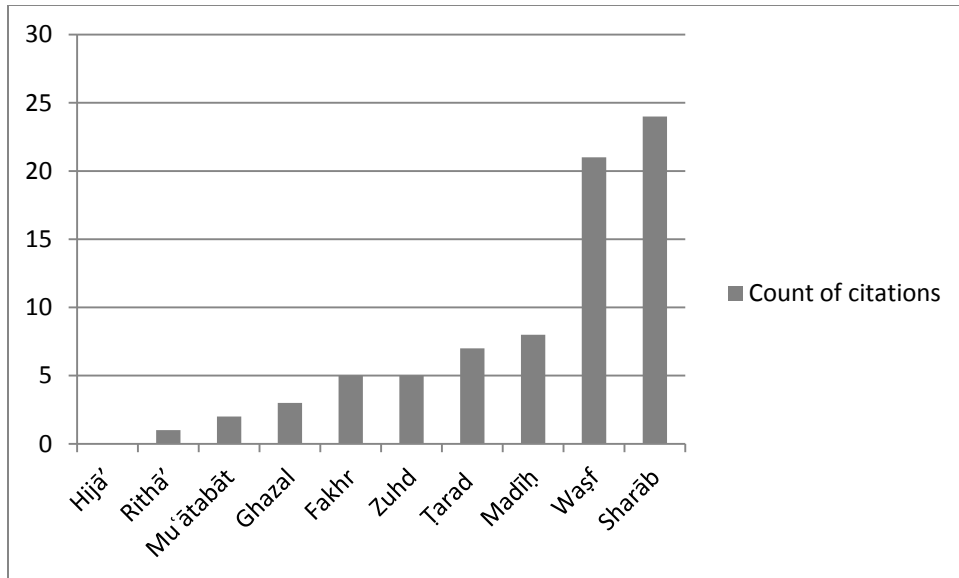
What did major critics have to say about Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s strengths and weaknesses as a poet, his relative standing and what made him special? For that matter, how are these questions treated by western scholars today?

0.1.3.1 Ibn al-Mu‘tazz as seen in the classical tradition

A comprehensive study of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s reception in the classical tradition being beyond the scope of this text, we will instead provide a close examination of how Ibn al-Mu‘tazz is referenced in a few prominent classical sources, hopefully representative. The *balāgha* literature—writings on literary theory and practice—will be represented by the *‘Umda* of Ibn Rashīq and the *Asrār al- Balāgha* of ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī; meanwhile the poetic anthology literature (composed of short excerpts from a diverse selection of poems) will be represented by the *Ḥamāsa* of Ibn al-Shajāri. We will begin by examining the poems of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz that are cited in these three texts, and then proceed from there to an examination of the explicit commentary provided on Ibn al-Mu‘tazz by the two *balāgha* authors within their works.

After collecting up the citations of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s poetry listed in these three sources, we can begin with an internal comparison: how often are lines cited from poems of different genres? The chart below provides the answer:

Figure 1



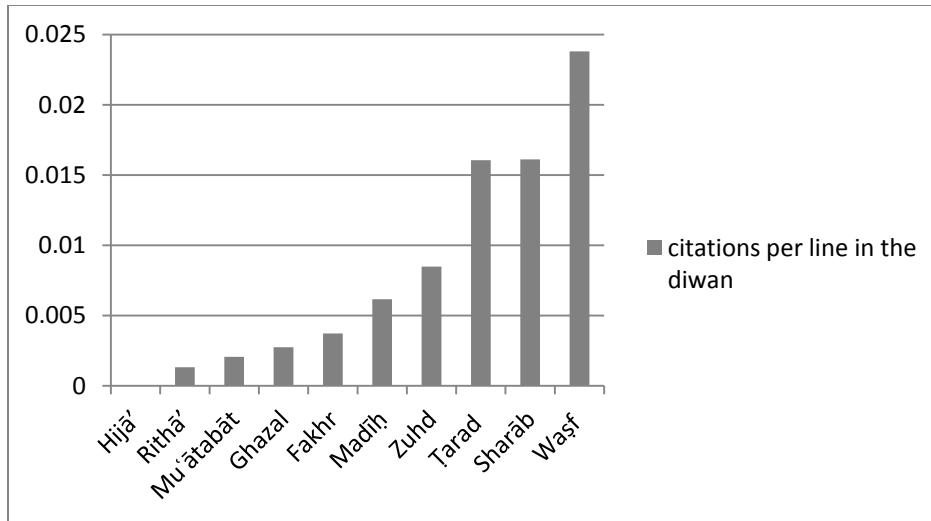
The first striking result to emerge from this chart is that lines from *sharāb* (wine poetry) and *wasf* (descriptive poetry) are more frequently cited than lines from any other genre by a considerable margin. At the other end of the spectrum, we see that *hijā'* poems, which are devoted to satiric mockery, are not cited at all, and elegiac poetry (*rithā'*), complaint poetry (*mu'ātabāt*) and love poetry (*ghazal*) are cited very rarely. A middle area is inhabited by the two *qaṣīda* genres, *madīh* and *fakhr*, along with hunting poetry (*tarad*) and penitential poetry (*zuhd*).

Looking at this set of data, we can also ask a related, subtler question: how often are poems in different genres cited relative to their frequency in Ibn al-Mu'tazz's *dīwān*? It's possible, in other words, that the reason *sharāb* and *wasf* poems are cited so frequently is that he wrote more of those poems than of the others. This would not render the above results insignificant—if there are more than twice as many *sharāb* and *wasf* poems represented than any other genre because there are more written than any other genre, the

result would still be that readers of these sources read many more *sharāb* and *wasf* poems by Ibn al-Mu‘tazz than poems of any other sort. However, it would mean that this preference was due to the author’s preference in writing that poetry, rather than the editor’s choice in selecting it for citation. So now let’s look at another chart. In Figure 2²⁶, the number of citations from each genre is divided by the number of lines from that genre that appear in the *dīwān*. In other words, if the authors had picked citations so as to be evenly spread among all the genres, the bars on this chart should be approximately flat. If on the other hand there were exactly the same number of lines in each genre, so that the chart shown above reflected entirely editorial privileging of some genres over others, the forthcoming chart would look exactly like the last one. Alternatively, if the authors had chosen (as one might expect) to pick disproportionately many lines from the *qaṣīda* genres, those being the most prestigious genres in general, the lines corresponding to them would be higher:

Figure 2

²⁶ This chart omits references which are found in the “Extras” section of the Yūnus Aḥmad al-Sāmarrā’ī edition of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s *dīwān* (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997), or which could not be found in the *dīwān* at all. The extras section is a repository for poems (or fragments thereof) which the editor found attributed to Ibn al-Mu‘tazz but did not find in any of his primary sources.



This chart seems to suggest that the citation distribution does not reflect indifference on the part of the anthologists and *balāgha* writers—on the contrary, there's a significant spread in citations from a genre as a proportion of total lines of that genre available. *Wasf* lines seem to be privileged substantially the most highly. After that, *sharāb* and *tarad* are neck and neck (this reflects the fact that there are lots of *sharāb* lines, a medium number of *wasf* lines, and only a very few *tarad* lines in the genre as a whole). Other than that, this chart looks reasonably similar to the last one—*hijā'*, *rithā'*, and *ghazal* are not merely rarely cited but underprivileged, and *madīh*, *fakhr*, and *zuhd* are somewhere in the middle.

With considerations of genre addressed, we can now turn our attention to the citation of individual poems. How many different poems are being cited in our sources? Do the poems cited reflect a regular corpus of poems that are cited reliably in all three sources, or do the authors seem to be drawing from different poems? Are some poems cited much

more frequently than others? Are some particular lines from poems being cited much more frequently than others? In considering this question we will add a second anthology, *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb* from *al-Muḥibb wa-al-Maḥbūb wa-al-Mashmūm wa-al-Mashrūb* by al-Sarī al-Raffā,²⁷.

Of the citations taken from these four sources, no Ibn al-Mu‘tazz poem (much less any specific line citation) is cited by more than two different authors. In the majority of cases, each poem cited is only cited once within those four sources combined: 58 unique poems were cited in 76 citations. This suggests that Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s poetic legacy was broadly distributed—that lots of his poetry was in circulation, and that he didn’t tend to be remembered by the literary tradition primarily for his authorship of specific poems.

The 18 multiple citations come from 9 Ibn al-Mu‘tazz poems cited multiply in one way or other (whether by being cited twice by the same author or by different authors, and whether the lines cited are in the same place in the poem in all cases or not). Of these poems, 4 are classified as *sharāb*, 3 as *wasf*, 1 as *ṭarad*, 1 as *madīh*, and 1 was an unclassified extra²⁸. As we will see later on, *sharāb*, *wasf*, and *ṭarad* are the three genres with the highest concentration of similes in the *dīwān*. And of the 8 passages cited more than once, 5 of 8 include similes²⁹ and all but one involve sensuous description³⁰. To the

²⁷ (al-Sarī al-Raffā’ 1986). This work was excluded from the genre question because, as an anthology of love poetry, its source material demonstrated a predictable bias towards poems of the *ghazal* variety. That fact may serve to indicate that the genres found to be underrepresented from ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s *dīwān* in the previous section do get some exposure in sources specifically devoted to those genres.

²⁸ The *dīwān* contains a section for verses attributed to Ibn al-Mu‘tazz not found in the editors primary sources.

²⁹ The 9th poem had two citations taken from two different places

³⁰ Beyond the three reproduced below, other five of these eight poems are:

extent that particular verses can be considered to be privileged over others in our sample, these are they. Three of these poems (hopefully representative) are produced below, with the cited passages in boldface.

Poem 3³¹

1 Say to the sweetest of people in form and shape

‘Is this departure serious, or not serious?’

2 This is not what my wishes told me.

Alas for my soul! I see you have betrayed affection.

3 Between us is God and covenants that we would not

Sever ties; we don’t alter a promise.

4 What do you think of someone infatuated with you, adoring,

Submitting, who sees no alternative to abasement!

5 If his eye should stray to other than you, then flog

It with long sleeplessness and tears in punishment!

6 My friend, I have given my servitude to a master

He doesn’t think that I’m fit even to be a slave in love.

-
1. (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 511, #1001) Line 3 is cited by both al-Jurjānī and Ibn al-Rashīq; moreover, al-Jurjānī cites it twice. This poem is from the *wasf* genre
 2. (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 193-295, #779) Lines 14-15 are cited by al-Sarī al-Raffā’; lines 14-16 are cited by Ibn al-Rashīq. This poem is from the *sharāb* genre.
 3. (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. III, pg. 211, # 16 from the “extras” section (c.f. note 22).)It is cited in its entirety twice, once by al-Sarī al-Raffā’ and once by al-Jurjānī. It is therefore not canonically assigned to a genre; however in style it resembles a *ghazal* poem (hence its inclusion in the al-Sarī al-Raffā’ anthology).
 4. (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 459-464, #389) Line 6 is cited 3 times by al-Jurjānī. It is from the *madīh* genre.
 5. (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 195-7, #780). Line 6 is cited twice by al-Jurjānī. It is from the *sharāb* genre.

³¹ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 87, #677) From this poem, lines 1-2 and 4-5 are cited by al-Jurjānī, and line 5 is cited by al-Sarī al-Raffā’. This poem is *sharāb*.

7 *His waist restrained by girdles, he has*

Blossomed his cheeks with pomegranate flowers and roses.

8 *Many's the cup I have drunk from his hand*

And many's the morning that was auspicious in union with him.

9 *Where cares do not find the way to us*

And we believe joy and pleasure to be eternal

10 *In wine-houses sheltered in a shady garden*³²

Where it meets a cool breeze

11 *Between a cup and a lute which conveys the song*

with its eloquent strings, and renders it

12 *And wine jugs like a row of men*

*Who were roused to dance the Dastaband*³³

13 *And pitchers bent towards the spigot*

*When the unbeliever opened the jug's veins*³⁴

14 *When we made the freshly plucked rose above us*

Rain, and the clouds aloe and ambergris.

Poem 4³⁵

1 *We stopped by the garden, which the dew had moistened,*

When the morning light had a fire in the garb of darkness.

³² The word translated as "abodes" also has the connotation of "taverns"

³³ a Magian ritual dance

³⁴ Since Islam forbids the consumption of alcohol, proprietors of taverns were typically non-Muslim.

³⁵ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 559, #1085.) Line 2 and 3 are cited by both al-Jurjānī and Ibn al-Shajarī. al-Jurjānī cites line 2 thrice, and line 3 six times. It is from the *wasf* genre. It is translated again and discussed at some length in chapter 4 on pg. 116

2 It was as though around³⁶ the eyes of the fresh narcissus

Were oil flasks of pearl which were stuffed with carnelian.

3 If the dew moistens them, you imagine that their tears

Were the tears of eyelids, whose kohl was saffron perfume.

Poem 5³⁷

1 Oh, give it me to drink, when the darkness is stripped away

And the stars of the darkness are racing in the arena of the night.

2 Its as though the Pleiades at the end of the night

Were the opening of a blossom or silvered reins.

Having surveyed the poetic citations, we will now proceed to an examination of explicit commentary made by the two *balāgha* writers about Ibn al-Mu‘tazz.

Ibn Rashīq makes a number of explicit comments about Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, his literary criticism, and his poems. The most notable pattern that emerges from these comments is his association of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz with *badī‘* in general and with similes in particular—in these areas, Ibn Rashīq apparently views Ibn al-Mu‘tazz as without peer in the tradition.

³⁶The text in the Sāmarrā’ī edition (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997) reads *baynahu*, the antecedent of which is somewhat opaque but might perhaps be translated as “within the garden”. In the Ritter edition of *Asrār al-Balāgha*, where this line is quoted numerous times, the text reads *hawlahā*, i.e. “around the eyes”. I have adopted Jurjānī’s reading here.

³⁷ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 157-8, #749) Line 2 is cited 4 times by al-Jurjānī. It is from the *sharāb* genre.

According to Ibn Rashīq's account of the development of artificial *badī'* among the modern poets, the history proceeds from Bashār Ibn Burd to Ibn Harma, to Kulthūm Ibn 'Amr al-'Attābī, to Abū Nuwās, to Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī; finally he concludes by saying: "and 'Abd Allāh Ibn al-Mu'tazz, and the science of *badī'* and the craft of it was completed with him, and it was sealed with him."³⁸ Ibn Rashīq also calls Ibn al-Mu'tazz "the most plentiful of [the poets] in *badī'*..."³⁹

While surveying different schools of thought as to which poets are the greatest, he says,

A faction of the debaters said, 'the greatest poets are three: *Jāhili*, Islamic, and Modern. The great *Jāhili* poet is Imru al-Qays, and the great Islamic poet is Dhū al-Rumma, and the great Modern poet is Ibn al-Mu'tazz. And this is the opinion of those who prefer *badī'*, especially simile, over all the arts of poetry."⁴⁰

In fact, he subscribes to the belief that every poet has a special calling:

There is no escaping that every poet have a way which predominates for him, so that his nature is led towards it and taking it up is easy for him, like Abu Nuwās in wine...and Ibn al-Mu'tazz in simile."⁴¹

'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī makes fewer explicit comments about Ibn al-Mu'tazz than does Ibn al-Rashīq, owing presumably to the different nature of his book. However, he does discuss Ibn al-Mu'tazz once, in the context of explaining the difference between *tashbīh* (simile) and *tamthīl* (metaphor)⁴²:

38 (Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī 2000, 211-212)

39 (Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī 2000, 211)

40 (Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī 2000, 154)

41 (Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī 2000, 467)

⁴² These translations are somewhat oversimplified. For al-Jurjānī, phrases that have the rhetorical structure as a simile while eliding the "like" (such as "her hair is the night", which differs from the simile "her hair is like the night" only by its lack of the term "like") count as *tashbīh*. The term *tamthīl* is used for phrases that graft the characteristics of one thing onto another (such as "the hand of the north wind").

“Likewise, you say: Ibn al-Mu‘tazz is excellent in *tashbīh* with respect to their *badī‘*, because you would mean his *tashbīh* are elucidated, one part by the other, and nothing like explanation occurs in it ...Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s excellences in [*tashbīh*] are more numerous, and he is more famous for it...so you wouldn’t say “Ibn al-Mu‘tazz is excellent at *tamthīl*...”⁴³

Ibn al-Mu‘tazz is explicitly identified here with his excellence in writing similes, as opposed to other forms of *badī‘* or even other forms of imagery.

The explicit commentary by Ibn al-Rashīq and ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī thus corresponds with the impression of the poetry cited and multiply cited in these two works and the *Ḥamāsa* of Ibn al-Shajārī: Ibn al-Mu‘tazz was best known for his descriptive poetry in general, and his similes in particular. Although *qaṣīda* poetry (exemplified by the genres of *fakhr* and *madīḥ*) was and remains highly privileged over lyric poetry, and although Ibn al-Mu‘tazz wrote no shortage of *qaṣīda* poetry in addition to his lyric poetry, the lyric genres nevertheless tend to attract the most attention. In particular, *wasf*, the lyric genre devoted explicitly to description, is the genre most represented in contemporary citations relative to its frequency in the *dīwān*.

0.1.3.2 Modern Review of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz

For an analogous birds-eye overview of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s reception in modern English language scholarship, I have opted to examine the sum of references made and citations provided to Ibn al-Mu‘tazz within two major survey works that cover the literature of the

⁴³ (Jurjānī 1954, 85-87)

period: the general reference *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd Edition⁴⁴, and the specifically literary reference *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: 'Abbasid Belles-Lettres'*⁴⁵.

Of the 135 articles in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam II* that reference Ibn al-Mu'tazz, approximately a third of them deal with him in his capacity as a poet. In a testament to the way in which the significance of a text can change over time, another full third involve citations to Ibn al-Mu'tazz's accounts of other poets in his work of poetic history, the *Ṭabaqāt al-Shu'arā'*. The popularity of the *Ṭabaqāt al-Shu'arā'* as a source of information on 'Abbāsid poets is presumably owing to the fact that the work, which survives in a single incomplete manuscript, is one of the very few specimens from the prolific genre of poetic history to have survived at all; as a result, it contains information that can no longer be found anywhere else.⁴⁶

About an eighth of the articles referencing Ibn al-Mu'tazz in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam II* are references to his abortive bid for the Caliphate, generally occurring in entries devoted to people involved in it, or occasionally in entries devoted to people and institutions affected by it.⁴⁷ Another eighth concern his literary criticism⁴⁸, and yet another eighth involve references to people he was acquainted with, information gleaned from his minor works or referenced to him without specific attribution, and other assorted incidental references which are irrelevant to his poetic, critical, or political work.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ (Encyclopaedia of Islam 2011)

⁴⁵ (The Cambridge history of Arabic literature: 'Abbasid belles-lettres / edited by Julia Ashtiany ...[et al.] 1990)

⁴⁶ According to (Lewin 2011)

⁴⁷ See for example: (Sourdel 2011), (Massignon 2011), (H. Kennedy 2011)

⁴⁸ See for example: (Khalafallah 2011), (Bonebakker, Kudāmab. Dja'far al- Kātib al-Baghdādī, Abu 'l-Faraj 2011), (Bonebakker, Ibtidā' 2011)

⁴⁹ See for example: (Schwarz 2011), (Brockelmann 2011), (Arazi, Hanaway and Soucek 2011)

The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: 'Abbasid Belles-Lettres accords Ibn al-Mu'tazz more focused attention as a critic than as a poet. Abu Deeb's overview "Literary Criticism" includes detailed descriptions of Ibn al-Mu'tazz's critical masterpiece the *Kitāb al-Badī'*⁵⁰ as well as his anthology *Ṭabaqāt al-Shu'arā'*; and the *Kitāb al-Badī'* is given a chapter of its own by S.A. Bonebakker.⁵¹ By contrast, while chapters in the book are devoted to the poetry of Bashshār Ibn Burd, al-Mutanabbī, Abu Firās al-Ḥamdānī, and Abū 'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī, none is devoted to Ibn al-Mu'tazz in his capacity as a poet. At the same time, beyond the two significant sections devoted to Ibn al-Mu'tazz as critic, we find 18 citations referencing Ibn al-Mu'tazz as a poet, and only 3 referencing him as a critic. This may reflect the fact that the editors of *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature* found Ibn al-Mu'tazz's criticism to be more innovative and more relevant to the history of criticism than his poetry was relevant to the history of poetry, while the authors of the various articles in the book found Ibn al-Mu'tazz's poetry much more pervasive than his literary criticism.

Upon examination of the references to Ibn al-Mu'tazz's poetry in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam II* and *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*, it appears that Ibn al-Mu'tazz is best known by modern western scholars (as by classical Arab scholars) for his similes. The *Encyclopaedia of Islam II* articles on the narcissus, the orange, and hair all mention

⁵⁰ (Abu Deeb 1990, 344-348)

⁵¹ (Bonebakker, Ibn al-Mu'tazz and *Kitāb al-Badī'* 1990)

Ibn al-Mu‘tazz having used those topics as the point of departure for celebrated similes⁵².

The entry on garden poems indicates that Ibn al-Mu‘tazz wrote lavish descriptions of gardens featuring the bilateral simile and the metaphor in poems of both the *awsaf* and *sharāb* genres, and that these descriptions formed an important prerequisite for the eventual development of the *zahriyyāt* (garden poem) genre.⁵³ Al-Jurjānī’s association of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz with similes (quoted above) is cited by both Abu Deeb⁵⁴ and Lewin⁵⁵. Ibn al-Mu‘tazz is explicitly characterized as being especially famed for his similes by Bonebakker⁵⁶ and Van Gelder.⁵⁷

The contributing writers of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam II* and *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature* venture only occasionally to characterize Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s similes in specific terms, however a few attempts are made. According to Badawi,

The last stage in the “mannerist” style in descriptive verse is to be found by the time we reach Ibn al-Mu‘tazz and al-Sanawbarī (d. 334/945). It was called “phantastic” by von Grunebaum, and is perhaps an offshoot rather than a continuation of *badī‘*; to borrow again Dr. Johnson’s words about the later Metaphysicals, these poets “left not only reason but fancy behind them” and “produced combinations...that not only could not be credited, but could not be imagined”. Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s energies were directed towards the discovery of new and startling comparisons: the star in the dark night is likened to an eye

⁵² (Glünz 2011); (Viré, Nārandj 2011); (Sadan, J.; Reinhart, A.K.; Reinert, B. 2011)

⁵³ (Schoeler, *Zahriyyāt* 2011)

⁵⁴ (Abu Deeb 1990)

⁵⁵ (Lewin 2011)

⁵⁶ (Bonebakker, *Ibn al-Mu‘tazz and Kitāb al-Badī‘* 1990)

⁵⁷ (G. van Gelder 2011)

looking stealthily while the attention of those watching is distracted; the crescent moon is like a silver boat weighed down with a load of amber.⁵⁸

While for Ayyad,

The welding together of hedonism and description is characteristic of the manner of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz (d. 296/908)... To speak of the manner of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz as mainly descriptive is to use the word in a special sense: what holds his poems, or for that matter his entire poetic output, together is not the personality that informs them (although this is an inescapable element) nor the poems’ function (panegyric, elegy, etc.) but the thing described for its own sake. Thus it can be said with some justice that Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s poetry constitutes something akin to “pure” art.⁵⁹

Aside from his similes, the facet of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s poetry that attracts the most attention from the writers of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam II* and *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature* is his hunting poetry. Seidensticker, Wagner⁶⁰ and Smith⁶¹ are in accord in stating that, while Abū Nuwās is the most important composer of *Ṭardiyyāt* (hunting poetry), Ibn al-Mu‘tazz is the second most important. *Ṭarad* poems by Ibn al-Mu‘tazz are copiously quoted in Smith’s overview of the genre, and Ibn al-Mu‘tazz rates mention in articles devoted to hunting, falconry, the dog, and the cheetah for his descriptions of those things in verse.⁶² It is, of course, no accident that the *Ṭardiyya* genre is also prominently associated with similes; as will be seen in Chapter 2, *ṭarad* poems

⁵⁸ (Badawi 1990, 165)

⁵⁹ (Ayyad 1990, 435-436)

⁶⁰ (Seidensticker 2011), (Wagner 2011)

⁶¹ (Smith 1990, 168-169)

⁶² (Viré, Sayd (sic) 2011), (Viré, Bayzara 2011), (Viré, Kalb 2011), (Viré, Fahd 2011)

have a greater concentration of similes than any other genre, even the nearly eponymous *wasf*.⁶³

Ibn al-Mu‘tazz also attracts attention for pioneering work in the *rajaz* meter. Although *rajaz* is closely associated with hunting poetry, and it is noted that for the most part Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s *rajaz* poetry coincides with his *ṭarad* poems⁶⁴, he attracts considerably more attention for his use of *rajaz* couplets in a very long *madīḥ* poem⁶⁵. He is recognized as one of the first poets to use *rajaz* couplets to write long poems on serious subjects⁶⁶, and the *madīḥ* poem in question occasions specific individual notice.⁶⁷

Ibn al-Mu‘tazz is also notably associated with wine poetry by our sources, though the association with wine poetry is less strongly marked than the association with hunting poetry. Sobieroj refers to Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, in passing, as a “bacchic poet”⁶⁸, and Bencheikh describes Ibn al-Mu‘tazz as “dominating” wine poetry in the third century, following again in the footsteps of Abū Nuwās.⁶⁹ While acknowledging Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s preeminence in the genre, Bencheikh is critical of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s influence over it: he suggests that as an establishment poet, “the enemy of every passionate outburst and concerned with an elegant measure”, Ibn al-Mu‘tazz put an end to the morally and culturally subversive character of the wine poem, in the process lessening the genre’s

⁶³ (Smith 1990, 176)

⁶⁴ (Smith 1990, 174)

⁶⁵ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 443, #372)

⁶⁶ (Pellat, Ch.; Massé, H.; Mélikoff, I.; Hatto, A.T.; Ahmad, Aziz 2011); (Ullmann, M.; Heinrichs, W.P. 2011) (Bencheneb 2011)

⁶⁷ (El Tayib 1990)

⁶⁸ (Sobieroj 2011); (Canard 2011)

⁶⁹ (Bencheikh 2011)

“indispensible vitality”.⁷⁰ Another, more extensive argument for Ibn al-Mu‘tazz exerting a conservative, even anti-creative force on ‘Abbasid poetics can be found (though in the context of literary criticism rather than poetic composition) in Stetkevych’s book on Abū Tammām.⁷¹

Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s *qaṣīdas* do also attract some attention in addition to his lyric poetry, however the tone in which they are invoked is markedly different: rather than being identified as epitomizing the genre (as is the case of both his wine poetry and hunting poetry) his *qaṣīdas* tend to merit note for their similarities to lyric poetry. Schoeler notes that Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s praise poetry is remarkable for how many short poems it encompasses⁷². Badawi takes note of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s choice to begin a praise poem with a descriptive passage rather than a more conventional opening.⁷³ Moreover, as indicated above, his most frequently referenced *qaṣīda* is noteworthy for being written in *rajaz*, a meter considered more proper to hunting poetry than to eulogy. In an article on al-Bārūdī, Perez (exhibiting a propensity with which the present author can only sympathize) furnishes a ranking of how many lines of *madīḥ* poetry are quoted with attribution to each of 30 poets in al-Bārūdī’s anthology, called “the most representative anthology of the modern poets”. Ibn al-Mu‘tazz ranks 22nd out of 30, far behind Ibn al-Rūmī, al-Buḥturī, Abū Tammām, and al-Mutanabbī. Appropriately, Abū Nuwās (whose name typically appears just before Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s in discussions of lyric poetry) appears only slightly

⁷⁰ (Bencheikh 2011)

⁷¹ (S. P. Stetkevych, *Abū Tammām and the poetics of the ‘Abbāsīd age* / by Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych 1991)

⁷² (Schoeler, *Ḳiṭā‘* 2011)

⁷³ (Badawi 1990, 157)

ahead of him on Perez's list, in 17th place.⁷⁴ Relatedly, it's worth noting that 61% of the lines cited in al-Bārūdī's "representative" anthology are taken from *qaṣīdas*; more *qaṣīda* poetry is cited there than everything else put together. In Ibn al-Mu'tazz's *dīwān*, that percentage (made by adding *fakhr* and *madīḥ*) is 38%. By contrast, in al-Bārūdī's collection descriptive poetry accounts for 9% of the total line count, whereas in Ibn al-Mu'tazz's *dīwān* descriptive poetry (made by adding *sharāb*, *wasf* and *ṭarad*) makes up 40% of the total line count.

A final category of citations to Ibn al-Mu'tazz as a poet concerns specific instances of his legacy: references made to his influence in articles about poets who followed him. Al-Sharīf al-ʿAqīlī and Ibn al-Mu'izz are both authors of poems that specifically imitate poems of Ibn al-Mu'tazz in order to contradict them (in the latter case, the disagreement concerns the relative rights of ʿAlids vs. ʿAbbāsids to the caliphate; in the former case, the disagreement concerns the relative merits of wine in the evening vs. wine in the morning).⁷⁵ It seems to have been the destiny (or the doom) of later princes who excelled in poetry to be likened to Ibn al-Mu'tazz by the tradition. According to al-Tha'alibi, Abu Firās al-Ḥamdānī is

singular in his time, a shining sun of his day in manners, excellence, generosity, nobility, celebrity, eloquence, brilliance and courage, and his poetry is noted for its beauty and polish...and princely lustre; qualities such as were never found before in any poet except Ibn al-Mu'tazz, to whom, however, Abū Firās is considered superior by professional poets and by the critics."⁷⁶

⁷⁴ (Pérès 2011)

⁷⁵ (Smoor, al-Ḥarīf al-ʿAqīlī, Abu 'Ḥasan ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn b. Ḥaydara b. Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Muḥammad. 2011) (Smoor, TAMīm b. al-Mu'izz Li-Dīn Allāh, Abū ʿAlī 2011)

⁷⁶ (El Tayib 1990, 327)

Tamīm Ibn al-Mu‘izz and Marwān al-Ṭalīq are both described as poet-princes “after the model of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz.”⁷⁷ Ibn Ḥazm calls the latter

the greatest Andalusian poet of his time and compares his rank among the poets of the Andalusian Umayyads to that of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz among the ‘Abbāsids because of the “gracefulness of his poetry and the beauty of his similes.”⁷⁸

0.1.3.3 *Synthesis*

Our classical and modern sources yield a more or less consistent literary perspective on Ibn al-Mu‘tazz: He is seen as one of the great poets of the classical tradition, and arguably the greatest in his own time. His peculiar artistic contribution is seen as being towards the development of the simile—in particular, towards crafting similes that are highly contrived yet intensely sensual. Correspondingly, while information about his life and access to his poetry have remained broadly available and widely accessed, the concentration of interest in his poetry tends to rest disproportionately on poems from the genres of *ṭarad*, *sharāb*, and *wasf*—which, as we will see, are the genres which feature the highest density of similes.

⁷⁷ (Ayyad 1990, 157), (Fahd, T.; Moreh, S.; Ben Abdeselem, A.; Reynolds, D.F.; Bruijn, J.T.P. de; Halman, Talat Sait; Rahman, Munibur; Kane, Ousmane; Hiskett, M.; Hooker, Virginia Matheson 2011)

⁷⁸ (Scheindlin, al-SHarīf al-Ṭalīq 2011)

0.2 The Lyric Corpus as a Structural Case-Study

0.2.1 On the Study of Structure in Arabic Poetry

The question of poetic structure has been a preoccupation in Arabic studies for as long as the field has existed in the West. Scholars in the 19th through the early 20th century advocated the view that Arabic poems (like its Persian and Turkish counterparts) are “molecular” or “atomic”, lacking thematic coherence beyond the level of the individual line; more recently, scholars have sought to exhaustively discredit this view by advancing new structural frameworks for understanding how smaller poetic units work together to form the whole.⁷⁹ This effort is wide-ranging in scope and encompasses a variety of approaches: it includes studies which seek to anchor poetry within the structures of contemporary social rituals⁸⁰, studies which seek to trace the development of structure and sensibility in particular poetic genres⁸¹; studies which seek to identify structural patterns within the corpora of individual poets⁸²; and of course, structural studies of individual poems.

The ongoing nature of this quest to uncover the structural assumptions of Arabic poetry reflects a fundamental but difficult truth: that structural intuition regarding Arabic poetry is not readily accessible to readers who were raised reading only western poetry. This is

⁷⁹ Several detailed accounts of this history are available. See e.g. (Scheindlin, *Form and structure in the poetry of Al-Mu‘tamid Ibn ‘Abbād* 1974, 1-6); (G. J. van Gelder 1982, 14-21); and (Gruendler 2003, 14-17)

⁸⁰ See e.g. (S. P. Stetkevych, *The poetics of Islamic legitimacy : myth, gender, and ceremony in the classical Arabic ode* 2002) and (Gruendler 2003)

⁸¹ See e.g. (P. F. Kennedy 1996), (J. Stetkevych, *The zephyrs of Najd : the poetics of nostalgia in the classical Arabic nasīb* 1993), and (Monroe 1992), etc.

⁸² See e.g. (Scheindlin, *Form and structure in the poetry of Al-Mu‘tamid Ibn ‘Abbād* 1974); (Hamori, *The composition of Mutanabbī’s panegyrics to Sayf al-Dawla* 1992), etc.

of course no reflection upon the objective quality of either the western or the Arabic literary canons—merely a consequence of the fact that the differences in assumption underlying the two extend well beyond the realm of the superficial. If art is built upon the tension between expectation and surprise, then comprehension of art requires a basis for expectation. That basis for expectation is most easily supplied by repeated exposure to the art form within its cultural substrate. The necessity of repeated exposure comes as no surprise per se, and Western scholars of Arabic literature approach their task anticipating that it will be necessary to read extensively. But the lack of the cultural substrate—that nebulous aspect of a work of art that remains embedded in the culture that gave it birth, in those literary sensibilities shared between creator and consumer by virtue of common context rather than any explicit communication in the work of art itself—that remains frustratingly elusive. In some significant sense, the task of the western scholar of Arabic literature, no less than that of a scholar of the Arabic language, is to painstakingly reconstruct, by dint of labor and erudition, a facsimile of those intuitions that any ‘Abbāsīd child would acquire without thinking about it. This is the task that these various approaches to identifying the structure of the Arabic poem seek to accomplish, whether by attempting to reconstruct the substrate itself by studying the intellectual history of the period, or by making inferences about its shape by searching for patterns in genres, corpora, or individual poems.

This is not to gloss over the comparable issues faced by a western audience with respect to its own classical tradition. There is a reason Shakespeare plays (entertainment for the masses in their own time) are studied in school, and why though the music of Bach and

Mozart is still considered beautiful, it must now be studied in order to be understood; even with careful study, it seems more than likely that modern audiences don't appreciate these classical artworks in the same way they were appreciated when they were written. However, we have two major advantages in approaching our own classical heritage. First, it is the sediment upon which our own native artwork is ultimately based—thus, while modern music does not sound like Bach and modern theater cannot be confused with Shakespeare, there is a genetic relationship between the two in both cases. Second, we are the inheritors of a continuous tradition of explaining our classic heritage, which has gradually changed and adapted along with our interests.

It is an undeniable dimension of the western scholar's predicament with respect to Arabic literary structure that the classical Arabic literary tradition was more interested in analyzing individual lines than in analyzing entire poems. Their lack of interest in discussing larger poetic structures does not mean that such structures did not exist, of course—critical interests vary from place to place and from time to time and in no case may be taken as exhaustive of all that a literary tradition has to offer—but since modern western scholars *are* interested in analyzing entire poems, their work is complicated by the relative lack of guidance from the critical tradition produced by writers who were possessed of native access to the poetry. Modern scholars have gathered up and analyzed the classical commentary that might have bearing on questions of poetic structure,⁸³ although the questions answered by the classical critics are not precisely the same as the questions modern scholars would have asked. One topic in the classical commentaries,

⁸³ Van Gelder has produced a reference (G. J. van Gelder 1982) to those writings by classical literary theorists that shed light on structures that encompass entire poems.

which has occasioned note from multiple modern sources, is the discussion of what makes a beautiful opening line, a beautiful closing line, and a beautiful transitional line. Scheindlin summarizes the findings from a survey of classical commentators as follows⁸⁴:

Most of the critics whose opinions have just been reviewed agree that the poem should open with a theme not directly related to the main subject...it would appear that it was customary for the first line to include some apostrophe...The effect of opening with an apostrophe is twofold: within the context of the *nasīb* it serves to introduce the theme of separation; and within the living context in which the poem was recited, it attracts the attention of the auditor...the poem should end with a particularly good verse which leaves no doubt that the poem is at an end and which is appropriate to the theme of the poem as a whole; aphorisms and comparisons are favored; and benedictions, though under most circumstances disapproved by Ibn Rashīq, were sometimes customary.

Perhaps the most interesting result of this survey is the fact that the classical commentators believed the composition of the first line of a poem should be different from the last, and that both merited special direction. The implication is that the critics recognized, even if they chose not to dwell upon, the existence of a progression in a poem from the beginning to the end.

This dissertation seeks to contribute to the discussion of poetic structure in Arabic poetry by examining structural trends in the corpus of lyric poetry written by Ibn al-Mu‘tazz—specifically, trends that change over the course of a poem. Are first lines indeed different from last lines, generally speaking, and if so, how? If so, where in the poem do those differences occur? Are the first and last lines each special, and all the lines in between an

⁸⁴ (Scheindlin, *Form and structure in the poetry of Al-Mu‘tamid Ibn ‘Abbād* 1974)

undifferentiated mass? Or does the first line share its unique properties with the second and the third lines, while the last line shares its properties with the lines preceding it?

The undertaking of a structural corpus study is accompanied by some perplexing questions. It is not difficult to analyze the structure of a single poem. How can one meaningfully analyze the structure of a thousand poems and produce a conclusion about structure that is really general? For that matter, what would such a result signify? After all, it is not “poetry” that is beautiful, but individual poems. Assuming that the structural trends evident in the poetry are not entirely regular (and if they were entirely regular, they would be rules rather than trends, and doubtless described in a manual of contemporary rhetoric), how can a general conclusion about structure contribute to our understanding of individual poems?

This dissertation adopts a mildly quantitative approach to the problem of a large corpus study. This makes it possible to note trends that would not be visible in a small group of poems but can be seen to apply to the corpus taken as a whole; it also facilitates comparisons between different subsets of the corpus—for example, between poems of different genres, or between poems of different lengths. This approach, when combined with clear criteria for defining the characteristics to be measured, has the attractive property of yielding generalizations which are somewhat protected against wishful thinking on the part of the author who, upon noting a pattern in a few poems that appears to be promising, may then proceed to convince himself of the pattern’s wide applicability by inadvertently cherry-picking more poems that fit the same pattern. It also has the

consequence that general trends may be observed for which many, many counterexamples exist.

As to the question of what purpose it serves to know, for example, that conditional sentences appear disproportionately in the second halves of short poems, that datum cannot by itself enable us to understand the structure of any particular poem, given that all poems are different. It can, however, contribute to our structural understanding of Arabic poetry in two ways. First, in combination with other similar pieces of information, it can enable us to construct an abstract shape of a poem, a platonic ideal which reflects all the gravitic tendencies observed in the trend-lines, and seek to understand the structure of that “typical” poem. Secondly, the abstract platonic ideal of the statistically likely poetic structure provides a paradigm that can serve as a basis for comparison when approaching an individual poem. In situations where the individual poem conforms to the paradigm, that provides a plausible basis for believing that the poem is satisfying the subconscious expectations of the native reader in that instance; reciprocally, in situations where the individual poem deviates from the paradigm, that provides a plausible basis for believing that the poem is surprising. Moreover, the strength of the trend can serve to proxy for the strength of the expectation, and hence for the strength of the reaction to that expectation being confirmed or confounded. In this way, while the statistical approach does not contribute directly to the predicting the structure of a given poem, it can provide a tool to assist us in guessing how a particular poem’s structure would resonate with the implicit assumptions of a native audience.

0.2.2 In Defence of Lyric Poesy

It seems fair to posit—notwithstanding some excellent articles and studies which focus upon non-*qaṣīda* poetry—that by and large the study of classical Arabic poetry is dominated by the study of the *qaṣīda*. This comes as no surprise. *Qaṣīdas* are typically the longest poems in the Arabic canon, the most linguistically complex, and the most structurally counterintuitive. All of these facts together mean that the *qaṣīda* presents a nearly irresistible challenge to the intrepid western scholar, who finds ready validation for his fixation in the observation that classical Arabic scholars privileged the *qaṣīda* just as much, and for much the same reasons.

Be that as it may be, the fact remains that there are a tremendous number of poems in the classical Arabic canon which are not *qaṣīdas*. In Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s *dīwān*, for instance, as we have already had cause to note, a majority of the lines of poetry come from poems that are not *qaṣīdas*; and if we were to look at the proportion of poems rather than the proportion of lines involved, on the theory that the attention merited by a poem is greater than the total of its component lines, we would find that all the *madīḥ*, *fakhr*, and *hijā’* poems put together sum a mere 21% of the total poems in the corpus. Nor is it the case that we can dismiss the silent majority of non-*qaṣīda* poetry as mere trifles, improvised on the fly and of no serious artistic significance. The difficulty in preserving and reproducing texts in the pre-modern age should rule out that possibility by itself. In the case of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, not only have the lyric poems survived to this day, we know from the evidence cited in section 0.1.3.1 that Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s lyric poems were broadly accessible to critics who lived hundreds of years after his death, and that in fact the four

genres of his poetry cited most disproportionately often—*wasf*, *sharāb*, *ṭarad* and *zuhd*—are *none* of them *qaṣīda* genres. To be sure, the structures of these poems may be simpler than that of the *qaṣīda*, and understanding them may require less time; nevertheless, sheer arithmetic demands that their structures receive significant attention.

But even scholars whose focus on the *qaṣīda* is unassailable will likely find the structural study of non-*qaṣīda* (or, to repurpose a more euphonious term to describe poems from the non-*qaṣīda* genres, “lyric”) poetry to be relevant to their work. There is reason to believe that the study of short lyric poems may be useful to furthering our understanding of *qaṣīdas*. *Qaṣīdas* and lyric poems cannot be strictly separated in Arabic literature. For one thing, there is in all probability some sort of genetic relationship between many of the lyric genres and short subsections of *qaṣīdas* which bear strong similarities to them⁸⁵. If there are thematic similarities, might there not also be structural similarities between the two?

Moreover, even the most virtuosic *qaṣīdas* are often not reproduced in their entirety by their native tradition. Like other poems, when *qaṣīdas* are quoted in *balāgha* books and anthologies, they tend to be quoted in short segments. Of all the poetic citations made to Ibn al-Mu‘tazz in the *‘Umda*, *Asrār al-Balāgha*, the *Ḥamāsa* and the *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb*, none exceeds seven lines and the overwhelming majority are composed of four lines or fewer. That seems to raise the question of whether there’s any structural criterion

⁸⁵ It’s unclear exactly how this genetic relationship works. Perhaps there were short pre-Islamic lyric poems which were the ancestor of both *qaṣīdas* and of *muḥdath* lyric poems, or perhaps these themes in the *qaṣīdas* were spun off in the ‘Abbasid period into independent genres. It could even be the case that short lyric poems combined to make *qaṣīdas*, and that *qaṣīdas* subsequently spun off to form a short lyric poetry. But the fact that lyric poems bear some relationship with *qaṣīdas* has been noted many times.

underlying the selection of those short segments from the often-longer poems in which they originally occurred. In the case of the *balāgha* books it may be argued that citations are tailored to the fit of whatever broader point the author is making, but what about the anthologies, in which short segments of great poetry are collected with no apparent motive other than the entertainment and enlightenment of the reader? Might there be a structural relationship between these excerpts and the short free-standing poems written by the same authors, and if so, what can that teach us about the structure of the *qaṣīda*?

We can also ask whether there might be some structural similarities between short lyric poems and complete *qaṣīdas*, alongside the differences. If long Arabic poems present such a challenge to us in analysis, might not short poems, which were written by the same people and reflect the same stylistic and thematic sensibilities, shed some light upon the matter?

In short, by studying short poems, we can begin not only to better understand the structure of a literature that is eminently worthy of study in its own right, but to better understand the relationship of lyric poems to *qaṣīda* poems. Such a line of inquiry (of which this dissertation is only one small part) can serve to broaden our understanding of all Arabic poems.

0.3 Overview of the Following Dissertation

This dissertation is composed of four chapters.

Chapter 1 undertakes a close examination of the structural proclivities of couplets—poems of two lines. It finds that certain formal features (dubbed openers) gravitate towards the first line of a couplet; whereas others (dubbed closers) gravitate towards the second. It proposes some conclusions about the platonic structure of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s lyric couplet. It also finds a more or less complimentary distribution between features that gravitate towards genres including *ghazal* and *zuhd* and those including *sharāb* and *wasf*; on that basis, it suggests a binary classification between “argumentative” genres and “descriptive” ones.

Chapter 2 applies the broad conclusions of Chapter 1 to poems of arbitrary length, finding that the same trends which apply to couplets also apply to other short lyric poems—they strongly apply to poems up to 4 lines in length, and more weakly to poems up to 7 lines. It also finds that the binary classification of “argumentative” and “descriptive” genres observed in Chapter 1 holds for short poems but breaks down as poems get longer.

Chapter 3 ventures beyond the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz to consider the general applicability of the structural trends identified in Chapters 1 and 2. It finds that these trends are substantially mirrored in poetic segments found excerpted in the *wasf* section of the *Ḥamāsa* of Ibn al-Shajārī, and in volume 1 of *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb* by al-Sarī al-Raffā’. It then takes a look at some *madīḥ* poetry written by Ibn al-Mu‘tazz and at some excerpts from the *Ḥamāsa* of Ibn al-Shajārī, discussing similarities and differences with the lyric corpus.

Chapter 4 returns from the realm of abstraction to look at individual poems. It undertakes close-readings of a variety of poems from the lyric corpus, rendering analyses which are informed—though not constrained—by the basis of expectation established in Chapters 1-2.

A Note on the Text of the *Dīwān* of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz

This study is based upon the 1997 critical edition of the *dīwān* of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz produced by Dr. Yūnus Aḥmad al-Sāmarrā’ī in Beirut. Al-Sāmarrā’ī compiled this edition from fifteen surviving manuscripts of the poet’s *dīwān* as transmitted by his contemporary, the esteemed 10th century literary scholar Abu Bakr al-Ṣūlī. The organization of the book, including the genre divisions (which will be used extensively in our analysis of the *dīwān*), are al-Ṣūlī’s work. In an effort to create a text that was at once authentic and complete, al-Sāmarrā’ī elected to use one manuscript as the baseline for the first four genre chapters (including *ghazal* and the three *qaṣīda* genres), and a second manuscript for the chapters devoted to the remaining six lyric genres. Throughout the text, al-Sāmarrā’ī notes places where other editions diverge from the baseline text. Al-Sāmarrā’ī also includes poetic lines attributed to Ibn al-Mu‘tazz in other sources but not found in al-Ṣūlī’s transmission, in a separate chapter at the end which we have translated as “Extras”; except where otherwise noted, this study does not make use of the “Extras” chapter. Al-Sāmarrā’ī will be referenced as “the editor” throughout this study, when his commentary is cited regarding textual issues in the poetry.

In some cases, I have found it necessary to alter a vowel or a letter pointing in a verbal prefix in order to achieve a satisfactory reading. In other cases, I will adopt an alternative reading identified by the editor—this latter circumstance will be indicated with an explanatory footnote.

Chapter 1: The Minimal Poem

1.1 Introduction

In seeking to better understand the construction of short lyric poems⁸⁶, we shall begin by studying some of the shortest poems in Arabic poetry: those composed of two lines.⁸⁷ A study of lyric couplets is desirable on several counts. Couplets are extremely prolific in the corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz. Within both the lyric corpus and the *dīwān* as a whole, there are considerably more couplets than poems of any other length— more than one third of the poems in Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s *dīwān* are couplets, and couplets actually constitute a majority of the poems in the *waṣf* genre. Yet, owing to the aforementioned systematic preference for the study of longer and more complicated poems, couplets have been dramatically understudied in proportion to their frequency. If in studying poetry we seek to study it not only as it was idealized but as it was actually written and read and preserved for us, in the case of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz at least couplets have more than earned their place at the table.

⁸⁶ For the purposes of this study, “the lyric corpus” refers to all the poems in the *dīwān* of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz excepting *fakhr*, *madīh*, and *hijā’*, which are classified as *qaṣīdas*. The adjective “lyric” should therefore be taken to mean “non-*qaṣīda*” in this context.

⁸⁷ In a theoretical sense, Qudāma ibn Ja‘far famously defines poetry as “measured, rhymed speech, indicating a given meaning” (Bonebakker, S.A. Bonebakker, *The Kitāb Naqd al-ši‘r* of Qudāma b. Ġa‘far al-Kātib al-Baġdādī 1956, 9/2) In order for speech to be rhymed, it’s necessary for it to include at least two words that rhyme with one another, and since rhyme usually occurs only at the ends of lines, the “minimal poem” should probably include at least two lines. Scheindlin mentions a debate among the classical critics as to whether poems of a single line should count as poetry, and reports that the prevailing opinion was that it could not (Scheindlin, *Form and structure in the poetry of Al-Mu‘tamid Ibn ‘Abbād* 1974, 9). Arabic poetry does also call for hemistich rhyme in some cases, and in fact there are a few examples in the corpus of *rajaz* verses composed of three rhyming hemistiches. These have been skipped over for the purposes of this chapter on the grounds that, firstly, their structure can be presumed to be quite different from those of balanced couplets; and secondly, there aren’t enough of them to study as a group.

Admittedly, when studying poems individually, it's much easier to find something to say about a long poem than a short one. When studying a large body of poems, however, a large corpus of short poems of the same length lends itself to study in parallel, yielding results that can be readily parlayed into generalizations about the characteristic structures of couplets as a whole. That is to say, the fact that there are so many couplets, all of the same length, enables us to compare all the first lines and all the second lines, or for that matter, all the third hemistichs. Moreover, because they are so short and constrained by length to be relatively simple, there are fewer options in implementation of a couplet than there would be for a longer poem, again making it easier to focus on implementation strategies that are frequent. Observations about the preferred structures in couplets may then prove useful as a basis of comparison for structural observations in longer and more complex poems.

The study of couplets may prove particularly valuable as a starting point in considering the overall structure of a poem. As noted in the introduction, classical Arab critics made some potentially helpful remarks about how poems should begin and end, and modern scholars have sought to follow up on those remarks by looking for patterns in the beginnings and endings of poems by famous poets⁸⁸. In analyzing couplets, we're in the enviable position of looking at a body of poetry composed of nothing but opening and closing lines, without engaging the delightful complications interposed by the lines in between.

⁸⁸ e.g. (Hamori, *Examples of Convention in the Poetry of Abū Nuwās* 1969), (Hamori, *The composition of Mutanabbī's panegyrics to Sayf al-Dawla* 1992)

Another intriguing feature of the couplet is its particular sensitivity to the bipartite structures which animate so much of Arabic poetry generally. Scheindlin has described how the bipartite structure of the poetic line in Arabic gives rise to an ongoing cycle of rhythmic anticipation and resolution that rises and falls with each line; and how poetic lines tend frequently to be composed of two members whose break either lines up with the hemistich break or plays against it.⁸⁹ He has studied the same bipartite relationships as they operate over multiple lines.⁹⁰ In a two-line poem, the formal structure of the entire poem is formally bipartite, balancing over the line break in the same way the typical line balances on the hemistich break. Couplets therefore lend themselves to structural play between the two lines as well as the two hemistichs, and to play on the pacing between them.

This chapter examines the 410 lyric couplets of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz as a group, and describes some patterns that emerge in their composition when studied *en masse*. We start by identifying features that appear frequently in the poems and can be identified with a relative lack of subjectivity or ambiguity—formal features such as imperatives, conditionals, and similes. These features can be described formally, but at the same time they have important thematic implications. We then look at where each feature occurs most frequently—where in the poem, and where in the corpus. Where a significant irregularity is found, we explore the implications of that irregularity in formal and thematic terms.

⁸⁹ (Scheindlin, *Form and structure in the poetry of Al-Mu‘tamid Ibn ‘Abbād* 1974, 37)

⁹⁰ (Scheindlin, *Form and structure in the poetry of Al-Mu‘tamid Ibn ‘Abbād* 1974, 84)

Patterns in the characteristic location of formal features in a couplet have a complex relationship with the thematic formulae that characterize Arabic poetry. Some such patterns can be explained in terms of traditional formula; for example, the high frequency of direct address and imperative as opening constructions in *sharāb* poems is readily understood in reference to the popular *sharāb* opening formula: “Oh my friend, get up!” Most patterns cannot be so directly related to thematic conventions, despite the fact that they have thematic consequences.

Identification of structural patterns should not be confused with identification of formulae. While some of the features identified are referenced in relevant ways by Arab literary critics, and while the classical critics did (as described above) express some interest in formal features marking the beginnings, transition points, and closings of poems, these features were never catalogued or evaluated as formulae, nor were they applied as formulae. The effort here is not to identify new formulae, but to uncover some non-formulaic, possibly unintentional, structural and thematic assumptions which underlie the couplets of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz.

The following features have been identified as useful for study on the grounds of being (a) unambiguous enough to be studied as a collective; (b) frequent enough that their frequency patterns can be significant; and (c) possessed of significant irregularities in

distribution throughout the poems, allowing them to serve as a basis for a discussion of structure in the couplets⁹¹:

- If/then constructions—two part conditional clauses. The following two poems provide examples of this construction:

Poem 6⁹²

1 Oh my companion, give me wine to

Drink, in public and in secret.

2 If the ignorant one pontificates to

*You about it, **then** say “peace!”*

Poem 7⁹³

1 Don’t be gulled out of youth and its sweetness—

Not ever! Patch up its white hair with dye.

2 If youth had given its soul her pleasures

***Then** the soul would devote itself, after youth was gone, to repentance.*

⁹¹ In these and forthcoming examples, when poetic examples of particular structures are provided the structures under discussion will be bolded when possible. Sometimes it will be helpful to mark a feature that is not indicated by a particular word (either because there’s no appropriate translation for a particle in Arabic or because the structure has no identifying word even in the original). What that occurs, the feature will be indicated with a bolded placeholder hyphen (-).

⁹² (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 223, #808)

⁹³ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 230, #93)

- Imperatives, with special attention given to imperatives at the beginning of the poem, imperatives preceded by a *fa-* particle, best translated in this context as “so” (hereafter so-imperative), and constructions of the form, “do x, for y” (in Arabic, imperative x, *fa-* y, hereafter imperative/for). The following three examples highlight one imperative of each sort:

Poem 8⁹⁴

1 Give! Tell me, oh sweetest of people without exception,

Why you have neglected me and betrayed me.

2 I said, ‘Visit me!’, and he said, “I am sick”;

Oh sick one, who will not recover from hating us!

Poem 9⁹⁵

1 Start drinking wine early, with a morning draught,

And don’t let the cup out of your hand.

2 Indeed joy is life for a young man

***So seize** joy from your life.*

Poem 10⁹⁶

1 They said “the cloud has ruined our plans with its dripping!”

When they saw it imitating my weeping.

⁹⁴ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 309, #201)

⁹⁵ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 79, #670)

⁹⁶ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 566, #1099)

2 ***Don't be shocked*** regarding what you have seen, ***for*** indeed

This sky is weeping in sympathy for me.

- Similes—demarcated usually by a particle such as *mithla*, *ka-* or one of its compounds, but also encompassing constructions such as “I imagined x to be y”).

In the three examples that follow, the first has a simple comparison between objects “x is like y”, the second involves comparison between phrases “it was as though x were y”, and the third involves a comparison between two situations “when x happened, it was as though y had happened”.

Poem 11⁹⁷

1 *I have seen him wandering, wearily, sullenly,*

Like the branch of a sand-dune, defeated, outcast.

2 *Would that the dust which abrades him were kohl for me*

And would that I were his neighbor on the night of the ʿīd!

Poem 12⁹⁸

1 *Oh, give it me to drink! The night's death has been announced by the rooster*

And the horizon of morning has been laid bare and bereft.

2 *And Canopus has appeared to the night-traveller, **as though it were***

A guardian⁹⁹ over all the stars in the sky.

⁹⁷ (Ibn al-Muʿtazz 1997, v. I, pg. 272, #167)

⁹⁸ (Ibn al-Muʿtazz 1997, v. II, pg. 32-33, #613)

Poem 13¹⁰⁰

1 It's as though his birthmarks were

the ripe fruits of a fresh garden;

2 Rather, it's as though they were the fifths and

the tenths on the surface of a Quran manuscript.¹⁰¹

- *Wāw rubba*¹⁰² constructions—this grammatical construction has usually been translated as “many’s the x”, or “and there was an x”, as in the following two examples respectively:

Poem 14¹⁰³

1 Many's the night I have rejoiced,

And many's the day I've been unconscious of

2 Which I have spent dead of drunkenness

With my life in pursuit of it.

Poem 15¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Guardian is intended here in the sense of the watcher who's supposed to prevent lovers from meeting

¹⁰⁰ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 556, #1080)

¹⁰¹ This refers to the decoration (in the form of geometric patterns or rosettes) that occurs in the fifth and tenth verses of chapters in the Quran (Canby 2012). The simile in the first line of this poem is comparable to that in the example above, in that it involves a comparison between two phrases.

¹⁰² There are some cases in the lyric corpus of *rubba* constructions (in which the word *rubba* is used instead of just the *wāw*). These cases are treated as *wāw rubba* for the purposes of this study.

¹⁰³ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 33, #615)

¹⁰⁴ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 254-55, #127)

1 And there was one who clipped layers of jet-black hair

In the ivory of a face that shone like lamplight.

2 Our bodies have wasted away with emaciation,

So call his graces to account for our heart's blood.

- Direct address, or “address/content” constructions, of the form “oh x, y”

Poem 16¹⁰⁵

1 Oh full moon that revolves in the sky of the cavalry field¹⁰⁶

Be gentle to the eyes of beholders.

2 -Stop for us on the track, if you do not visit us;

A stop on the track is half the visit.

- Dialogue, defined for these purposes as direct speech of the sort represented by quotation marks in English (e.g. ‘They said, “you are a fool”’) but not indirect speech (e.g. ‘They said that I was a fool’).

Poem 17¹⁰⁷

1 She says to me, as the tears are trickling

On her cheek, intermixed with blood.

¹⁰⁵ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 300-1, #188)

¹⁰⁶ This poem seems to be referring to a beloved who rides horses in tournaments, drawing the eyes of his admirers around the circuit along with him.

¹⁰⁷ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 254, #126)

2 *'For how long must we meet warily?*

Have we no relief from our torment?'

- “How many?” constructions, in which the particle *kam* introduces a phrase which discusses how often a general phenomenon occurs.

Poem 18¹⁰⁸

1 *The night phantom healed me, no praise to him,*

And substituted a lovers' tryst for his rejection .

2 *And **how many** a pimping slumber of mine*

Has brought the beloved despite his distance?

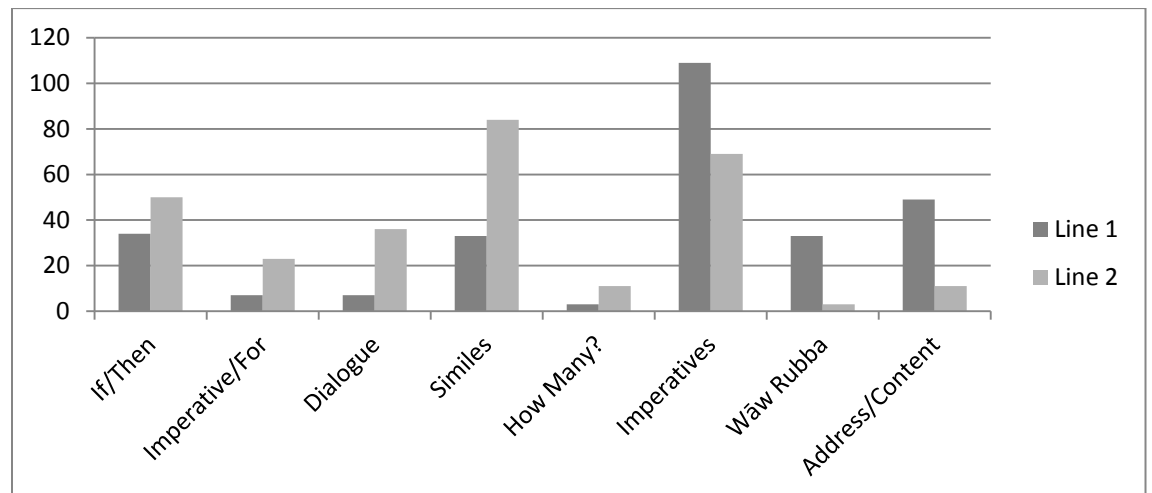
Having identified these features which will be the focus of our study, we will examine how they are distributed throughout Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s lyric couplets.

1.2 The Frequency Distribution of Syntactic Structures

After collecting up all the instances of these structures within the lyric couplets and examining them, the first major discovery is that nearly all of them have an uneven distribution of frequency between the first and second lines of the poems. The table below shows how many instances of each feature were found in the first line of a lyric couplet, and how many were found in the second line:

¹⁰⁸ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 275, #155)

Figure 3



While the distribution patterns don't follow anything like a hard-and-fast rule, it's clear that some of these structures (which we will henceforth call "openers") tend to gravitate towards the first of the two lines, while others (which we'll call "closers") tend to gravitate towards the second.¹⁰⁹ These sorts of gravitational effects have been noted elsewhere, as by Hamori in 1969: "In much of Arabic poetry, we find specific types of phrase or phrasing preferred at the beginnings or ends of poems and their sub-sections."¹¹⁰ But how does it happen, and why? To answer that, we shall examine each distribution pattern in turn, first openers and then closers.

¹⁰⁹ Chapter 2 will introduce a measurement of statistical significance that speaks to how likely disparities of this sort are to have occurred by chance. Generally speaking, the larger the sample, and the larger the difference between the number of first line/second line occurrences, the more likely the difference is to be significant (i.e. to have not occurred by chance). All of the disparities in this figure meet the standard threshold of statistical significance (which is that the chances of such a result occurring in a random sample are 5% or less)—with the possible exception of if/then, where the closer effect is estimated to have a 5.05% of having occurred by chance.

¹¹⁰ (Hamori, *Examples of Convention in the Poetry of Abū Nuwās* 1969, 10)

1.2.1 *Wāw rubba*

Wāw rubba structures, which are overwhelmingly concentrated in the first line, are also overwhelmingly concentrated at the beginning of the first line. Of all 34 lyric couplets containing *wāw rubba*, all but one (97%) begins with a *wāw rubba*. Here's the sole exception:

Poem 19¹¹¹

1 Listen and accept the prayer of a lover,

Oh absolutely best beloved of people to us.

2 Don't appear in the night if not naked;

***Many were** the coverings upon you, and then upon us.*¹¹²

Two other lyric couplets have *wāw rubba* occurring both at the beginning and later on in parallel, including the following couplet:

Poem 20¹¹³

*1 **Many's the** night I have rejoiced,*

*And **many's the** day I've been unconscious of*

2 Which I have spent dead of drunkenness

¹¹¹ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 587, #1128). Said in reference to a black woman.

¹¹² That is to say, the woman was imagined to be clothed in the night because of her dark skin, and then when she approaches the poet she covers him in blackness as well.

¹¹³ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 33, #615)

With my life in pursuit of it.

The other 30 attestations of *wāw rubba* in lyric couplets have one instance of *wāw rubba* occurring at the very beginning of the poem, as for example the following love lyric:

Poem 21¹¹⁴

1 And there was a midnight sun which I visited, and from her there came

A rejection, which I wasn't expecting.

2 She says, "Who is that? I don't know!"

Oh thief of the heart, I have come to seek it back.

A similar usage occurs in the following descriptive poem:

Poem 22¹¹⁵

1 Many's the night, like the kohl of the eye, into whose blackness I plunged

With a flashing spear and a cutting sword.

2 And a swift camel who flies in the saddle; it was as though she were

Flinging pebbles of gravel upon severed skulls.

This strong preference for *wāw rubba* as a starting gesture marks a sharp (if well-established) distinction between couplets and *qaṣīdas*, given that in the latter *wāw rubba*

¹¹⁴ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 234, #99)

¹¹⁵ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg.584, #1123)

is typically used as a marker of abrupt transition into a descriptive passage¹¹⁶. In the corpus of lyric couplets, it is not used that way ever, even in the rare cases where it does not appear at the beginning of the poem. In the cases where a later *wāw rubba* parallels the one at the beginning of the poem, it functions as formal indicator of thematic parallelism, and in the one case where it appears neither at the beginning nor in parallel with a *wāw rubba* at the beginning, it serves as a direct follow-up to the statement preceding it. Of course, the scope for transition is very narrow in a poem of only two lines. One possibility is that the use of *wāw rubba* as an opening gesture in couplets points to a relationship between these short descriptive poems and transitional descriptive passages from longer poems (this idea will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 3). Another possibility, that the couplets cited in the *dīwān* are themselves excerpts from longer poems, should also be considered; however, the fact that the redactors of the *dīwān* felt comfortable transmitting these couplets as complete poems suggests that the *wāw rubba* opening did not strike contemporary taste as necessary evidence of a fragment.

1.2.2 Address/Content

The preference of address/content structures for the beginnings of poems is very well born out in both thematic and formal studies of Arabic poetry. Hamori declares the practice of starting poems with apostrophe to be “too well known to require illustration.”¹¹⁷ Scheindlin likewise observes that the medieval critics consider an

¹¹⁶ (Hamori, Examples of Convention in the Poetry of Abū Nuwās 1969 , 11)

¹¹⁷ (Hamori, Examples of Convention in the Poetry of Abū Nuwās 1969 , 10)

opening with apostrophe to be customary. The apostrophic opening is a powerful thematic motif in the pre-Islamic *qaṣīda*¹¹⁸. Scheindlin notes two rhetorical functions of this opening: “Within the mode of the *nasīb* [in the context of a *qaṣīda*] it serves to introduce the theme of separation; and within the living context in which the poem is recited, it attracts the attention of the auditor”.¹¹⁹ If we regard the *nasīb* as the ancestor of the *ghazal* poem, we might then be unsurprised to learn that *ghazal* poems have the highest frequency of address/content structures of any genre in this lyric couplet corpus.¹²⁰

Address/content structures function as a bipartite syntactical structure. They are reliably composed of two sections, which are unambiguously identifiable—first the vocative call to the interlocutor, then the content of the message (as for example, “[1]Oh Shirr, [2] be kind!”). The rhetorical strength of this structure is strengthened by the fact that when presented in the natural order (vocative call first, content second) the first part creates the expectation of the second part following it, thus creating a two-part anticipation/resolution pattern of the sort that motivates much of the forward thrust of Arabic poetry at the level of the single line and the couplet.¹²¹ Bipartite structures in couplets generate suspense due to their pacing: when the first part begins, the reader

¹¹⁸ (Scheindlin, Form and structure in the poetry of Al-Mu‘tamid Ibn ‘Abbād 1974, 18)

¹¹⁹ (Scheindlin, Form and structure in the poetry of Al-Mu‘tamid Ibn ‘Abbād 1974, 18-19)

¹²⁰ It should be noted that Scheindlin also identifies apostrophe as a common modality for ending poems (Scheindlin 117-123). However, an examination of his examples reveals that this apparent disparity in results arises from a difference in definition of terms. Of Scheindlin’s seven examples of closing apostrophe, only two include the bipartite structure address/content, and one of those two is inverted. Five of the seven examples (including the attestation of the uninverted address/content structure) close on an imperative, four of which fall into the bipartite pattern imperative/for, identified in our analysis of this corpus as a characteristic closing pattern.

¹²¹ See, for example, (Scheindlin, Form and structure in the poetry of Al-Mu‘tamid Ibn ‘Abbād 1974, 36)

knows to expect the second part, but when? Will it occur in the second half of the same hemistich, as in the following example?

Poem 23¹²²

1 **Oh**, wine-seller, **bring** what you see

Liberally—May God not sanction shortchanging!

2 *When the hangover of drunkenness reminds me, tomorrow [I will say]*

'This day is not lovely—Alas for my yesterday!'

Will it occur in the second hemistich of the same line, as here?

Poem 24¹²³

1 **Oh**, you who act prideful and angry,

Show favor to me, for I am repentant.

2 *You were angry when I said your departure was killing me;*

If your intimacy returns to me, then call me a liar.

Or will the first part stretch itself out, with the release waiting for the second line of the couplet, as in Poem 25?

¹²² (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 145, #734)

¹²³ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 238, #108)

Poem 25¹²⁴

1 **Oh** branch—if its walking shakes it

I fear that its pomegranates will fall¹²⁵—

2 **Have pity** upon a lord who has become enslaved;

His power has been humbled in loving you.

Like some other bipartite structures, the address/content structure can also be inverted, with the content of the statement preceding the direct address, as in this case:

Poem 26¹²⁶

1 **The** *ʿīd* has come to me, **Oh** my tormenter;

Don't make it a time of care or sorrows.

2 *Rise, and slaughter our separation for the holiday*

And let it become, oh Shirr, our sacrifice.

Note that the force of the anticipation and resolution is lost in inversion, since when the content precedes the address, there's no basis to expect the second part before it occurs.

The inversion of bipartite structures serves to confound expectations, mixing up the syntactical melting pot by introducing more variety. In this corpus, 23% of address/content structures are inverted (19 out of 81); this constitutes a significant fraction but a clear minority.

¹²⁴ (Ibn al-Muʿtazz 1997, v. I, pg. 390, #330)

¹²⁵ If the beloved is understood as a female despite the masculine pronoun (as per common convention) then the pomegranates may be understood to refer to breasts.

¹²⁶ (Ibn al-Muʿtazz 1997, v. I, pg. 397, #338)

Within an uninverted bipartite structure, the author can play up the anticipation of the reader by reiterating the first half of the structure before bringing it to resolution with the second half. Here's an example of such a variation, in which the "address" component is repeated three times before the "content" resolves the tension in the final hemistich:

Poem 27¹²⁷

1 Oh wondrous one with no equal,

Oh, deserving of all pride!

2 Who has treated me harshly, so that I don't see him,

Give me a slumber, that I might see you there!

Such variations are quite rare, accounting for only 5 of the 81 address/content attestations (6%). By far the majority of address/content occurrences in the corpus are of the simple, uninverted kind.

All of these considerations—bipartite structure, inversions, and variations—have to be taken into account in considering where in a couplet address/content structures tend to gravitate. In a bipartite structure, both parts have to be located, and their location relative to one another is relevant. In the case of *wāw rubba*, we were able to simply state that it

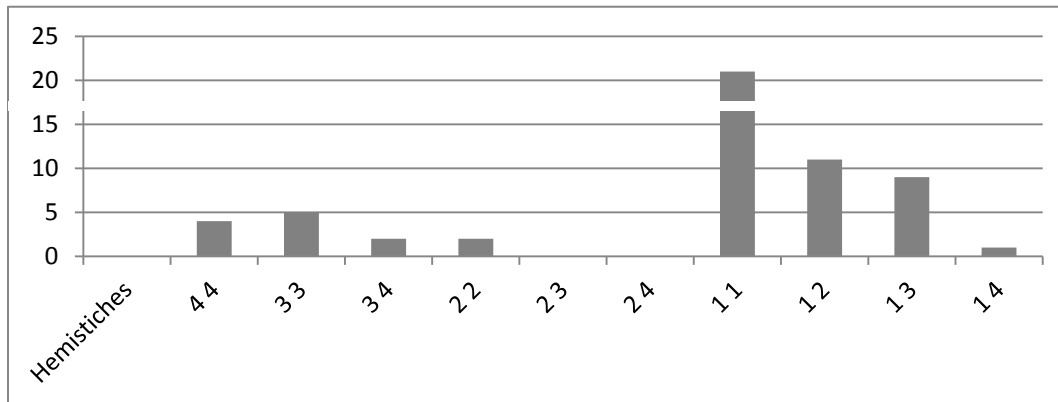
¹²⁷ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 420, #372) The first iteration of the address uses the vocative particle *ayā*; the second uses *yā*, and the third uses *man*. Without being in the position to support the assertion at present, I venture to suggest that it's not unusual in the case of syntactical parallelism in Arabic poetry for the poet to use slightly different words each time.

marked the very beginning of 97% of poems in which it occurred. But when we consider how to analyze the placement of address/content structures in a poem, we run into complications in comparing the inverted and uninverted forms. What does it mean to mark the beginning of an inverted address/content structure? Does it begin with the “content”, or with the “address”? It seems problematic to count inverted address/content structures as beginning at the beginning of the “content” section, even though it appears first, given the fact that an inverted address/content structure isn’t marked as such at the outset of the initial “content” section. But we also distort the data by considering it to begin at the beginning of the deferred “address” section; if we compare all “address” components together, inverted along with uninverted, we gloss over the differences between their constraints in placement. An inverted address cannot, by definition, occur at the very beginning of the poem; and an uninverted address cannot occur at the very end. In order to sidestep these complications and try for a clear picture, we will consider only uninverted address/content structures in the question of what proportion of them begin the poem. Of the poems with uninverted address/content structures, 80% have those address/content structures occurring at the very beginning of the poem.

The following graph, which considers only uninverted address/content structures of the simple a/b variety, illustrates the distribution of the two parts of the structure throughout the couplet. The paired numbers indicate the hemistichs in the couplet in which the first and second parts of the structure occur (respectively), and the height of the bars indicates the frequency of that hemistich distribution in the corpus.

Figure

4



This distribution will become more interesting later on, in comparison with other bipartite structure distributions, but a few observations can be made immediately. First, as might be expected given the frequency of poem-initial address/content structures, the most popular distributions are those in which the “address” occurs in the first hemistich. Second, there’s a noticeable preference towards a balanced distribution of the two parts. That is to say, in a 1-1, 2-2, 3-3, or 4-4 distribution, the bipartite structure balances over the hemistich; In a 1-2 or 3-4 distribution, the bipartite structure balances over the line; in a 1-3 distribution, the bipartite structure balances over the couplet. 2-3 and 1-4 distributions are not balanced over anything; whereas a 2-4 structure could be arguably

balanced over the couplet, or also arguably unbalanced. This graph shows 2-3 and 2-4 with no attestations at all, and 1-4 with only one (noteworthy in contrast with the other distributions that begin in the first hemistich). Finally, among those poems which have address in the first hemistich, there's a strong preference towards the content following it immediately, rather than as a balanced member in the next hemistich or the next line. This suggests that by default, the entire address/content structure is an opening gesture, but that the author may play on that default expectation by extending the resolution for a hemistich or, less frequently, for a line.

1.2.3 Imperative Openers

The third characteristic “opener” is the imperative. Imperatives occur frequently within the corpus; they are featured 178 times among 104 poems, thus making their appearance in more than one in five lyric couplets. Of those 178 occurrences, all but nine fall into one of the following four categories:

- Imperatives occurring at the very beginning of the poem
- Imperatives occurring in an imperative-for structure
- Imperatives occurring in a so-imperative structure
- Imperatives occurring in parallel with other imperatives in the same couplet.

We've already seen that imperatives occurring in the first line constitute a majority of imperative usage overall (in 109 out of 178 cases; about 60% of the time).

We can now use the four categories presented above to understand that proportion better. The imperative-for structure is a closer, with a strong preference towards appearing in the second line. The so-imperative structure is rather evenly distributed throughout the poem,

with the exception of the *zuhd* genre, except that—owing to its position as a rhetorical follow-up—it very rarely occurs at the very beginning of the poem. Imperatives that parallel earlier imperatives employed in the same poem are unable to occur at the very beginning by definition. After eliminating from consideration imperative-for constructions, so-imperative constructions, and imperatives that are not the first imperative in the poem, we are left with 40 poem-initial imperatives, the aforementioned nine imperatives that fall into none of the listed categories, and thirteen imperatives which are the first in a parallel construction without being poem-initial. In that set of 62 imperatives, 65% occur at the very beginning of the poem in which they appear. The following two examples are characteristic of poem-initial imperatives:

Poem 28¹²⁸

1 Be patient! Perhaps you will soon attain

By the favor of God, possessor of good deeds,

2 Deliverance, whose daybreak will shine forth for you

Dawning in the darkness of sorrows.

Poem 29¹²⁹

1 Don't tell me off, indeed, my sort is too busy for you,

And look at what my eye has brought down upon my head.

*2 The spring has come, rich with blossoms*¹³⁰

¹²⁸ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. III, pg. 196, #1338) Regarding patience, and waiting for happiness

¹²⁹ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v.I, pg. 318, #216)

As though they were stolen from the face of ‘Abbās.

We may also note that, in thirteen of the remaining 22 cases of imperatives that are not poem-initial, the imperatives are serving as the second component part in an address/content pair (a brief scan of the examples of address/content structures already provided will show that imperatives are a frequent complement to direct address). Poem 30 below provides another example of this phenomenon—when an imperative is functioning as the “content” component of an uninverted address/content structure, it’s obviously not possible for it to occur at the very beginning of the poem.

Poem 30¹³¹

Oh you who dye white hair with henna to conceal it,

Ask God for concealment from the fire for it.

White hair will not depart from a house where it has settled

Until it drives away the owner of the house.

A review of three openers—*wāw rubba*, address-content, and imperatives— suggests that those structures which tend to gravitate towards the first line of a couplet do so by tending to occur at the very beginning of the couplet; even in the case of the bipartite

¹³⁰ *Fī mulah*, translated somewhat loosely as “rich”, might be translated more literally as “among beautiful things” (as explained by al-Sāmarrā’ī)

¹³¹ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. III, pg. 160, #1287)

address/content, the entire structure prefers most of the time to remain condensed at the beginning of the poem. The distribution of the closers is significantly more complex, perhaps partly because more structures tend to gravitate towards the second line than to the first. That may be due in part to a common opener which we did not discuss—the simple declarative sentence. It appears to be frequent occurrence in the corpus for a poem to begin with a statement of fact in the first line and then proceed from there to a climax in the second line. Poem 32, for example, begins with a statement of fact in the first hemistich, followed by a second (somewhat more complex and figurative) statement in the second hemistich. The second line is devoted to a dramatic rhetorical question (employing the closer “How many?”), which explicates the central conceit of the poem.

Poem 31¹³²

*1 The night phantom healed me, no praise to him,
And substituted a lover's tryst for his rejection.*

*2 And how many a pimping slumber of mine
Has brought the beloved despite his distance?*

Poem 32 also begins with a statement in the first hemistich, followed by a somewhat more complex and figurative parallel statement (which begins at the end of the first hemistich and ends at the end of the second). The third hemistich is another statement of fact, and the fourth hemistich employs simile to build a memorable image out of that final statement.

¹³² (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 275, #155)

1 He has a glance that pierces hearts, and a cheek

In which roses have bloomed on every side.

2 And the sides of his face have been bedowned with straight lines

As lines mark the parchment of a writer.

In examining the closers, we shall start with a study of the bipartite structures if/then and imperative/for, and the sometimes bipartite structures of dialogue and simile. The sequential examination of these structures is valuable in part because the language needed to describe their placement in the poem is the same, and in part because a comparison between them reveals certain characteristic similarities, as well as serving to highlight the idiosyncratic differences between them.

The bipartite closers share a distinctive rhetorical—which is to say, persuasive or argumentative—flavor. Imperative/for and if/then structures share a rhetorical substructure of persuasion by explanation. The argument made explicitly in the case of the imperative-for structure: “You should do x, because y”, is often implicit in the if-then structure: “if you do x, then y will happen as a result.” Consider, for example, the two couplets below. The first includes an if/then structure, and the second includes an imperative/for structure. In both cases, we could make a similar rhetorical point by using the other structure. Instead of “**If** you anger them, **then** you will see our swords with them” we might say “**Don’t** anger them, **for** our swords are with them”. By portraying

¹³³ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 226, #88)

the result of a conditional as unfavorable (as in “you will see our swords with them”) the speaker is essentially advising the interlocutor to avoid bringing about the condition (in this case, that “you anger them”) so as to avoid bringing about its consequences. We can perform the reverse operation with Poem 34, restating it as a compound conditional: “**If** you meet your liaison by day, **then** the sun will gossip; **if** you meet him by night, **then** the night will procure.”

Poem 33¹³⁴

1 Say to the Quraysh: leave off extravagance and be moderate;

Indeed ‘Alī and ‘Abbās are my two hands!

2 If you anger them, then you will see our swords with them;

Indeed we and they are two souls in one body.

Poem 34¹³⁵

1 Don’t meet your lover except by night,

For the sun is a gossip, and the night is a procurer.

2 How many a lover, with the dark of night hiding him,

Has met his beloved, while the people were sleeping?

In fact, the more frequent variation of the if/then argument could be restated: “don’t bother doing x, for y will happen anyway.” Thus, in the example below, the second line

¹³⁴ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 280, #848)

¹³⁵ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 270-1, #148)

could be restated as an imperative and achieve a very similar rhetorical effect: “**Don’t** deny a form to the body’s form/ **for** in the soul, the soul’s form will be found for the soul.”

Poem 35¹³⁶

1 I see that the eyes of enemies have apprehended us

And suspicion has estranged those who used to be friendly.

2 If you deny a form to the body’s form,

***Then** in the soul, the soul’s form will be found for the soul¹³⁷*

Bipartite dialogue also lends itself readily to rhetorical argument because it provides a natural vehicle for presenting two sides of an argument, giving each one a voice. The example below is self-explanatory.

Poem 36¹³⁸

*1 **They** say to me, when there’s a distance between me and her,*

‘Shirr is far away from you, and the cord of closeness has been coiled up.’

*2 **But I** say to them, when love is revealed by weeping,*

‘Even if my eye has departed, my heart has remained.’¹³⁹

¹³⁶ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 316, #212)

¹³⁷ That is to say: if you forbid one body from meeting another, then the two metaphysical forms will nonetheless find one another in the soul.

¹³⁸ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 228, #91)

¹³⁹ This last hemistich incidentally provides another example of a conditional that could be restated as imperative/for: “Don’t make my eye depart, for my heart will remain regardless.”

The form of a bipartite structure can lend rhetorical force to these arguments through the mechanisms of anticipation and resolution discussed above. In the closers, more than in the opener address/content, there is a lot of interplay between the two parts of the structure and the hemistich break. It's worth noting in this connection, however, that of the three bipartite closers, only if/then shares with address/content the property that the second half of the structure is formally required by the first. One statement in dialogue does not necessitate another, and imperatives do not necessarily require a "for" complement; however "if" (in an uninverted form) requires a "then" to complete it.

1.2.4 If/Then

The preference of conditional sentences for the second lines of couplets is mirrored in Hamori's identification of the conditional as a closure pattern in the poetry of al-Mutanabbi¹⁴⁰. But this preference—in the case of the couplets—must be qualified. As shown in figure 1 above, the ratio of "if" appearing in second vs. first lines is 50:34. However, a closer examination reveals that this second-line effect is owed to a stronger preference that acts upon a subset of if/then constructions. If one considers those cases in which the bipartite structure is inverted, and instances in which "if" has the sense of "when" or "whenever" (as when the conditional particle is *lammā* or *idhāmā*), the second line effect diminishes to the point of insignificance, with a ratio of 19:16. The real gravitation towards the second line occurs in uninverted if/then structures where "if"

¹⁴⁰ (Hamori, The composition of Mutanabbi's panegyrics to Sayf al-Dawla 1992, 3)

carries a truly conditional connotation, with a ratio of 31:18¹⁴¹. It is perhaps no coincidence that these are also the if/then structures which pack a rhetorical punch, in that they take full advantage of anticipation/resolution potential of their bipartite structure, and in that as true conditionals the if/then structure acts to describe the consequences of certain choosable actions. By way of illustration, consider the following three poems. In Poem 37 below, the conditional particle is *lammā*, which carries the sense of “when” rather than “if”. Structure of this sort do not evince a clear closer effect.

Poem 37¹⁴²

1 When the most brilliant of the front teeth appear

And hearts are exposed and glances stretch towards you

2 -I put a seal upon the pearl middle incisor with a seal

Of carnelian¹⁴³, and under the seal the jewels glow.

Poem 38 contains an if/then structure which conveys the sense of “if” (the Arabic particle *idhā*). However, the if/then structure is inverted so that the result “how lovely the bristle...” precedes the condition “If she gives it wine”. Structures of this sort are also not clearly closers.

¹⁴¹ As was noted earlier in footnote 109, the statistical significance of opener and closer effects involves calculating the odds of the observed effect occurring by chance—the standard threshold being that if the effect has a less than 5% chance of occurring by chance it’s considered statistically significant. The if/then closer effect presented at that point was marginally significant (with the odds of random occurrence at 5.05%). By restricting our view to uninverted conditional usages, we can comfortably clear the 5% mark.

¹⁴² (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 536, #1042)

¹⁴³ i.e. with his lips, by kissing

Poem 38¹⁴⁴

*1 Greetings to the one whom I have been meeting in slumber;
How lovely her night-phantom; would that it were she.*

*2 -Oh, how lovely the bristle of toothbrush from her mouth
If she gives it wine to drink from her teeth.*

The following poem contains an uninverted if/then structure in which the conditional particle “*in*” conveys the sense of “if”. If/then structures of this sort gravitate towards the second line of couplets.

Poem 39¹⁴⁵

*1 You have become ill, and you have made me ill
And you have slept and made me sleepless.*

*2 So if you are –may my soul
ransom you— restored to health, **then** you will restore me to health.*

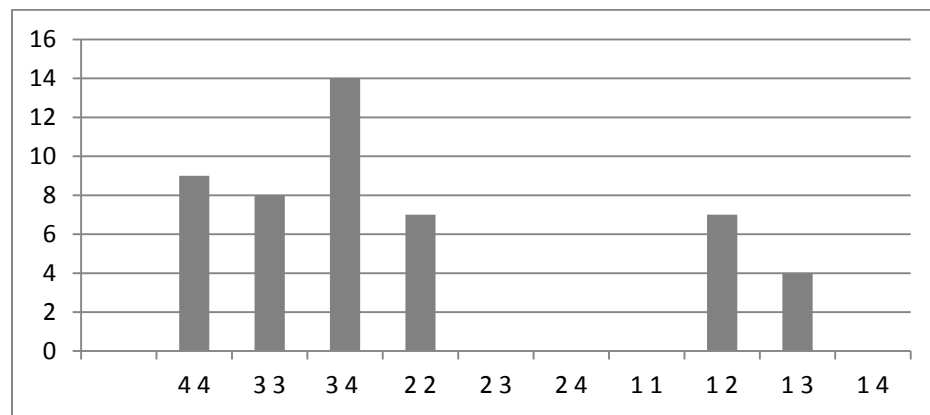
Future discussion of the if/then bipartite closer structure will thus refer only to the subset of if/then structures exemplified by Poem 39.

¹⁴⁴ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 221, #80)

¹⁴⁵ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 400, #343)

Aside from their preference for occurring in the second line, what can we say about them? A chart of their bipartite distribution by hemistich is shown below, similar to the earlier chart of bipartite address/content distribution. In this case, for the pairs of numbers given below, the first refers to the placement of the “if” in the poem, while the second refers to the placement of the “then”.

Figure 5



As in the bipartite opener structure address/content, we find that the 2-3 and 1-4 distributions are avoided, in addition to the questionable case of 2-4. 1-1, the strong favorite for address/content, is avoided entirely. Of the possibilities remaining, 3-4 emerges as the clear favorite. The disproportionate preferences for 3-4 and against 1-1 account for most of the second-line preference between them, though there may also be a slight preference towards the end of the poem—4-4 is more popular than 3-3, which is more popular than 2-2. 1-2 is nowhere near as popular as its second-line equivalent, 3-4, and 1-3 (balancing the structure across the entire poem) is the rarest extant distribution.

We can understand this distribution better by looking more closely still. The default assumption for the if/then structure is that it is “full”—that is, the structure occupies the full space of the hemistich or hemistichs it inhabits; and balanced”—that is, and the first and second parts are of equal length (or approximately equal length, in the case that the structure occupies a single hemistich). The extent to which this default assumption holds true varies depending upon where in the poem the structure occurs. In 2-2 and 4-4 distributions, all but one attestation of each is both full and balanced; when they are not, it is because they don’t begin quite at the beginning of the hemistich, not because they don’t extend to the end. Structures that occur in these positions tend to neatly round out the line in which they occur. This poem provides an example of a full and balanced 4-4 structure:

Poem 40¹⁴⁶

1 I have posed you a riddle, all of you who have not been tried¹⁴⁷;

Speak the truth, or leave me alone:

2 What is the stony ground¹⁴⁸ whose pebbles are a jewel?

*If it is not in the mouth of Shirr, **then** in whose?*

While this poem shows a full and balanced 2-2 structure:

Poem 41¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 402, #346)

¹⁴⁷ Reading the passive, poetic license permits reading *munī* for *muniya*

¹⁴⁸ The editor recommends this interpretation, but admits some confusion about it.

1 My slave's haughtiness, while I submit--

*If that is my lot, **then** what shall I do?*

2 Oh my blamer, you are blaming me in vain;

You have made me hear, but love will not listen.

3-4 distributions likewise all extend to the end of the line. 10 of the 14 are full and balanced. Of those that are not, this is mostly because they fill the line without quite balancing on the hemistich. Such is the case with this poem, which was shown above:

Poem 42¹⁵⁰

1 You have become ill, and you have made me ill,

And you have slept and made me sleepless.

*2 So **if** you are —may my soul*

*ransom you— restored to health, **then** you will restore me to health.*

This couplet is interesting in that the poet could have rather easily chosen to harness the power of the hemistich break to the bipartite break, but chose to disrupt the expected pacing of the line by interjecting an expostulation right on top of the hemistich break, leaving the conditional to flow around it. This should help to remind us that the expected balanced pacing of lines, far from being a matter of slavish formula, was an effect that the

¹⁴⁹ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 327, #231)

¹⁵⁰ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 400, #343)

poets were happy to play with, as here, in order to surprise the audience (in this case, the exclamation of devotion achieves the impression of spontaneity by overflowing the expected metrical containment for the bipartite structure).

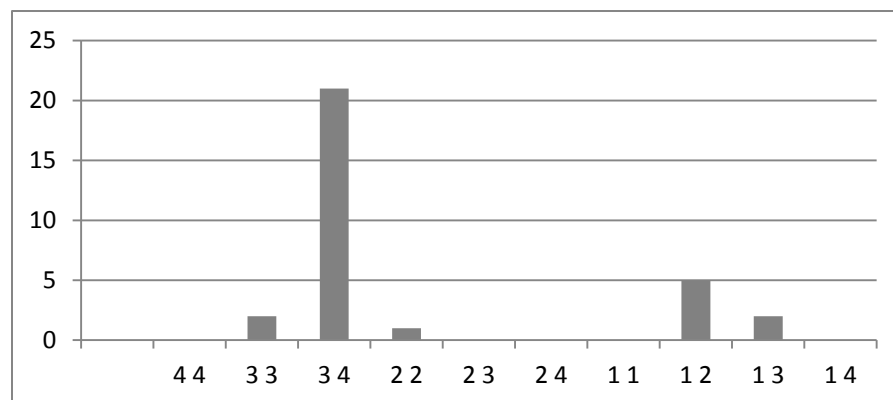
When we examine the eight 3-3 distributions, only four are full and balanced; of the other four, two crowd into the second half of the hemistich, one covers only the first half of the hemistich, and the last one overflows the hemistich boundary and continues to the end of the line. This creates an interesting contrast between 3-3, on the one hand, and 4-4 and 2-2 on the other. The likely explanation for this contrast is that 4-4 and 2-2, which occur at the ends of lines, feel more pressure to neatly fill out their space than does 3-3, which occurs only at the end of a hemistich. It is not surprising that line boundaries impose a lot more stability than hemistich boundaries. However, the corollary is that conditionals which dwell in the first half of a line might have a lot more freedom in terms of their length and shape than those that occur near a line-break.

Of the seven 1-2 distributions, four are full and balanced, and three are not—rendering it significantly less stable a structure than its second-line counterpart 3-4. 1-1 is, of course, avoided altogether. Of the four 1-3 distributions, only one is full and balanced over the entire poem. Of the other three, two balance at the line break but do not extend to fill the end of the poem; the other one is part of an unbalanced, embedded structure. The paucity of regular 1-3 distributions may help to explain why the distribution is itself so relatively rare.

1.2.5 Imperative/For

Of the bipartite structures under consideration, imperative/for is perhaps the least orthodox. Unlike if/then or address/content structures, imperatives neither necessarily suggest the presence of an explanation prefaced with the particle *fa*, nor does the particle *fa* imply the existence of an imperative preceding it. It is, perhaps, not so much a structure as a pattern in which two relatively frequent syntactical devices coincide. The argument for classifying imperative/for as a bipartite structure and a phenomenon worth studying rests on two pillars. First, as previously mentioned, imperatives rarely appear in the second line at all without either falling into this pattern or one of two others (so-imperative or a parallel to an imperative that occurred earlier in the poem). Second, the usage of this structure is highly regular, and shares some features in common with if/then. Here's a chart of the bipartite distribution of imperative/for, by hemistich:

Figure 6



Some of the features of this distribution may by now be familiar. As in the other bipartite structures we've studied, 2-3, 1-4, and 2-3 are avoided. So, as in if/then structures, is 1-1. 1-2 and 1-3 are both present, and by now it may be worth noting that, in all three bipartite distributions we've seen, 1-2 has been more common than 1-3. But the most notable feature in this distribution is, of course, the fact that 3-4, which had been preferred in if/then, is very strongly preferred in imperative-for. Across the board, this structure is overwhelmingly full and balanced:

Poem 43¹⁵¹

1 Often has generosity induced poverty in a man

So that he stands among men in a lowly position.

*2 So **tighten** the loops of your money, and save it up—*

***For** miserliness is better than begging the miser.*

Poem 44¹⁵²

1 Oh my soul, if you are satisfied with your daily bread

Then you are mighty and prosperous forever.

*2 **Put** away from you the ambitions and hopes*

***For** how often have hopes overcome a death?¹⁵³*

¹⁵¹ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. III, pg. 184, #1319)

¹⁵² (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. III, pg. 200, #1347)

¹⁵³ The editor notes a possibly preferable alternative reading for this hemistich: "for many are the hopes that have brought on death".

The imperative/for structure exhibits a strong tendency to occur in the second line, but it exhibits an even stronger tendency to continue to the very end of the poem. Not only do all the imperative-for structures that occur in the second line end the poem, so do all the 1-3 structures—which, because they begin in the first hemistich, are classified as occurring in line 1 rather than line 2. This marks a contrast to the if/then structure whose preference for the second line outweighs the preference for ending the poem. The two structures do share one other property, which is that in both cases, the preference towards occurring in the second line is found not only overall but in every genre of poetry with a significant number of couplets except *zuhd*, where in both cases the first line shows a slight advantage.

1.2.6 Dialogue

The attraction of dialogue towards the ends of poems has not, to the best of the author's knowledge, been specifically noted in other secondary literature. The tendency to end a piece of poetry with dialogue (especially a love lyric) is hardly an unusual feature in Arabic poetry, and perhaps finds its best known example in the *kharja* that ends the Hispano-Arabic *muwashshaḥa*, which typically has the beloved speak in her own voice.

Dialogue occurs in the second line of the poem in 80% of cases where it occurs in a lyric couplet. Here's one example of second-line dialogue.

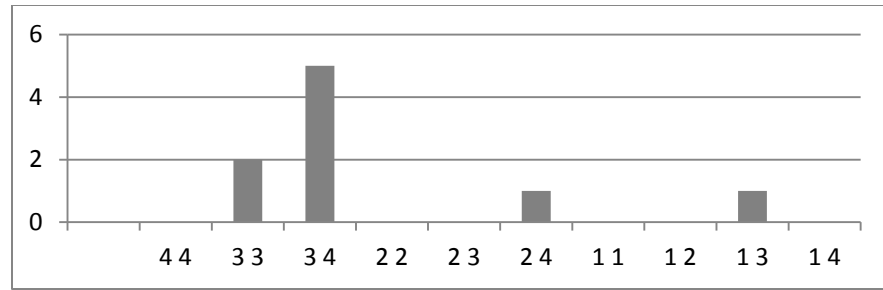
*1 Had you not raised my hopes, oh heart,
when Shirr drew away, that you would yearn no more?*
*2 So it said, "I thought that the young man masters love;
It's death, though I was told that it was love".*

In this case, the dialogue not only occurs in the second line, it extends to the end of the poem. However, whereas the imperative-for structure seemed to gravitate towards the ends of couplets even more strongly than to the second line, dialogue shows a much weaker propensity to occur at the very end of the poem is relatively weak (only 56% of lyric couplets with dialogue have that dialogue occurring at the end of the poem)

Of the 32 couplets which include dialogue, nine have more than one instance of dialogue (none has more than two instances). It is possible to think about this subset as a bipartite structure. There are barely enough of them to plot their distribution; but although the results are too small to be lent much credence, they do tend to follow other patterns we've seen for bipartite distribution:

Figure 7

¹⁵⁴ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 237, #105)



The 3-4 bump here ought to be familiar at this point, as well as the avoidance of 1-1, 2-3 and 1-4. The 2-4 attestation, on the other hand, is surprising, since it is the only instance of its kind we’ve seen in any bipartite structure.

One respect in which dialogue, whether of the bipartite variety or not, differs from if/then and imperative/for structures is in its relative independence from the hemistich. There is no particular inclination on the part of dialogue either to fill out the hemistich, or to stop at the hemistich break, or to balance along it when it acts as a bipartite structure. We may therefore say that dialogue is not intrinsically either “full” or “balanced” as those terms were defined earlier. Below are several examples of dialogue that isn’t full or balanced. In the case of Poem 46, the dialogue in the second line fills out the entire second line, but the dialogue is unbalanced between the two hemistichs, with the second half of the dialogue beginning half way through the first hemistich.

Poem 46¹⁵⁵

I My soul has been afflicted by one who will not respond to me

And that is torment above all torment.

¹⁵⁵ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 238, #107)

2 I said to him, ‘Return an answer!’ , and he said to me,

‘Your answer is No. So don’t bother with an answer to my answer.’

In Poem 47, the dialogue begins at the beginning of the third hemistich, and runs over the end of the hemistich to end halfway through the fourth hemistich without filling it out.

Poem 47¹⁵⁶

1 The notorious welcher has no fidelity

In his promise there’s pretext and postponement.

2 If I say ‘indeed I am besotted, ill

with the loveliest of people’, then he will be recognized.

One potential explanation for this may be that the rhythms of speech serve to supply a pleasant tension with the rising and falling rhythms of the poetic line.

1.2.7 Similes

The placement of similes in poetry has been discussed by commentators both classical and modern. Both Scheindlin and Hamori note a comment by Abu Hilāl al-‘Askarī on the ending of a poem, which he praises in the following terms: “He ended it with a clever simile and a nice comparison; that is the practice of the skilled secretaries and the foremost composers of letters.”¹⁵⁷ Following up on al-‘Askarī’s commentary, Hamori

¹⁵⁶ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 330, #236)

¹⁵⁷ Translation from (Scheindlin, Form and structure in the poetry of Al-Mu‘tamid Ibn ‘Abbād 1974, 20)

finds tentative but non-conclusive evidence of similes serving in a cadential role (i.e. the ends of sections of poems, not the ends of poems themselves) in the *qaṣīdas* of al-Mutanabbī.¹⁵⁸ Scheindlin actually finds a notable absence of similes at the ends of poems by al-Mu‘tamid, with the exception of very short *ghazal* and *khamr* poetry.¹⁵⁹ It is in the context of these observations that we must consider the observation that 72% of similes occurring in the lyric couplets of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz occur in the second line; and that in 82% of couplets where a simile occurs, the poem ends on a simile. al-‘Askarī’s observation notwithstanding, Scheindlin and Hamori have found no evidence of similes at the endings of the corpora they studied. Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s propensity for using similes to end couplets may, however, resonate with Scheindlin’s finding similes at the ends of short poems. It may also relate to Hamori’s finding that similes might function as cadences, if we consider that short poems may be related to sub-sections in longer poems (as was suggested earlier in Section 1.2.1 *Wāw rubba*, and will be discussed again).

It’s not possible to discuss the usage of similes without first discussing the range of structures the word “simile” has been used to encompass. In most (though as we shall see, not all) cases, similes involve the explicit comparison of one thing (x) with another (y). This comparison is usually affected with a particle of likeness, such as *mithla*, *ka*,

¹⁵⁸ (Hamori, The composition of Mutanabbī’s panegyrics to Sayf al-Dawla 1992, 20)

¹⁵⁹ (Scheindlin, Form and structure in the poetry of Al-Mu‘tamid Ibn ‘Abbād 1974, 112) Scheindlin’s attitude as evinced here and elsewhere is that very short poems are likely to be extemporaneous and unserious as works of art, and that therefore it is of little consequence when they contravene compositional tendencies observed in longer poems (as for example the tendency to avoid similes in closure). The present study has identified a number of patterns in short poems, and as oral-formulaic theory amply attests, improvisation is in no way incompatible with regular patterns in composition or seriousness of artistic purpose. However, it’s certainly likely that very short poems should exhibit some patterns of composition which differ in some respects from those of longer poems—if nothing else, very short poems operate under different constraints than longer poems do.

and compounds of *ka*, but in a few cases explicit comparison is achieved without such a particle, by means of structures such as “I imagined x was y” or “x resembles y” or “if you’ve seen x, you’ve seen y”. It excludes metaphors, such as the “new” variety identified by Heinrichs¹⁶⁰—in which y is substituted for x as the antelope for the beloved in line 1 of the poem below:

Poem 48¹⁶¹

1 He is a white antelope, haughty with a graceful form;

Languor played with the glance of his eye.

2 And it was as though the scorpion of his forelock halted

When it drew near to the flame of his cheek.

And it also excludes metaphors of the “old” variety—in which the attributes of an unnamed y are attributed to x. The poem which follows contains two “old” metaphors atop each other in the first line: first, the soil is lent the attributes of someone drinking wine; at the same time, the wine is given the attributes of tears:

Poem 49¹⁶²

1 The sun kissed its soil when it was given to drink

The tears of rains from the eyelids of the clouds.

¹⁶⁰ (Heinrichs, *The hand of the northwind : opinions on metaphor and the early meaning of isti' āra in Arabic poetics* 1977) Heinrichs, *The Hand of the Northwind*

¹⁶¹ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 244, #113)

¹⁶² (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 450, #955)

2 *And it's as though that soil were made of silk brocade*

And as though these hills were made of water.

Despite this apparently narrow definition, the range of things covered under it is diverse.

It covers cases in which x and y (represented as x / y) are noun phrases (the sun / the gold coat of mail in Poem 50), or compound noun phrases (the wine and the glass / the fine meaning and the subtle mind in Poem 51):

Poem 50¹⁶³

1 *A pond's waves are made to tremble*

By the blowing of the breezes and the passage of the east wind.

2 *When the sun above it rose*

I fancied it a gold coat of mail.

Poem 51¹⁶⁴

1 *And many's the drinking companion whom I've served wine undiluted,*

When dawn's horizon was lifting the curtains.

2 *It was pure, and its glass was pure around it,*

Like a fine meaning in a subtle mind.

¹⁶³ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 463, #971)

¹⁶⁴ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 168, #757)

It also covers cases in which x and y are complete sentences (the bubbles of water wander at its sides / tears wander upon a flushed cheek in Poem 52)

Poem 52¹⁶⁵

1 Many's the fire we've kindled quickly at daybreak;

Whenever water is spread out upon it, it catches fire.

2 The bubbles of water wander at its sides

As tears wander upon a flushed cheek..

And it also covers cases in which x and y are not syntactically parallel (as for example the flanks in Poem 53, which are the subject of the sentence that describes them / the water, which is the object of the sentence that describes it):

Poem 53¹⁶⁶

1 I have a horse that crosses the gloom of battle

At the forefront, and he carries me across the gloom of total darkness.

2 His flanks tremble when he walks

***Like** water whose surface the east wind shakes.*

It covers cases in which x precedes the particle of likeness, as here in the case of the cloud / the swindler):

¹⁶⁵ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 89, #678)

¹⁶⁶ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 449, #953)

Poem 54¹⁶⁷

1 She is given in marriage to the garden, and it¹⁶⁸ hopes for her

When the dark of night is like pitch, deep black.

2 A cloud—when lightnings rend it—

*Is **like** a swindler struck by whips.*

And it also covers cases in which the particle of likeness precedes both x and y (as here, where “it’s as though” precedes the Pleiades / nuggets of silver):

Poem 55¹⁶⁹

1 Oh! serve me a golden wine!

For the dark of night has adorned the horizons in blackness.¹⁷⁰

*2 **It’s as though** the Pleiades when the night surrounds them*

Were nuggets of silver surrounded by jet.

Moreover, it includes cases in which x isn’t really defined, and the particle of likeness introduces a situation that is roughly analogous to a situation already described—as in the following poem, where the 4th hemistich (y) is being compared with the third hemistich (x) without clear points of comparison being established:

¹⁶⁷ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 521-2, #1016) The poem is in description of a cloud

¹⁶⁸ I.e. the garden

¹⁶⁹ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 482, #988)

¹⁷⁰ i.e. the blackness of a pupil

Poem 56¹⁷¹

1 Knowing about what love lies beneath the breast,

Quick in darting a glance when the heart is restless.

2 He is wounding my innards with a soft¹⁷² eye

As the body of a sword is smooth when the sword is cutting.

Or even to a situation that is hardly described at all. In the following poem, all we know about x is that it's occurring at the same time as the (other) riding animals were making excuses. The rest of the poem is entirely devoted to exploring y:

Poem 57¹⁷³

1 It's as though I were, when the riding animals were making excuses,

On an eagle with wings outspread

2 In a desert which glances cannot compass

Far from the water, swallowing the winds

These variations render a straightforward analysis of the placement of similes very difficult. It will therefore be necessary to employ several different strategies for locating the simile. We can locate the beginning¹⁷⁴ and ending of the simile, as well as the particle of likeness. We can also analyze similes which compare x to y as bipartite structures, and

¹⁷¹ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 324-5, #226)

¹⁷² This word carries the double sense of "languid" as in an eye, and "supple" as in a sword.

¹⁷³ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 483-4, #990)

¹⁷⁴ The simile is consider to begin with the beginning of x if there is an x; if there is no x, then the beginning of the analogy is the beginning of the simile.

separately look at those similes which have no x (that is, cases like Poem 56 or Poem 57, in which x is not defined).

Before discussing the placement of similes, it's also necessary to take a look at a technicality attendant upon assigning the particles of likeness to hemistichs. When Scheindlin studied the behavior of syntactical structures around the hemistich break in the poetry of al-Mu'tamid, he identified a group of cases in which a syntactic break occurs right before the hemistich.¹⁷⁵ In these cases, the syntactical structure that fills the second hemistich begins with a single particle, such as *wa'in*, *ka'annanī*, or *alladhī*, that appears in the first hemistich right before the break. Here's an example:

Poem 58¹⁷⁶

1 And there was a lover whose heart was so wounded by separation

That the tears are pouring from his eyelids

*2 The hour of parting has shaken him, so that **it's as though***

In every one of his limbs there were a throbbing heart.

Scheindlin judges that the effect of a line like this is not notably different from the effect of a line that breaks evenly along the hemistich. The couplets of Ibn al-Mu'tazz contain a number of examples of these prefixes that Scheindlin identified, many of which occur with the particle of likeness as the prefixed particle. Scheindlin's explanation of the prefixed particles reflects his having dealt with them principally in the context of relative

¹⁷⁵ (Scheindlin, *Form and structure in the poetry of Al-Mu'tamid Ibn 'Abbād* 1974, 47)

¹⁷⁶ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 340-1, #251)

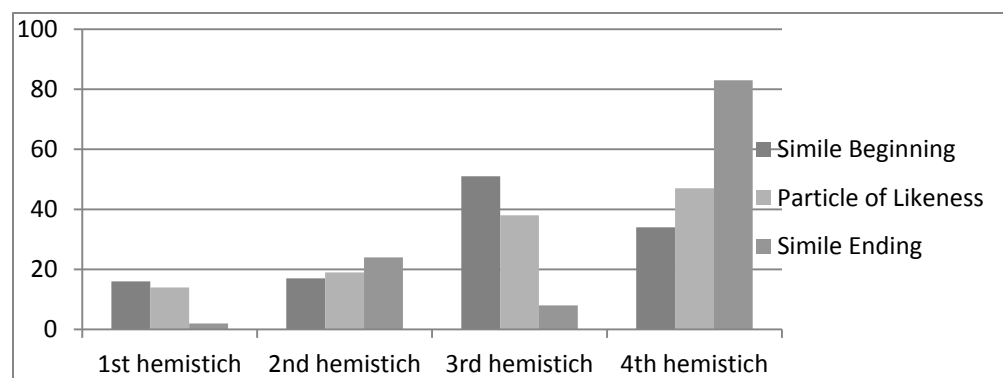
clauses that begin with *alladhī*. Observing that the opening vowel in *alladhī* is bound by the rules of Arabic phonology to assimilate to the vowel immediately preceding it in the sentence, Scheindlin posits that this justifies its placement before the hemistich break rather than after it as the more natural one. While this explanation may account for *alladhī*, however, it doesn't explain the placement of *in*, *inna*, *ka*, and their compounds—and these account for the bulk of the Scheindlin prefixes observed in Ibn al-Mu'tazz's couplets. Another difficulty with considering particles of this sort to belong more naturally to the clause that precedes them rather than the clause that follows them lies in the extreme disapprobation of Arabic poets and critics towards particles of this sort occurring at the end of a line, rather than the end of a hemistich. If indeed the classical Arabic ear prefers the particle to attach to the preceding clause, this preference should be heightened over line-breaks. Instead, Ibn Rashīq specifies the placement of the particle *innī* at the very end of the line—the line-break analogue to the Scheindlin prefix—as a particularly egregious version of enjambment.¹⁷⁷ An alternative explanation for the Scheindlin prefix, which takes account of all its observed variations, might rest upon the fact that these particles are all beautifully suited to end a metrical foot according to Arabic prosody. Given how comfortably these particles fit at the end of the foot, it's intuitively easy to see how a poet wishing to employ a simile in the second hemistich of a line would be tempted to locate the particle of likeness at the end of the foot immediately preceding the hemistich. A technique that arose from metrical expediency might have in time grown elegant as it became familiar, with gentle cliffhanger of the particle dangling over the hemistich break providing a pleasant mild tension.

¹⁷⁷ (Scheindlin, *Form and structure in the poetry of Al-Mu'tamid Ibn 'Abbād* 1974, 13)

In this study, particles of likeness that occur as Scheindlin prefixes are counted as though they had occurred in the second hemistich rather than at the very end of the first. While this procedure introduces some slight distortion into the analysis inasmuch as it downplays the tension the prefix introduces at the hemistich break, the distortion would be greater if we treated a structure that naturally belongs to the fourth hemistich and occurs only at the very end of the third hemistich as though it were proper to the third hemistich, thus treating it as indistinguishable from all the particles of likeness that occur at the beginning of the line.

The following chart shows the placement, by hemistich, of the beginnings, particles of likeness, and conclusions of the similes in the lyric couplets:

Figure 8



As the “simile ending” bars on the right demonstrate, similes have a strong propensity to continue until the end of the poem; failing that, they gravitate towards the end of the first

line. Looking at the “particle of likeness” bars in the middle, we see that the particles of likeness tend to gravitate towards the end of the poem, with each hemistich more likely to contain a particle of likeness than the one before. But according to the “simile beginning” bars on the left, the favored place for a simile to begin is in the third hemistich. From these facts, we may conjecture that similes prefer either to span an entire line, or (failing that) to concentrate in the second hemistich; and also that similes strongly prefer the second line to the first.

Two further facts are also notable—first, that a few more similes conclude in the second line than begin in it; and second, that the number of similes with beginnings in the second line is the same as the number of similes with particles of likeness in the second line. In some cases, similes’ attraction to the end of the poem lures them over the line break. But of the similes which began in the first line and continued in the second, all had the particle of likeness occur in the first line. As described above, there are two characteristic places for the particle of likeness to occur: either between x and y, or at the beginning of the simile (either preceding both x and y or preceding y in the absence of x). In order for a simile to cross a line break with the particle of likeness occurring in the first line, it would be necessary either for the particle of likeness to occur at the beginning of the simile, or for the y clause to run over the line break (a fairly blatant example of enjambment) or for the particle of likeness to occur at the very end of the first line and y to begin in the second line (a Scheindlin prefix on the level of the line—but as discussed, that structure is heavily criticized as a form of egregious enjambment). As might be predicted from a desire to avoid enjambment, every attestation in which the simile runs

over the line has the particle of likeness occurring at the very beginning of the simile—in fact, at the beginning of the poem. In six of seven cases, x then follows in the first line, and y takes over in the second. For example, in Poem 59 below, we see that the particle of likeness occurs at the beginning of the poem, x (the orange) takes up the rest of the first line, and y (the cheek) takes up the second line.

Poem 59¹⁷⁸

It's as though the orange when its yellowness appeared,

 Wrapped in redness like a flame,

Were the cheek of a beloved who saw a lover—

 Which turned yellow, then it turned red in fear of the guardian.

The same pattern applies here:

Poem 60¹⁷⁹

It's as though the orange on its branches

 of pure gold, unmixed,

Were a ball which the mallet cast into the air

 And it didn't fall, but hung suspended in the sky.

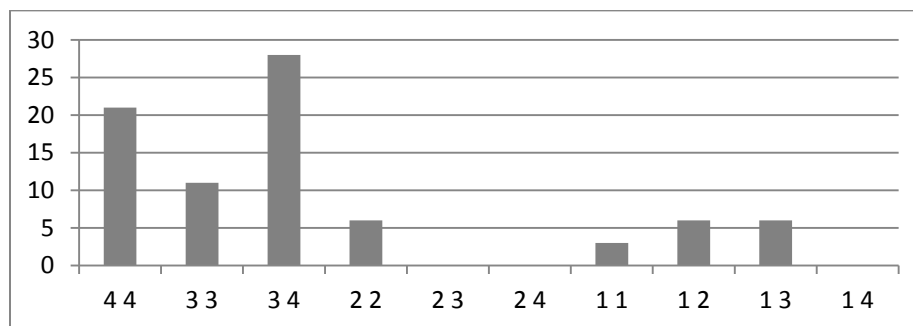
¹⁷⁸ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 464, #972)

¹⁷⁹ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 551, #1072). This poem describes an orange

These full-poem similes are quintessentially full and balanced, marking a small but distinctive exceptional pattern to the general closer function of similes (this pattern will be discussed below in section 1.3.2). They do, however, represent a beautiful example of the poet's use of the bipartite power of the couplet. And indeed, with the set-up in the first line and imagistic resolution in the second line, we see in these poems a clear example of a two-line rise to a descriptive climax.

Another way to look at similes is to separate the similes with an identifiable x and y from those without one. 70% of the poems have both an x and a y; the remaining 30% do not. We can then analyze the poems with an x and y as a bipartite structure. That analysis yields the following distribution:

Figure 9



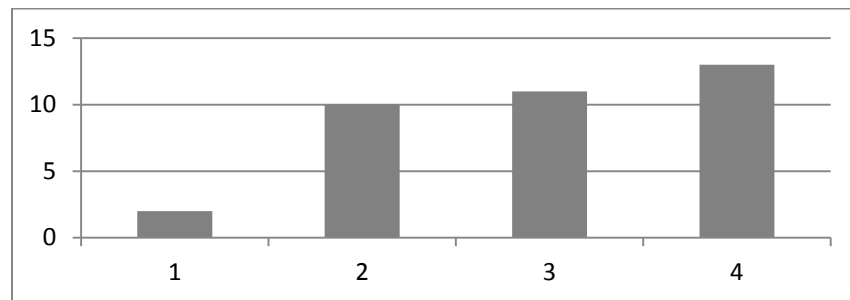
We can see here some of the familiar hallmarks of the bipartite closer. 3-4 is the favorite distribution, while 1-4, 2-3, and 1-4 are avoided. 1-1, which is generally avoided in bipartite closers, has the lowest rate of occurrence among attested distributions. In the

second line, 3-4 is the most common distribution, followed by 4-4, followed by 3-3.

Similarly, in the first line, 1 2 and 2-2 are favored over 1 1.

By contrast, the hemistich distribution of the 36 similes which don't have an x looks like this.¹⁸⁰

Figure 10



We see here a strong preference against non-bipartite similes beginning in the first hemistich; the distribution of the second, third, and fourth hemistichs is relatively flat (though there might be a slight preference for similes occurring later rather than earlier in the poem). We can see from this that the preference for simile onset in the third hemistich (as viewed in Figure 8) is entirely attributable to the 3-4 preference in bipartite similes; in non-bipartite similes no such preference exists.

¹⁸⁰ Note that in the case of non-bipartite similes, the particle of likeness always occurs at the onset of the simile.

1.2.8 “How Many A”

The propensity of gnomic statements or aphorisms to occur at the end of poems has been noted by classical and modern commentators. Abū Hilāl al-‘Askarī has the following words of praise for a poem that ends this way: “He ends it with a proverb; people are particularly fond of proverbs because they make use of them in literary discussions and assembly.”¹⁸¹ Scheindlin observes a preference in the poems of al-Mu‘tamid for ending poems with aphorisms, while Hamori notes some gnomic clausulas in al-Mutanabbī’s panegyrics.¹⁸² In fact, Hamori ties in his observation of conditional closing poems to the preference for gnomic conclusions, on the grounds that the two structures are closely related. I believe that the conditional closers in Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s couplets can better be described as argumentative than gnomic. Where they diverge from the persuasive pattern described in the section on conditionals above, they tend to serve most commonly as a basis for elegantly contrived, sometimes casuistic claims. Such is the case in Poem 61 (which was also cited above as Poem 40)—the forms of argument are being used in the 4th hemistich to defend the image in the third.

Poem 61¹⁸³

1 I have posed you a riddle, all of you who have not been tried;

Speak the truth, or leave me alone:

2 What is the stony ground¹⁸⁴ whose pebbles are a jewel?

¹⁸¹ C.f (Scheindlin, Form and structure in the poetry of Al-Mu‘tamid Ibn ‘Abbād 1974, 20)

¹⁸² (Scheindlin, Form and structure in the poetry of Al-Mu‘tamid Ibn ‘Abbād 1974, 116-117); (Hamori, The composition of Mutanabbī’s panegyrics to Sayf al-Dawla 1992, 1-3)

¹⁸³ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 402, #346)

¹⁸⁴ The editor recommends this translation, but admits some confusion about it.

*If it is not in the mouth of Shirr, **then** in whose?*

Likewise, in the poem that follows, the conditional serves to couch an image in the form of an argument, rather than to express any gnomic vision.

Poem 62¹⁸⁵

1 A recovery came to me which I didn't hope for

Like the loosening of a prisoner after his bonds had been tightened.

*2 So **if** I didn't swallow a draught of death*

***Then** I spit death out after tasting it.*

Gnomic statements, aphorisms, and proverbs are all pretty loosely defined, and an analysis of the placement of such statements in the corpus would therefore be subject to many subjective judgments. For that reason, we have chosen to focus upon a subset of gnomic statements which can be clearly defined and readily identified—those of the form “and how often does x occur!”, as marked by the particle *kam*. This relatively standard realization of the gnomic spirit appears 14 times in the corpus; while this does not provide us with enough evidence to make strong or subtle claims, it does lend itself to a few generalizations. The most notable feature of these structures is that 11 of the 14 (78%) occur in the second line. Eight of these structures begin in the third hemistich, giving that single hemistich the majority of attestations. Nine structures proceed to the end of the poem. The archetypical form of this structure, perhaps, is the one that spans

¹⁸⁵ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 557, #1082). This poem concerns an illness that afflicted him

the second line of the couplet, beginning at the beginning of the third hemistich and continuing to the end of the poem. Such is the case in the following *zuhd* poem, which also serves to demonstrate the gnomic sentiment underlying the “*kam*” structure.

Poem 63¹⁸⁶

1 Reach your money before its heirs—

Man does not tarry on the earth.

2 How much cash which chokes its purses

*Has screeched on the scales of inheritance?*¹⁸⁷

A different take on the same mode is provided in the second line of Poem 64 (which was first cited as poem Poem 34 above). While the gnomic mood of a *ghazal* is less entirely fatalistic than its counterparts in *zuhd*, it nevertheless also serves to generalize, sagely, upon an individual experience.

Poem 64¹⁸⁸

1 Don't meet your lover except by night,

For the sun is a gossip, and the night is a procurer.

2 How many a lover, with the dark of night hiding him,

Has met his beloved, while the people were sleeping?

¹⁸⁶ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. III, pg. 134, #1257)

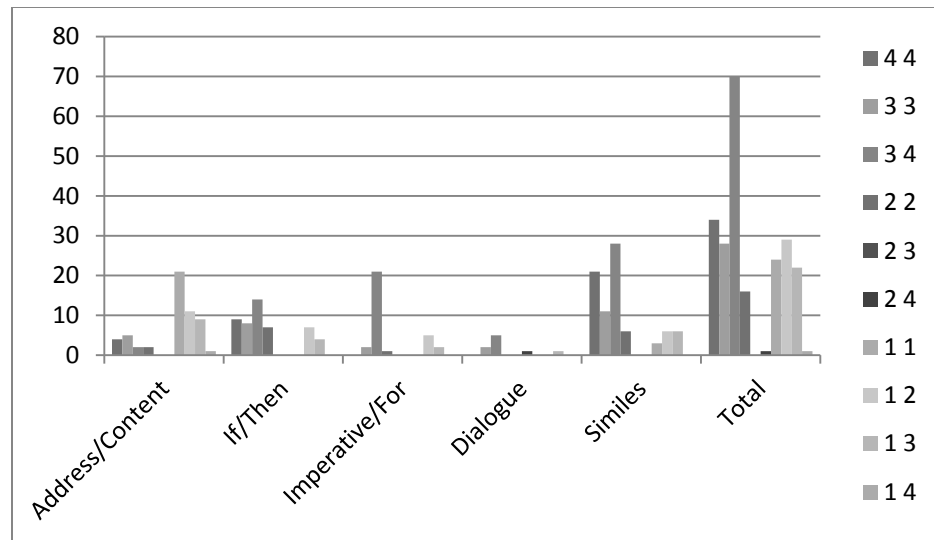
¹⁸⁷ The word translated as “cash” also means “silent”; this stands in opposition to the screeching in the next hemistich.

¹⁸⁸ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 270-1, #148)

1.2.9 Conclusions

What generalizations can we draw from the cumulation of these individual structural analyses? One obvious topic for consideration is the bipartite structure, which has been featured (one way or another) in all but three of the structures we've examined. If we aggregate all the bipartite distributions, we get the following:

Figure 11



What can be said about these structures' frequencies overall? The unbalanced bipartite structures 1-4 and 2-3 are overwhelmingly avoided overall, as is 2-4. This provides strong evidence for the intuitive theory that bipartite structures gravitate towards placements that are balanced with respect to the formal structure of the poem. The avoidance of 2-4 can also be partly explained in the context of balance—There is a tendency (though not by any means a universal tendency) for the two parts of a bipartite structure to be consecutive, with the beginning of the second part directly following the end of the first. In a consecutive bipartite structure, in order to achieve a 2-4 distribution the first part of the structure would have to fill the second and third hemistichs, while the second part would occupy only the fourth hemistich. That is not a balanced structure, which may explain why it is entirely unattested. It's worth noting that the sole attestation of a 2-4 bipartite distribution (which we've seen before) is nonconsecutive.

1 They say to me, when there's a distance between me and her,

'Shirr is far away from you, and the cord of closeness has been coiled up.'

2 But I say to them, when love is revealed by weeping,

*'Even if my eye has departed, my heart has remained.'*¹⁹⁰

In three out of the five bipartite structures, the 1-2 structure is more popular than the 1-3 structure, and this expresses itself in a modest cumulative effect. This doesn't constitute strong evidence by any means, but it may contribute, alongside the rareness of 2-4, to the discussion of enjambment in Arabic verse, which has been considered by both classical and modern scholars. Scheindlin surveys the medieval critics on enjambment, and qualifies their objections to the practice in a few ways¹⁹¹. He finds that there is more cause for objection when the first line is syntactically dependent upon the second than vice versa. He finds that the objection grows more severe the closer the syntactical dependency grows to the rhyme word at the end of the first line. Finally, he notes that, despite the objection of the critics, enjambment was never avoided entirely by poets. The 1-3 bipartite structures we have observed represent enjambment to varying degrees. In the case of imperative/for and dialogue, the different parts of the structure are syntactically, if not perhaps thematically, independent, and therefore would escape the censure of the critics. However, address/content, if/then, and bipartite similes all involve the first line being syntactically dependent upon the second. The preference of 1-2 over

¹⁸⁹ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 228, #91)

¹⁹⁰ This last hemistich incidentally provides another example of a conditional that could be restated as imperative/for: "Don't make my eye depart, for my heart will remain regardless."

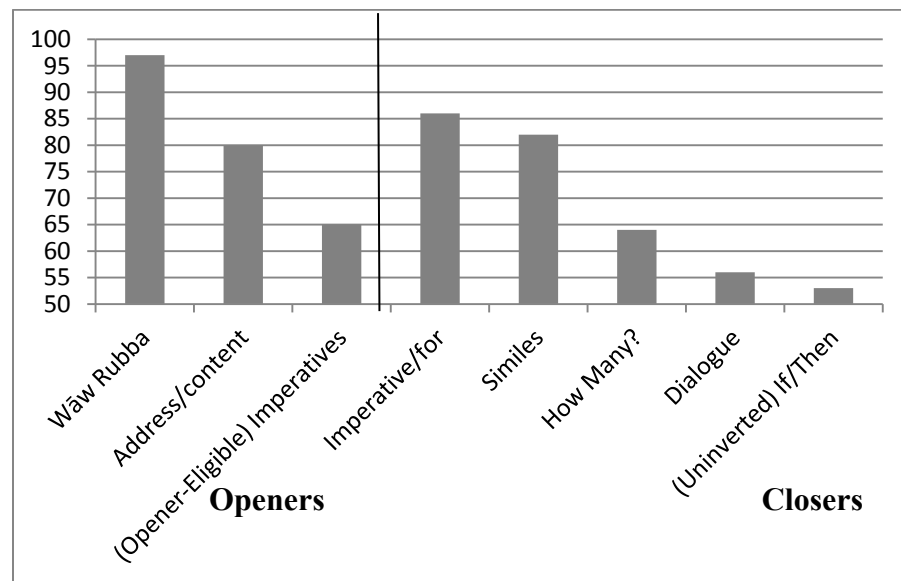
¹⁹¹ (Scheindlin, Form and structure in the poetry of Al-Mu'tamid Ibn 'Abbād 1974, 13)

1-3 might be read as a mild statistical preference against enjambment, but the preference is definitely mild, if indeed it is present at all. On the other hand, the fact that 1-3 is the only enjambed structure that occurs with any frequency, and that 2-3 and 2-4 are both avoided, could perhaps relate to the critics' greater discomfort with enjambment as it presses up against the rhyme word, and greater comfort with it when the particles that necessitate the first line's dependency on the second (i.e. those which signify "if" in an if/then structure, "oh" in an address/content structure, or "as though" in a simile) occur in the first hemistich.

In all of the bipartite closers the 3-4 structure is favored, while the 1-1 structure is avoided. In the sole bipartite opener (address-content) 1-1 is the favored structure, while 3-4 is pretty unusual. It is regrettable, for the purposes of comparative analysis, that there is only one bipartite opener. Nevertheless, these trends feed into a larger conversation contrasting openers and closers. Of the three openers, all except address/content comprise a single word, which usually occurs at the very beginning of the poem. Of the five closers, all are clauses, which have the tendency to take up the entire second line. The fact that address/content should strongly favor 1-1 over 1-2 makes it function more like the other openers, as a poem-opening gesture, and distinguishes it in usage from the bipartite closers with which it shares a formal resemblance. The fact that address/content should be the only bipartite opener, in contrast to five bipartite closers, enhances this dichotomy between openers and closers.

We can flesh out our comprehension of the opener/closer distinction by investigating the relative likelihood that openers will occur at the very beginning of the line, vs. the likelihood that closers will occur at the very end of the line. The observation that closers tend to be clauses which span approximately the entire line sheds no light on how likely they are to extend to the very end of the line. It happens to be the case that syntactic markers in Arabic are more likely to occur at the beginning of phrases than at the end. Thus, a force drawing syntactic markers to the very end of the poem would have to operate on clauses rather than particles. The following chart shows the percentage of openers occurring at the very beginning of the poem (the first three bars), vs. the percentage of closers occurring at the very end (the last five bars)

Figure 12



While there's a range in both cases, openers seem more strongly attracted to the very beginnings of poems than closers are to the very ends. In some cases, such as dialogue and if/then, the attraction to the end of the poem is considerably weaker than the gravitation to the second line. Even for structures like imperative/for and similes, whose attraction to the end of the poem is stronger than their attraction to the second line, the distinct plurality of attestations begins in the third, rather than the fourth, hemistich. The combined effect of all of these factors is to suggest that openers and closers serve distinct, non-analogous functions. Openers tend to occur at the very beginning of the poem, getting the attention of the reader with a short, evocative call for attention and then dispersing. Closers tend to last longer, to be more various in both type and placement, and generally to have more force in shaping the content of the poem.

Indeed, it seems as though couplets in general are often composed on a crescendo, with the first line laying the groundwork for a colorful argument or image in the second line. For example, the following poem begins with a generic observation in the first line (emphasized at the beginning with an address). The second line builds upon the themes established in the first line to create a compelling image.

Poem 66¹⁹²

1 Oh how lovely is a lemon

Which produces wonder for the soul.

2 It's as though it were camphor

¹⁹² (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 464, #973)

Which has a rind of gold.

In Poem 67, similarly, the first line describes a situation and provides the preparation for dialogue. The second line draws upon the context to create the literary conceit which provides the main thrust of the poem's impact.

Poem 67¹⁹³

I I say, when a careworn night has stretched out

And I have endured the sorrow of an emaciated heart,

2 'Perhaps the sun has been turned into a star,

And it has risen in the company of the stars.'

There is, perhaps, some structural similarity between this shape for a couplet and the shape of the august 'Abbāsīd *qaṣīda*. The *qaṣīda* of the time was usually bipartite, with a *nasīb* drawing the attention and sympathy of the auditor and paving the way for the *madīḥ*, where the fundamental issues of the poem were taken up and addressed explicitly.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 384, #319)

¹⁹⁴ The evolution of the *qaṣīda* into a predominantly bipartite structure in 'Abbāsīd times has been documented by Renate Jacobi (Jacobi 1982). Jacobi observes that the *nasīb* tends to constitute 1/4-1/3 of the length of the poem (19). The notion of the *nasīb* as drawing in and winning over the reader in preparation for the *madīḥ* is most famously proposed by the medieval commentator ibn Qutayba. While ibn Qutayba's account has been much criticized by modern scholars, the idea of the fundamental *qaṣīda* structure as a build-up from *nasīb* to *madīḥ* has been generally absorbed and accepted by the critics.

The pacing of the couplets is informed, not only by the placement of structures in the couplets, but by their relationship with one another. A good deal of the energy in the couplet comes out of parallelism between structures along with the juxtaposition of structures on different scales. The most fertile ground for parallelism among the structures studied is the imperative. Of 104 poems with imperatives, 46 have more than one, and 16 have more than two. Imperatives can set a steady pace, as in the following couplet, where each hemistich begins with an imperative.

Poem 68¹⁹⁵

*1 **Have done** with men— long have they wearied you—*

*And **return** to God a face of hope*

*2 **Don't petition** for a livelihood from his petitioners;*

***Petition** it from the one who guarantees it.*

Parallel imperatives can also manipulate the perceived pacing of a poem by occurring at intervals which change. The intervals occasionally accelerate as the poem draws to its conclusion. The next poem contains one imperative in the third hemistich (whose clause absorbs the entire hemistich), and then two more in the 4th (absorbing half a hemistich each). The acceleration of the parallel structure serves to generate excitement as the poem moves towards its conclusion.

Poem 69¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. III, pg. 184-5, #1320). The poem concerns livelihood.

1 How sweet is this world, and how difficult!

God has freed me and I have become its slave.

*2 **Strive**, if one day you encounter its good fortune*

***And hurry** towards power, **and be forgiving** when you achieve it.*

More often than speeding up, parallel imperatives slow down, broadening out the perceived end of the poem. The tendency of parallel structures to slow towards the end of poems has also been observed by Scheindlin, who dubbed this phenomenon a “slowing pattern”.¹⁹⁷ In this corpus, slowing patterns can be observed on a variety of scales. Poem 70 establishes a pattern of repeating imperatives at the beginning of each hemistich; the fourth hemistich, however, deviates from this pattern by elaborating upon the content of the third.

Poem 70¹⁹⁸

*1 **Halt** at al-Qufṣ and its taverns,*

*And **pause** with us in the shadow of its gardens.*

*2 And **divert** the soul with it for an hour*

For indeed the world is measured by its hours.

The next poem slows down even further: the first hemistich contains 2 imperatives, the second contains 1, and then the whole second line contains 1:

¹⁹⁶ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. III, pg. 145, #1268)

¹⁹⁷ (Scheindlin, Form and structure in the poetry of Al-Mu‘tamid Ibn ‘Abbād 1974, 125-126).

¹⁹⁸ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 61, #643)

Poem 71¹⁹⁹

1 ***Be addicted** to your wine, and **drink** a morning draught,*

*And **mix** your delights in the cup.*

2 *And **enjoy** your day, for indeed*

The life of the young man is the day of the morning draught.

Finally, Poem 72 contains a slowing pattern in each of the first and second lines: in each case, the first hemistich has 2 imperatives, while the second hemistich has one²⁰⁰.

Poem 72²⁰¹

1 *Go with this one, go with that one, so **break** off and hook up*

*And **separate** from everyone that you have been with.*

2 *And whom you have loved, **betray**²⁰² and **forget**,*

*And it would be unfaithful **that you not leave** him.*

As an aside, we may note that acceleration patterns and slowing patterns are standbys of phrase structure in Western classical music. A famous example of an acceleration pattern

¹⁹⁹ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 77, #666)

²⁰⁰ Technically, the final imperative is not imperative but jussive. The two forms are very similar in Arabic, however.

²⁰¹ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 328-9, #233)

²⁰² An alternate reading, according to the editor, yields a translation of “forgive”

is the opening to Beethoven's 5th Symphony, where a 4 note figure repeats twice at a two-bar interval and then repeats thrice more at a one bar interval.

Figure 13²⁰³



A corresponding example of a famous slowing pattern in Western classical music is the “Lone Ranger” theme from Rossini’s William Tell Overture. After establishing a pattern (which is repeated 3 times) of doubling a figure composed of two sixteenth notes and an eighth note, the composer builds the phrase to a dramatic climax by transforming this figure into two sixteenth notes followed by a dotted quarter note which takes up the space allotted to the second iteration of the figure.

Figure 14²⁰⁴



²⁰³ (Beethoven ca. 1808)

²⁰⁴ (Rossini 1829)

The interplay of bipartite structures on different scales also serves to create interest by establishing expectations and surprise. Because the first half of the bipartite structure raises the expectation that it will be followed by the second half, the poet can build up suspense by repeating the first part before allowing it to resolve with the second part. In the following poem, for instance, we begin with a direct address, the first component of the bipartite address/complement structure. Rather than resolve immediately, the poem creates another parallel address in the second half of the first hemistich, followed by three more parallel addresses in the second hemistich (an accelerating pattern). When the resolution of the address/content structure finally comes in the second line, the anticipation has been heightened by the repetition:

Poem 73²⁰⁵

*1 Oh wronger in deeds, and wronged in gaze*²⁰⁶,

And oh sand-dune and reed and moon

2 -You were destined for me, and how lovely is that destiny

Even if you have filled the eye with tears and sleeplessness.

A similar delaying effect is created by embedding a similar structure on a smaller scale after the first part and before the second. The following poem starts out with a simile, presenting a particle of likeness followed by x (the mole). In the second hemistich, rather

²⁰⁵ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 289, #172)

²⁰⁶ The word translated as “wronged” also has the meaning of “languorous” when applied to a gaze.

than resolving the bipartite structure with *y*, the author introduces a second hemistich-long simile comparing the lock of hair and the darkness. Only in the second line does the poet resolve the original simile by providing *y* (the remnant):

Poem 74²⁰⁷

1 And it was as though a mole upon the surface of his cheek

Under a lock of hair, like the darkness of twilight,

*2 Were the remnant of a spark on a red shirt*²⁰⁸

Or a dot in musk atop red anemones.

It's also possible to create a chiasmic effect by repeating the same bipartite structure twice and inverting it once. In the poem that follows, both the first and second lines are built out of conditionals—the first uninverted and the second inverted. As a result, the conditional particle *in* is both the second word and the penultimate word of the couplet, so that the poem's end mark a formal return to its beginning:

Poem 75²⁰⁹

1 My friend, if I confide to you some of what is in me

-I will increase your pain and passion and sorrow.

2 -Do you not see that every day

We are travelling towards death even if we remain?

²⁰⁷ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 564, #1094)

²⁰⁸ The remnant of the spark is a burn mark left behind by it

²⁰⁹ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. III, pg. 197, #1340)

The next poem employs a sort of reverse effect. Again, the first and second lines each have a conditional structure, with one inverted and the other uninverted. However, this time the order of inversion is reversed.

Poem 76²¹⁰

1 -Oh, long have I wished to meet his gaze

If he takes a glass at a party.

2 If he sees a cause for fear, or the guardian is concerned about him,

-He directs his glances into the glance of the cup.

These sorts of effects can become even more striking when more than one structure is employed. The poem that follows is an example of complex bipartite play on a variety of different scales.

Poem 77²¹¹

1 Oh! Oh my lord, give me a hand

And don't leave me, and don't say 'wretchedness be upon you!'

2 And forgive, and if I backslide, then forgive again

For a doctor may cure one who has relapsed.

²¹⁰ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 316-7, #213)

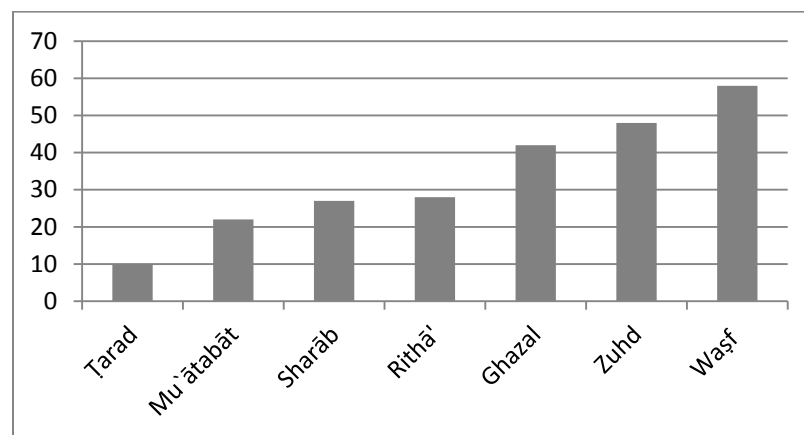
²¹¹ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 320-1, #220)

It should be emphasized again that the patterns observed and discussed above do not amount to prescriptions or formulae. Balanced bipartite structures are frequent, but no universal rules govern them. They can be repeated, inverted and stretched; they can appear as embedded structures within larger structures; they can end early, begin late, and be interrupted. By creating a basis for structural expectation, the default assumptions constitute an artistic language that the poet can use to surprise the audience.

1.3 Distributions of Syntactic Structures by Genre

Before we consider the distinctions in the use of structures by genre, we should consider the frequency of couplets in the lyric genres. As previously noted, couplets make up slightly more than one third of the lyric poems overall. However, the variation in couplet frequency between genres is considerable. The following chart shows the percentage of poems in each genre that are couplets:

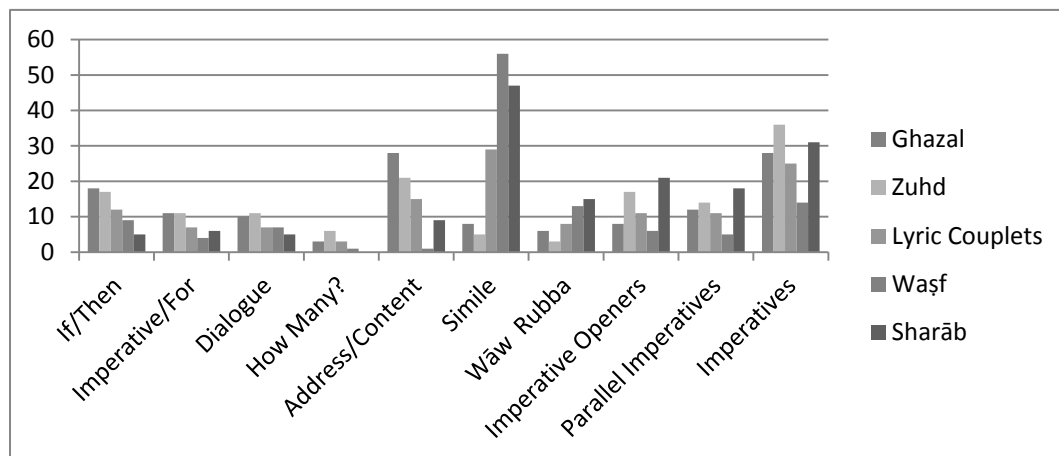
Figure 15



Couplets account for only 10% of *tarad* poems, but nearly 60% of *wasf* poems. It is dangerous to make strong claims about the character of couplets in a genre when that genre has only a few examples of couplets available for reference (*tarad*, for example, has only five). We shall therefore discuss in some depth the four lyric genres-- *ghazal*, *wasf*, *sharāb*, and *zuhd*— which present fifty or more couplets as examples, and then briefly survey the others.

When seeking to understand the characteristics of each genre on the basis of various structures, a logical first step involves a study of the frequency with which each of those structures appears in each genre. The following chart supplies the frequency of each structure's occurrence in each genre as a percentage between the number of attestations of the structure and the number of poems in the genre. The “lyric couplets” bar (always the center bar) shows the same percentage taken over the lyric couplets as a whole.

Figure 16



The key finding here is that, not only does the frequency of the structures vary between the genres, the relative frequencies are correlated. For the if/then, imperative/for, dialogue, “how many a”, and address/content structures, in *ghazal* and *zuhd* they occur more frequently than the average, while in *wasf* and *sharāb* they occur less frequently than the average.²¹² For the simile and *wāw rubba* structures, that pattern is reversed: they occur more frequently than the average in *wasf* and *sharāb* poems, and less frequently than the average in *ghazal* and *zuhd*. Only among the imperative structures does this correlation break down; most notably, *sharāb* exhibits consistently more than the average and *wasf* exhibits consistently less. This suggests the possibility of similarities in compositional structure between *ghazal* and *zuhd* on the one hand, and *wasf* and *sharāb* on the other.²¹³

This also provides evidence for a division between the structures under consideration (except for imperatives), with *wāw rubba* and similes (favored by *sharāb* and *wasf*) on one side, and if/then, imperative/for, dialogue, “how many a”, and address/content structures (favored by *ghazal* and *zuhd*) on the other. In the author’s view, there is a clear thematic division between these two categories. Similes serve a primarily descriptive function, while *wāw rubba* has traditionally served to introduce short descriptive

²¹² In a few cases, one genre or another has exactly the average frequency of that structure throughout the lyric couplet corpus.

²¹³ It is possible to demonstrate a statistical correlation between *wasf* and *sharāb* on the one hand, and between *ghazal* and *zuhd* on the other, using a correlation measure called Pearson’s *r*. The correlation of feature frequencies in *wasf* and *sharāb* is .84, while the correlation of feature frequencies in *ghazal* and *zuhd* is .86—in both cases, there is less than a 1% chance that this correlation could have occurred by chance. Of the genres and features presented above, no other genre pairs demonstrate a significant correlation.

passages in *qaṣīdas*. The structures on the other side of the divide tend to serve a primarily argumentative function—engaging an interlocutor and making a point.

Another obvious question to take up, on the heels of the previous discussion, is whether the overall distribution patterns of structures throughout the couplets (explored in 1.2) vary between genres. It's difficult to make any subtle points about this—the sample sizes used to analyze distributions across the entire corpus of lyric couplets become much smaller when applying only to a single lyric genre's worth of couplets. Nevertheless, it is possible to measure first line vs. second line frequency of each structure in each genre. The preference of a structure towards the first or the second line of a poem generally holds true over all genres that evince more than one or two attestations of that structure, with several notable exceptions (which will be discussed) that mostly pertain to the *zuhd* genre.

1.3.1 Ghazal

The *ghazal* genre exhibits frequent address/content, if/then, imperative/for, and dialogue structures. Its incidence of imperatives overall is slightly above average; it has more than average parallel imperatives and more than average imperative/for structures, but fewer than average imperative openers. Similes and *wāw rubba* are both relatively unusual.

How can we contextualize these observations within the secondary literature on *ghazal*? Hamori attributes to ghazal simple language, dialogues, and quick pace, along with a gradual evolution from anecdotes and vivid scenes to “the witty and delicate

manipulation of conventional postures and phrases.”²¹⁴ Likewise, Jaroslav Stetkevych notes in *ghazal* a “stylistically tantalizing, although ultimately not altogether novel, tendency to structure an argument or a story into dialogues. This ‘dramatization’ of the subject matter of a poem, even if employed for narrative purposes, produces an overall quickening of pace and a new kind of subjectivized immediacy.”²¹⁵ As an example of this sort of dialogue effect, Stetkevych points to a poem by Bashshār Ibn Burd—an argument between the poet and the woman who reproaches him.²¹⁶ Both scholars see *ghazal* as being conversational and quick-paced, and both specifically mention the relative frequency of dialogue. Stetkevych goes a step further, identifying the dialogue as serving an rhetorical function.

The structure frequencies we have observed fit in with and contribute to a conversational, argumentative interpretation of *ghazal*. Unsurprisingly, in many cases they involve an argument in which the poet is (either explicitly or implicitly) trying to convince the person he loves to return his affections or to be less cruel. Typical examples of this mode include Poem 8 and Poem 24, reproduced here as follows:

Poem 78²¹⁷

I Give! Tell me, oh sweetest of people without exception

Why you have neglected me and betrayed me.

2 I said, ‘Visit me!’, and he said, “I am sick”;

²¹⁴ (Hamori, Love Poetry (Ghazal) 1990, 204-214)

²¹⁵ (J. Stetkevych, The zephyrs of Najd : the poetics of nostalgia in the classical Arabic nasīb 1993, 56)

²¹⁶ (J. Stetkevych, The zephyrs of Najd : the poetics of nostalgia in the classical Arabic nasīb 1993, 260)

²¹⁷ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 309, #201)

Oh sick one, who will not recover from hating us!

Poem 79²¹⁸

1 Oh, you who act prideful and angry,

Show favor to me, for I am repentant.

2 You were angry when I said your departure was killing me;

If your intimacy returns to me, then call me a liar.

In other cases, they involve exhortations between the lover and stock players in the lovers' drama—the skeptical friend (as in Poem 36, reproduced here as Poem 81), the messenger (as in Poem 81), or the poet himself (as in Poem 82).

Poem 80²¹⁹

1 They say to me, when there's a distance between me and her,

'Shirr is far away from you, and the cord of closeness has been coiled up.'

2 But I say to them, when love is revealed by weeping,

*'Even if my eye has departed, my heart has remained.'*²²⁰

Poem 81²²¹

1 A singing girl has appeared to me in al-Muḥawwal

²¹⁸ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 238, #108)

²¹⁹ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 228, #91)

²²⁰ This last hemistich incidentally provides another example of a conditional that could be restated as imperative/for: "Don't make my eye depart, for my heart will remain regardless."

²²¹ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, Ibn al-Mu'tazz, v. I, pg. 232-3, #96)

God forbid anything but that I should be enamored of her.

2 So arise, oh my messenger, and meet her without fearing,

For indeed I have taken love as dictation from her gaze.

Poem 82²²²

1 How you have been afflicted with his delays and his harassment,

Oh you wretched failure of a man!

2 Perhaps you should not busy your wishes with the promise of one

From whose promise the deceitful mirage was created.

Some other cases may demonstrate the shift noted by Hamori in later poetry--the forms of argument are used, rather than to convince one of the players in the lovers' narrative, in the service of elegant contrivance. In the two poems below, the imperative/for structure (so naturally suited to exhortation) is turned to the service of stylized conceits:

Poem 83²²³

1 By God, oh you with the enchanting eye,

Forgive the sins of the falling tear.

*2 **Be** as haughty as you like with us, **for***

The world has been haughty on your account with the hereafter.

²²² (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 233-4, #98)

²²³ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 314, #209)

Poem 84²²⁴

1 By your life, sideburns have not detracted from Yusuf

Rather, he has increased in beauty several times over

*2 And **don't apologize** for loving him with a sprouting beard,*

*For a dinar is only beautiful when it is adorned with earrings.*²²⁵

We frequently see the first line functioning as a set-up for the rhetorical move in the second line (in keeping with the generalizations ventured about poetic shape in 1.2.9 Conclusions). For example, in Poem 84 (directly below) the first line establishes some facts about the speaker's relationship with Salma, while the second line launches an argument (in the form of an if/then structure) for how the poet should (or rather should not) behave in light of these facts:

Poem 85²²⁶

1 Oh my heart, don't be absurd! Your Salma is not returning

You and she used to be in a liaison, but it did not endure.

2 So if you have grieved over Salma, then over something fleeting,

And if you have been patient about Salma, then about something non-existent

²²⁴ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 332, #240)

²²⁵ The comparison being made is between a face with sideburns, and a dinar with earrings. The image of the dinar with earrings may refer to the practice of putting a hoop through a dinar in order to set it as a pendant (so that the hoop is analogous to an earring, which in turn is likened to a sideburn). I am indebted to Bernard Haykel for his assistance in identifying examples of dinars with hoops set into them, as in (Fitzwilliam Museum, Collections Explorer n.d.).

²²⁶ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 379, #309)

Likewise, in the next poem, the first line establishes a context (grieving abandoned lover) and the second line produces the central claim of the poem (couched in the form of dialogue):

Poem 86²²⁷

1 Oh people, the one whom I love has made public his leaving me

So let me weep over him, and I shall make others weep

2 I said to the cup, when he was sipping it,

“By God, I have tasted in him²²⁸ something more delicious than you.”

The quick-moving pace observed by Stetkevych and Hamori is achieved in part through pacing play with the many bipartite structures that occur, as well as through parallel imperatives. For example, the poem that follows employs interwoven parallelism and bipartite structure in every hemistich:

Poem 87²²⁹

1 Oh my eye, don't be overpowered:

Graze upon the gardens in his cheek.

2 Return to him, to him return

For since you were cast down, you have not seen him.

²²⁷ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 353, #270)

²²⁸ i.e. in his saliva

²²⁹ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 420, #371)

1.3.2 Waṣf

The relative structure frequencies characteristic of *waṣf* poetry is very nearly the antithesis of that of *ghazal*. Simile and *wāw rubba* both occur frequently. If/then, imperative/for, dialogue, and “how many a” structures are infrequent, and address/content structures are virtually non-existent. The *waṣf* poems also feature a markedly low proportion of imperatives, overall and in every category. Indeed, for imperatives overall, *ghazal*, *sharāb*, and *zuhd* all have more than the average number of imperatives—the incidence of imperatives in the *waṣf* genre is low enough to pull the average below all of them.

The very high frequency of similes in *waṣf* poetry should come as no surprise, of course. According to the medieval commentator Ibn Rashīq, *waṣf* is akin to simile and encompasses it, with the difference being that *waṣf* serves to report on the true nature of a thing, whereas simile involves figurative speech.²³⁰ Judging from the frequency of similes in *waṣf*, figurative speech may be harnessed to elucidate the truth of a thing. A peculiarity of the distribution of similes within *waṣf* poetry merits note: *waṣf* is the only one of the four genres we’re examining to feature more than a single simile occurring in the first hemistich of the poems. With eleven first-hemistich similes, *waṣf* singlehandedly accounts for nearly two thirds of the sixteen similes that appear in the first hemistichs of lyric couplets. Eight of the eleven first-hemistich similes in *waṣf* poems occur at the very beginning of the poem. The poem starting with a simile—a phenomenon also discussed

²³⁰ (Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī 2000, v. II, pg. 1096)

in the section on similes above— might thus be considered a distinctive feature of the *wasf* genre. The following couplets, which have been cited before, serve as examples of this mode of descriptive writing:

Poem 88²³¹

*1 It's as though I were, when the riding animals were making excuses,
On an eagle with wings outspread,
2 In a desert which glances cannot compass
Far from the water, swallowing the winds.*

Poem 89²³²

*1 It's as though the orange when its yellowness appeared,
Wrapped in redness like a flame,
2 Were the cheek of a beloved who saw a lover—
Which turned yellow, then it turned red in fear of the guardian.*

Both of the above examples employ the technique, characteristic of simile-initial *wasf* couplets, of interposing an adjunct clause into the first line in order to delay the onset of the second component of the simile until the beginning of the second line. This is yet

²³¹ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 483-4, #990)

²³² (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 464, #972)

another example of a way Ibn al-Mu‘tazz manipulates the expectations intrinsic to bipartite structure in order to build suspense and control the pace of a couplet.²³³

Wasf as a genre has been less studied than *ghazal* or *sharāb*, perhaps because *wasf* poems tend to be so short, and partly as a genre it is less coherent—referring not only to standalone descriptive poems but also to descriptive passages within poems in other genres. When it has been studied, it has mostly been studied as a motif that functions in longer poems. Whether in the context of the *qaṣīda* or the *khamriyya*, the consensus among modern scholars seems to be that *wasf* sections serve a covertly argumentative function: beautiful descriptions serve as a form of praise, and therefore either operate as part of the argument of a *madīḥ* poem, or as a substitute for it.²³⁴

Judging by the couplets of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, this agenda for description is generally absent in standalone *wasf* poetry. The goal seems to be description of the beautiful for its own sake. The two examples that follow provide particularly clear examples of this aesthetic sensibility:

Poem 90²³⁵

I It was as though the singing pond—when

It was filled to the brim with water, billowing

²³³ In fact, a very similar technique to this is also employed in longer poems, on a large scale. This is discussed in Chapter 4.1

²³⁴ See (Montgomery 1986, 4), (Sumi 2004, xii, 120), (P. F. Kennedy 1996, 181)

²³⁵ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 481-2, #987) This is a description of the pond of al-Ḥabash, and the adjoining river

*2 And the darkness had appeared— were a blacksmith's mirror;
That had been polished, and its handle were the river.*

Poem 91²³⁶

*1 The one my soul was the ransom for gave me
Two types of rose joined together in a bowl.
2 It was as though the white ones atop the red ones
Were stars that had risen in the red of the sunset.*

In cases where the description could be understood to advance an argument, it tends to be a goal familiar from other genres of poetry— indeed, in those cases, the poem often seems indistinguishable from a poem in one of those genres. Of the two couplets cited below, the first is categorized as *sharāb*, and the second as *wasf*—but their sensibility is extremely similar.

Poem 92²³⁷

*1 He came to me, when day was dawning in the darkness,
With a yellow wine, not spoiled by cooking or scorching.
2 And he served it to me when the Pleiades were like
A harvest of daffodils, with which the cupbearer greeted the drinking
companions.*

²³⁶ (Ibn al-Muʿtazz 1997, v. II, pg. 564, #1093) When some neighbors of Ibn al-Muʿtazz had brought him a red and white rose

²³⁷ (Ibn al-Muʿtazz 1997, Ibn al-Muʿtazz, v. II, pg. 173, #762)

Poem 93²³⁸

1 Oh! serve me a golden wine!

*For the dark of night has adorned the horizons in blackness.*²³⁹

2 It's as though the Pleiades when the night surrounds them

Were nuggets of silver surrounded by jet.

A frequent compositional pattern for *wasf* poems has the simile in the second line, with a build-up to it in the first line. In the poem that follows, for example, the first line establishes the basic situation and the second line provides the capstone image.

Poem 94²⁴⁰

1 How many nights have I passed watching the star

Until morning, staying awake, restless,

2 When it was as though the Pleiades were the head of a horse—

Black, adorned with ornamented reins.

Likewise, the first line of this next poem establishes the circumstance and the second line builds upon it with a memorable simile:

²³⁸ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 482, #988)

²³⁹ The Arabic word *da'aj* refers to the blackness of a pupil

²⁴⁰ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 577, #1112)

1 There was a singer—if he sang, he summoned all

Men of feeling among the drinking companions with his tankard.

2 He sewed his strings to the melodies of sound

As every body is sewn to its shadow.

In both of the above cases and generally, this progression involves movement from fact to fancy—from the observed situation to the simile, and from the real half of the simile to the imagined half. It cannot be described as a progression from the concrete to the abstract, since the fanciful half of the simile tends to be rich in specific sensory detail. Rather, the sensory experience (as the poet evokes it in the inner eye of the auditor) is shared between both parts of the poem, and it is the creation of that sensory experience that motivates and holds the poem together. It is perhaps this sort of poem that Ibn Rashīq is thinking of when he attributes to some contemporary critics the view that “the most eloquent *wasf* is that which transmutes hearing into sight.”²⁴²

This build-up in the first line to a descriptive climax in the second, characteristic of *wasf* couplets, is analogous to the characteristic pattern of *ghazal*, in which exposition in the first line builds up to the climax of an argument in the second.

²⁴¹ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 577-8, #1113)

²⁴² (Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī 2000, v. II, pg. 1097)

1.3.3 Sharāb

In most respects, the distribution of formal structures in the *sharāb* poems are similar to that of *wasf* and unlike that of *ghazal*: *sharāb* has a lot of similes and *wāw rubba* structures, and relatively low frequency of if/then, address/content, imperative/for, “how many a”, and dialogue. The similarity of *sharāb* and *wasf* itself occasions note: whereas a high rate of similes in *wasf* poems is unsurprising, the relationship of similes with the *sharāb* genre is considerably less transparent.

The noteworthy difference between *wasf* and *sharāb* is in the frequency of imperatives. As previously noted, *wasf* has very few imperatives in any category. *Sharāb*, on the other hand, has more imperatives per poem than any genre except the (thematically exhortatory) *zuhd*, and while *zuhd* has a higher rate of imperative/for and so-imperative structures, *sharāb* leads the way in both imperative openers and parallel imperatives.

The proliferation of opener imperatives comes as no surprise to anyone familiar with the *sharāb* genre, in which “Get up! It’s time to go drinking!” is among the most easily identifiable opening motifs. The proliferation of parallel imperatives is less obvious. It appears that the poet takes advantage of the convention of beginning *sharāb* poems with imperatives, using the initial imperative as a springboard for future parallels. The slowing patterns observed by Scheindlin are a not-infrequent feature of these parallel imperatives, as in the following poem, where the third in a sequence of hemistich-initial imperatives broadens out into a concluding imperative/for structure at the end.

1 **Join** day to night, oh my friend²⁴⁴

And **banish** your cares with wine.

2 And **leave** the censor alone, **for** he

Will grow bored of gossiping.

In secondary literature, *sharāb* is seen as a philosophically and socially engaged genre, using the medium of poetry to promote an irreverent, cosmopolitan, and often *shu‘ūbī* position. It is associated with narrative and dramatic dialogue, as well as simile and other species of figurative speech.²⁴⁵ Phillip Kennedy attributes a rhetorical function to the descriptive passages in *sharāb* poetry: “*wasf* of *khamr* functions as *madīḥ* of *khamr*. Praise of wine in itself supports the imbibing of wine.”²⁴⁶

How does this square with our observations that the *sharāb* couplets contain a high density of similes and imperatives, and a relatively low density of other structures? On the basis of syntactical frequency, we can see an enthusiastic corroboration of the *sharāb* preference for description, powered by many similes though not by any means restricted to them. The following three poems are representative of the descriptive mood of the *sharāb* couplets:

²⁴³ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 204, #788)

²⁴⁴ The Arabic literally reads “join your day”—the “to night” is implied.

²⁴⁵ (Harb 1990)

²⁴⁶ (P. F. Kennedy 1996, 181)

Poem 97²⁴⁷

1 Oh, give it me to drink, when the darkness is stripped away

And the stars of the darkness are racing in the arena of the night

2 Its as though the Pleiades at the end of the night

Were the opening of a blossom or silvered reins.

Poem 98²⁴⁸

1 Many's the fire we've kindled quickly at daybreak;

Whenever water is spread out upon it, it catches fire

2 The bubbles of water wander at its sides

As tears wander upon a flushed cheek.

Poem 99²⁴⁹

1 We drank with the little cup and the big one

And we didn't dwell on fate's misfortunes.

2 The horses of musical instruments carried us at a gallop,

And we flew on the wings of joys.

There is, however, no evidence of any preference for dramatic dialogue (in fact, dialogue occurs less frequently in the *sharāb* couplets than in the couplets of any other lyric genre). The paucity of narration beyond the basics of scene-setting comes perhaps as no

²⁴⁷ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 157-8, #749)

²⁴⁸ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 89, #678)

²⁴⁹ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 129, #711)

surprise in poems of this length—certainly an account of an involved situation is well beyond the scope of a couplet. As far as philosophical commitments, while there’s not a lot of *shu ‘ubī* nor anti-religious rhetoric evident in the couplets, there is a subset of *sharāb* poetry which employs imperatives (often parallel imperatives) in order to make “seize the day” arguments:

Poem 100²⁵⁰

1 Oh my companion, give me wine to

Drink, in public and in secret.

2 If the ignorant one pontificates to

You about it, then say “peace!”

Poem 101²⁵¹

1 Start drinking wine early, with a morning draught,

And don’t let the cup out of your hand.

2 Indeed joy is as life to a young man

So seize joy from your life.

Poem 102²⁵²

1 Halt at al-Qufṣ and its taverns,

And pause with us in the shadow of its gardens.

²⁵⁰ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 223, #808)

²⁵¹ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 79, #670)

²⁵² (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 61, #643)

2 And divert the soul with it for an hour

For indeed the world is measured by such hours.

These poems include a high density of imperative/for and dialogue structures (which are otherwise relatively rare in the genre), in addition to the parallel imperatives that are characteristic of the genre. There appears to be something of a complementary distribution between the *sharāb* couplets that actively engage “seize the day” rhetoric and *sharāb* couplets which employ simile, with very little overlap between them.

Among the primarily descriptive poems, many exhibit a very similar overall structure to that observed in *wasf* poetry, moving from exposition to simile. Such a motion is exemplified in the following two poems:

Poem 103²⁵³

*1 He brought it in the morning, a Karkhan yellow wine,
as though it were catching fire in its cup.*

*2 And you’d think the water was liquid glass
And you’d think the cups were frozen water.*

Poem 104²⁵⁴

1 They emit wine from their mouths²⁵⁵,

²⁵³ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 90, #680)

²⁵⁴ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 135, #720)

Casting forth musk and ambergris.

2 It's as though our wine cups were silver,

With red gold secreted within.

There are also some couplets that begin with an imperative, calling the interlocutor to drink, and move from there to a simile—in these cases, the simile often involves a description of the daybreak or other natural surroundings rather than a description of the wine itself. The following couplets are typical of this mode:

Poem 105²⁵⁶

1 Wake up, my drinking companion, from your slumber, and sit up!

Morning has come, and my eye has not slept.

2 As for the darkness, it had reached the point when its shirt grew thin,

And I saw the white of the dawn like a thirsting sword.

Poem 106²⁵⁷

1 Drink upon the lake of water lilies,

*Green with yellow edges.*²⁵⁸

2 It was as though their blossoms had sent forth

Tongues of fire from the water.

²⁵⁵ This poem refers to the wine jugs

²⁵⁶ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 90-1, #681)

²⁵⁷ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 16, #599)

²⁵⁸ This line refers to the green of the pond with yellow water lilies clumped around the edges.

The descriptive *sharāb* poems are neither interested in conversation nor in the structures of rational argument, but in creating a sensory experience. It is, however, possible to see the descriptive poems of *sharāb* as serving the persuasive function postulated by Kennedy: alongside the call to drink, the lavish descriptions of the wine and the beautiful surroundings serve as an enticement if not an argument—an appeal to the senses that may if successful result in a particular action on the part of the interlocutor (i.e. joining the poet for a drink). This shape is particularly apparent in the couplets that proceed from the injunction “drink with me!” to the sumptuous description. In this respect the *sharāb* descriptions are unlike those of the *wasf* couplets, where sensory depiction generally has no discernable agenda. It is perhaps revealing that *ghazal* and *sharāb* poems, which are both at heart intended to seduce the listener to their various vices, go about it in such different ways: in *ghazal* with arguments and talk of consequences, and in *sharāb* by painting the prospect as appealing.

1.3.4 Zuhd

Just as *sharāb* couplets follow the basic frequency distribution of *wasf*, so too do *zuhd* couplets follow the basic frequency distribution of *ghazal*: relatively frequent address/content, if/then, imperative/for, and dialogue, paired with relatively infrequent simile and *wāw rubba*.

There are, however, some points of difference. *Zuhd* couplets have a lower proportion of address/content structures than *ghazal*, and a higher proportion of “how many a” structures and imperatives overall, especially initial imperatives.

More significantly, there are some respects in which the distribution of structures throughout the poem distinguish *zuhd* from all the other genres. *Zuhd* if/then and imperative/for structures don’t act like closers—in both cases, they actually appear slightly more often in the first line than in the second. In each case, this is owing to a gravitation towards the first hemistich, where *zuhd* is disproportionately represented: about half of the first hemistich attestations of if/then and imperative/for are accounted for by *zuhd* poems, though *zuhd* poems make up only 15% of the lyric couplets.

Zuhd couplets also feature a closer that is not represented as such in any other genre. In the corpus overall, so-imperatives are pretty evenly distributed throughout all hemistichs save the first (where their paucity is unsurprising given that “So” doesn’t normally begin a sentence). In *zuhd*, however, 6 of the 8 so-imperatives occur in the third hemistich, giving it a distribution resembling that of “how many a” and dialogue.

Secondary sources may shed some light on these rather striking deviations exhibited by the *zuhd* couplets from patterns that otherwise hold steady across genres. *Zuhd* is, unlike the other genres under consideration, a religious rather than a secular genre. As such, while many of the motifs identified as characteristic of *zuhd* poetry derive from the usual

pre-Islamic origins, *zuhd* poems are understood to be deeply indebted to the *Qur'ān* and the religious tradition.²⁵⁹ It is characterized by an unornamented style, frequent references to *Qur'ān* and *Hadīth*, and formal echoes of the sermon and the homily. Rhetorical strategies include epigrams, pious aphorisms, and simple, straightforward arguments. The fact that *zuhd*, unlike secular poetry, draws heavily upon persuasive paradigms external to poetry may explain why the shape of *zuhd* arguments differ from those that we have found to operate so consistently, in their various forms, in the secular genres. The shape of a poem that builds up from short introductory phrases in the first line to an argumentative or descriptive climax in the second—observed in all the other lyric genres—need not apply in this case.²⁶⁰

The structural similarities between *ghazal* and *zuhd* may be understood with reference to similarities in the thematic agendas of the two genres. Whereas in *ghazal* the primary goal is to produce arguments that will persuade various stakeholders in the love story (i.e. the beloved, the censor, etc.) to change their behavior by removing the obstacles between the lover and fulfillment of his desires, in *zuhd* the primary goal is to produce arguments that will persuade the recalcitrant sinner to change his behavior by abjuring sin and embracing repentance.

The character of *zuhd* can also readily explain the points in which it deviates from *ghazal* in the frequency distribution of syntactic devices. *Zuhd* is naturally more forceful than *ghazal*, which explains why it should be more likely to begin with a direct command and

²⁵⁹ (Hamori, *Zuhdīyāt* 1990)

²⁶⁰ (Hamori, *Zuhdīyāt* 1990, 269)

less likely to begin with the more pleading address/content structure. Its philosophical engagement and objective distance from the personal concerns of human life also explain its relatively high density of gnomic utterances, including our benchmark gnomic utterance “how many a”.

The pacing of *zuhd* couplets does sometimes follow the pattern observed in other genres, in which the first line builds up to a second line where the familiar closers cluster:

Poem 107²⁶¹

- 1 Oh, often has generosity induced poverty in a man*
So that he stands among men in a lowly position.
- 2 So **tighten** the loops of your money, and save it up—*
***For** miserliness is better than begging the miser.*

Poem 108²⁶²

- 1 Oh believer in God who is not godfearing*
I trust in your speech, but not in your deeds.
- 2 **How many** have died, who died when you treated them*
—so look to your soul!—who are like you?

²⁶¹ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. III, pg. 184, #1319)

²⁶² (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. III, pg. 174, #1310)

In both of these examples, the first line contains a usual set-up in the first line (*wāw rubba*; address content), building up to a closer in the second line (“how many a”, imperative/for). It is worth noting in both cases that the so-imperative closer is also contributing to the decisive force of the second line.

In other cases, however, the argumentative force of the couplet is relentless, starting in immediately at the beginning and proceeding relentlessly throughout. Parallel structures between the first and second line, including the notably frequent parallel imperatives, are one strategy for achieving this effect:

Poem 109²⁶³

1 ***Don't** be sorry for anything you have been afflicted with*

***For** everything the merciful one has ordained is achieved.*

2 ***Ask** that you may know what you had been ignorant of*

***For** reason is of two kinds: natural and achieved.*²⁶⁴

Poem 110²⁶⁵

1 ***If** care wages war upon my heart*

Then it is assisted by patience.

2 *Oh fate, **if** you were noble*

²⁶³ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. III, pg. 167, #1300)

²⁶⁴ The two words used in the last line hemistich, *maṭbū`* (natural) and *maṣnū`* (achieved) are traditional opposites which are often used in literary criticism to contrast “natural” writing vs. affected, contrived, or highly crafted writing.

²⁶⁵ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. III, pg. 156-7, #1282)

You would not harm a noble man.

A similar effect is achieved, in terms of consistently high energy, by putting one closer device in the first line, and a different one in the second line as in the following poem:

Poem 111²⁶⁶

I Ask only the ruins about man

***For** man, so long as he lives, is a servant of hope.*

2 She said, “You are resolved upon separation”, so I said to her

*“I have resolve **if** God approves my works.”*

1.3.5 The Other Genres, In Brief

Since the other lyric genres are less well represented—and in some cases are hardly represented at all—it is difficult to make any confident conjectures about them.

Nevertheless, having analyzed the four most popular lyric genres for couplets, it is now possible to look briefly at the remaining genres: *ṭarad*, *mu‘ātabāt*, and *marāthī*. One question to consider is whether these new genres fit into the two broad categories already identified in the better-sampled genres: the descriptive mold represented by *waṣf* and *sharāb*, and the argumentative mold represented by *ghazal* and *zuhd*. The impressions described from this sparse couplet data will be revisited in Section 2.3 below.

²⁶⁶ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. III, pg. 185-6, #1322)

Tarad

It has been mentioned that *tarad* has the lowest proportion of couplets of any genre. In combination with the fact that the *tarad* genre is represented by a small collection of poems overall, the upshot is that there are only five *tarad* couplets, an extremely small sample from which to draw any conclusions. However, it is worth observing that of these five poems, three have similes. Two other structures under study, *wāw rubba* and address/content, each occur once. On this basis, it might be possible to –very tentatively– suggest the assignment of *tarad* couplets into the descriptive mold.

Poem 112²⁶⁷

1 And there were youths who set out at dawn, when the night was dusky

And the arrival of the morning light was uncertain.

2 As though their falcons were the princes of an army

*With rusty iron upon their shoulders.*²⁶⁸

Mu‘ātabāt

There are thirteen *mu‘ātabāt* couplets. It is notable that the “how many?” structure appears three times in this sample, despite the fact that this structure is very rare overall. Other than that, the structures that appear more than once are dialogue, imperatives (all parallel), address/content, and simile. On that basis, it is not possible to identify *mu‘ātabāt* as argumentative or descriptive in emphasis given the evidence available. By

²⁶⁷ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 396, #912)

²⁶⁸ By analogy to the dark markings many falcons have on their upper wings

way of example, of the following two poems, the first appears to follow the argumentative mode and the second appears to follow the descriptive mode:

Poem 113²⁶⁹

1 ***Oh** my sickbed visitor, come to enjoy my misfortune*

You have increased my emaciation and my pains.

2 *You have inquired about my news when you were absent—*

***How many** an inquirer asks so that the death-announcer will answer?*

Poem 114²⁷⁰

1 ***Oh many's** the war, smasher*

Of swords and spears!

2 ***And it's as though** our spears*

Were eyelashes of an eye, fluttering.

Rithā'

There are twenty-one *rithā'* couplets. In this corpus, structures that occur more than once include imperatives, address/content, and “how many?”. On that basis, we might very tentatively suggest an assignment of *rithā'* as an argumentative genre along with *ghazal*

²⁶⁹ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 322-3, #868)

²⁷⁰ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 337, #877)

and *zuhd*. The following poem provides an example as a *rithā'* poem that follows the argumentative mode:

Poem 115²⁷¹

1 Oh fate! -You have not been merciful to us, and you do not spare us,

So mercy on us! But no, I don't see you having any mercy.

2 How many a grave have you dug for a lover

And made him a home there? That is the true home.

In the next poem, the two-line address/content structure helps to enhance the abject misery of the couplet.

Poem 116²⁷²

1 Oh! You who have buried loved ones

And are dejected, devastated

2 Do you want to survive

While the one you love survives?— For that is eternity.

²⁷¹ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. III, pg. 57, #1181)

²⁷² (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, Ibn al-Mu'tazz, v. III, pg. 27, #1161)

The following poem follows a rhetorical escalation which will by now be familiar: it begins with a factual statement in the first line, and then builds up to a punchy conceit in the second, employing dialogue for emphasis:

Poem 117²⁷³

1 I remembered 'Ubayd Allah when the earth obscured him—

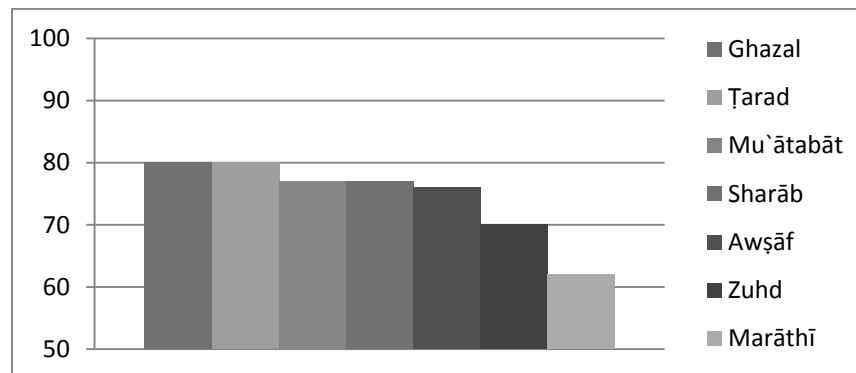
And the eyes had nothing except their tears.

2 Heaven forbid that I say, 'may rain water his grave'

His hands will water his grave from their generosity.

One other notable feature of *rithā'* concerns an important metric which has not yet been discussed: the proportion of the poems in each of these genres which features at least one of the syntactic structures under discussion. This proportion is expressed as a percentage in the following chart:

Figure 17



²⁷³ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. III, pg. 87, #1202) In elegy for 'Ubayd Allāh ibn Sulaymān

The proportions of poems which include syntactical structures studied here is reasonably consistent across all genres. In all genres but *rithā'*, it falls between 70 and 80 percent. At 62%, the proportion in *rithā'* is something of an outlier. That means that, of all the genres studied, the methodology we have used has been less effective in studying *rithā'* than any other genre. This might be owing to the fact that, from its pre-Islamic roots as a highly ritualistic genre in which the Arabic poetess found her only literary outlet, *rithā'* poems have always occupied a somewhat separate space from other poetic genres. Whatever the case may be, a separate study of *rithā'* couplets, with a larger sample size, might well reveal structural dynamics beyond the scope of this paper.²⁷⁴

1.4 Conclusion

A survey of the distribution of popular devices throughout the four hemistichs that comprise the couplet has provided evidence that some syntactical structures gravitate towards the first lines of couplets while others gravitate towards the second lines. The structures that gravitate towards the first lines tend to be brief staccato gestures that attract the attention of the listener at or near the very beginning of the poem. The structures that gravitate towards the second lines tend to be clauses (and often bipartite clauses) rather than single words, to fill much of the second line, and to support a figurative description or an argument of some sort. In consequence, we have identified a characteristic shape for a couplet: a short, distinctive gesture at the beginning draws the

²⁷⁴ While closer to the fold than *marāthī*, *zuhd* (which also has nonstandard origins, as previously discussed) also falls outside the 75%-80% range that encompasses all the other genres, and is thus also underrepresented, relatively speaking, by this methodology.

listener in; the stage is then set for a strong second line which delivers the rhetorical thrust of the poem. A survey of how these devices break down by genre supports an assertion that the abovementioned poem shape falls into two basic types: the descriptive and the argumentative, and that generally speaking the descriptive mode is favored by the *wasf* and *sharāb* genres while the argumentative mode is favored by the *ghazal* and *zuhd* genres. There is some preliminary evidence that if we were able to gather more data about the remaining genres, at least some of them might be assigned to one of these two categories just as readily.

Neither of these statistical trends should be taken in any way as absolutes. There are many poems in the corpus which do not follow the crescendo shape described above, especially in the *zuhd* genre but also in the others. Balanced parallels present one alternative paradigm to the two line crescendo. The following *zuhd* poem contains two injunctions of approximately equal heft, one in the first line and one in the second. There's no sense that the first builds up to the second.

Poem 118²⁷⁵

1 Depart the world with provisions of piety

For your life span is days of which few are counted.

2 And abandon what the depths of passion sweep

Towards the abyss where there is no reasoning being.

²⁷⁵ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. III, pg. 181, #1315) This poem is 'regarding repentance'

Likewise, the following *wasf* poem employs balanced similes in the first and second lines, with no obvious crescendo:

Poem 119²⁷⁶

*1 And the star in the jet-black night, **you'd imagine it***

An eye which takes advantage of the guardians' neglect.

*2 And the morning from under the darkness, **it's as though it were***

White hair that appeared in a black lock.

Nor can the argumentative and descriptive modes be seen as adhering absolutely to the genres with which they have demonstrated a statistical affinity—modes do sometimes cross genre lines to appear in the genres not generally associated with them. We've already described the argumentative substrain of *sharāb* which takes on the “seize the day” theme. Here's a *zuhd* poem (part of the arguably distinct variety which is primarily concerned with aging rather than repentance) which uses a standard descriptive pattern:

Poem 120²⁷⁷

1 Do you not see white hair covering my head?

My schemes have flagged regarding it, and my capacity has narrowed regarding it.

*2 **It's as though** the scissors which shaped it*

²⁷⁶ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 451, #957)

²⁷⁷ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. III, pg. 166, #1298)

Were the beaks of crows upon an ear of grain.

Likewise this *ghazal* poem employs the descriptive mode:

Poem 121²⁷⁸

1 He has a glance that pierces hearts, and a cheek

In which roses have bloomed on every side.

2 And the sides of his face have been bedowned with straight lines

As lines mark the parchment of a writer.

And this *sharāb* poem harnesses the imperative/for structure in the argumentative mode:

Poem 122²⁷⁹

1 I have confessed the sin of intoxication;

As far as I'm concerned, intoxication is the bane of the heart.

*2 **Punish** with whatever you wish save withdrawal;*

-I cannot endure your departure.

We can also see examples of the structures we've identified with one mode being used in the service of the other. Most notably, *wasf* poems tend to use the if/then structure in the

²⁷⁸ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 226, #88)

²⁷⁹ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 135, #721) It should be noted that this poem doesn't include the 'fa-' particle following the imperative that's usually translated as "for". However, that sense is plainly implicit.

service of a descriptive, rather than argumentative, agenda, as in the following two poems:

Poem 123²⁸⁰

*1 And there was a black woman, a flirting coquette,
In the heart there's a striving passion for her.*

*2 If you see her among the women
-You see a doll carved from jet.*

Poem 124²⁸¹

*1 Eyes the rain clad in clothes of splendor
—Their eyelids are white and their pupils yellow.*

*2 If a desirer smells them, -he imagines their scent
Compounded from camphor with which wine is mixed.*

These digressions should come as no surprise. We should not expect to find the trends that we have identified in this chapter, which can be presumed to engage the poet's artistic sensibilities on a largely subconscious level, to be reliably followed in every instance. Nevertheless, they can serve as a basis from which to examine other poems which may not include the structures we've studied. Given the understanding of a shape and modes which couplets frequently follow, we can find examples of these same poem

²⁸⁰ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 481, #986)

²⁸¹ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 544, #1057), regarding a narcissus

shapes and modes in poems which achieve these effects without those structures. In the following *wasf* poem, the descriptive mode is employed without recourse to simile:

Poem 125²⁸²

1 And there is a woman visible at the middle of the month to one who looks

But she is concealed at the end of the month.

2 She mingles the night during the moon's wane with something like to it²⁸³

And she laughs to reveal pearls and serves me wine.

Likewise, the following *ghazal* poem presents a clear crescendo into a lover's argument without recourse to any of the argumentative structures we've discussed:

Poem 126²⁸⁴

1 You quarrel with me about which of us is more in love

When my tears are loosed from my eyes.

2 The one who weeps his distress is most sincere

And the one who visits his friend is the most loving.

We can also see hints of structures similar to the ones we've examined, which are not attested frequently enough in this corpus to make any generalizations about. For instance,

²⁸² (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, Ibn al-Mu'tazz, v. II, pg. 520, #1013). This poem is a description of a black woman

²⁸³ i.e. her skin is dark like the new moon

²⁸⁴ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 345, #258)

the structure that begins “would that...” features a distribution across hemistichs that makes it a promising candidate for a closer, and a distribution across genres that justifies an intuitively justified orientation towards the argumentative mode. Here are two examples of poems in which “would that” appears to be functioning as an argumentative closer:

Poem 127²⁸⁵

1 She sent me a written page

With which she placated the vexation of the absent heart.

*2 Oh, **would that** I could be enclosed within its reply*

That I might kiss the hand of that writer.

Poem 128²⁸⁶

1 The one I love has grown angry. How accommodating the world is!—

I am not among the dead in the world, but neither am I among the living.

*2 Oh! **Would that** his mouth were a watering place for me, and would that I*

Were still drinking there, not pushed aside and never sated.

Another structure which evinces promising patterns but limited sample size is the riddle structure, which features a riddle that is set up in the first line and unleashed in the

²⁸⁵ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 237-8, #106)

²⁸⁶ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 219, #76)

second. Its distribution (in an extremely small sample size) suggests that it aligns with the argumentative mode:

Poem 129²⁸⁷

1 There are two things, that if my two eyes wept tears over them

*Until they announced departure*²⁸⁸

2 They still would not capture a tenth part of their obligation:

The loss of youth and the separation of lovers.

This first case-study into the study of the structures of couplets would benefit greatly from comparison with similar studies that consider more and larger samples of couplets. One benefit, obviously, would be the accumulation of evidence about how much of the structural tendencies observed here are specific to Ibn al-Mu‘tazz. Another would be the simple contribution of a larger sample, which would be likely to confirm some of the trends observed here and discredit others. Future studies of this kind could benefit enormously from the use of software designed to facilitate data analysis, along with training in statistical methods, the general paucity of such expertise in the contemporary field of Near Eastern Studies notwithstanding.

For this first attempt at quantitative analysis of structures in couplets, we have constrained the study to structures which can be identified unambiguously and which operate relatively simply. Of course, in so doing we have missed out on the opportunity

²⁸⁷ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. III, pg. 126, #1246)

²⁸⁸ That is, until they are worn out

to examine a variety of interesting structures which eluded the grasp of this cautious approach. Promising structures for future study include imagery beyond the scope of the simile, gnomic utterances beyond the scope of “how many a”, the vast world of subordinate clauses, and questions.

In particular, it’s necessary to note that the analysis of *ghazal* was done a noticeable disservice by the constraint of imagery to the simile. While *ghazal* poems are short on similes, they do, unlike *zuhd*, include a rich variety of imagery of other sorts. A future study brave enough to take on the categorization of imagery more broadly will likely be rewarded by valuable insights in that direction.

The study of lyric couplets would also be complemented by an examination of structures operating in couplet forms of non-lyrical genres. What is the shape of a two-line non-lyric poem? Couplets exist in all of the genres of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, and though they are very rare in the *madīḥ* and *fakhr* genres, they are extremely common in *hijā’*.

Finally, the structures in the couplets bear comparison to the structures of longer poems. Some efforts have been made to locate the findings about couplet structures within the secondary literature that deals with structures specifically and the lyric genres more generally. In later chapters, we will have occasion to see how the results found here relate to longer lyric poetry by Ibn al-Mu‘tazz.

Chapter 2: As Poems Get Longer

Having studied the form and structure of couplets, we now turn to the examination of longer poems. To what extent can the trends observed in couplets be found in poems of other lengths?

Chapter 1 identified certain structures in couplets as “openers”, which tended to gravitate towards the first line of the poem, and others as “closers”, which tended to gravitate towards the second line. Do the structures which function as openers and closers in couplets take on an analogous function in longer poems? If so, how does the concept of openers and closers in couplets translate, when considering poems of arbitrary length? For example, should we expect that couplet closers are structures which gravitate towards the last lines of longer poems? Alternatively, might they be more likely to occur in the second half of a poem than in the first half, and if so, how would the frequency change as we progress from the beginning of a poem to the end of it? What would any of these results have to say about the literary structure of a poem?

Chapter 1 also identified certain structures (called “descriptive”) which seemed to occur more often than average in couplets from the *wasf* and *sharāb* genres and less often than average in the *ghazal* and *zuhd* genres; and others, (called “argumentative”) which seemed to occur more often than average in couplets from the *ghazal* and *zuhd* genres and less often than average in the *wasf* and *sharāb* genres. Is this trend a peculiarity of couplets, or does it have applicability to longer poems as well? For that matter, what about the other lyric genres: *mu’ātabāt*, *ṭarad*, and *rithā’*? These genres didn’t provide enough examples of couplets for us to make generalizations about which structures tended to occur in them. But if we are looking at longer poems, we can now add them

into the mix: can they, too, be categorized as genres hospitable to argumentative or descriptive structures in particular? What do these results tell us about the literary structure of poetry, and the structural relationship between couplets and longer poems? What happens to lyric poems in Arabic as they get longer?

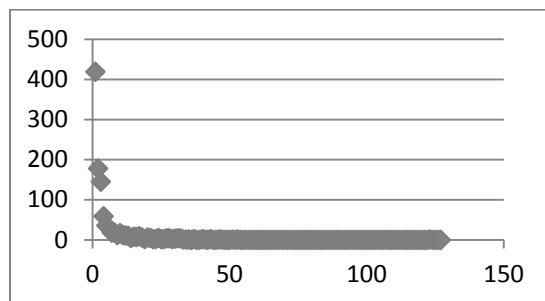
2.1 Poem Length in the Corpus

Before we venture to address these questions, it is perhaps helpful to begin (with the reader's indulgence) by considering the relative frequency of different poem lengths in the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu'tazz. In chapter 1, the specific study of couplets was justified partly upon the observation that more than one third of Ibn al-Mu'tazz's poems (both within the lyric corpus and overall) were couplets. Now, as expand the scope of our observation to encompass the entirety of the lyric corpus, the question arises as to how long Ibn al-Mu'tazz's lyric poems tend to be in general. When we make generalizations about the lyric corpus as a whole, what sorts of poems will we talking about? For instance, is the frequency of couplets a peculiarity, or does it extend in some measure to other short poems, like tercets and quatrains? Once poems become long enough to accommodate complex thematic structures, do they become more frequent? For that matter, how long do lyric poems tend to get? How does the frequency of poems change, as poems get longer?

2.1.1 Poem Length in the Lyric Corpus Overall

If we count how many poems have each number of lines and graph the number of lines in a poem (on the x axis) vs. number of poems with that number of lines (on the y axis), we get something that looks like this²⁸⁹:

Figure 18: Numbers of Poems (y) with Different Numbers of Lines (x)



From this we can see that there are a whole lot more poems with 2, 3 and 4 lines than of any other specific line length; unfortunately, the picture gets very blurry very quickly after the first few data points. However, the general shape of this curve suggests that it may be a curve called a power function ($y=ab^x$). One way to get a closer look at data approximating a power function is to convert both the y and x axes into a logarithmic scale (so that any number w on the scale actually means m^w where m is a constant).

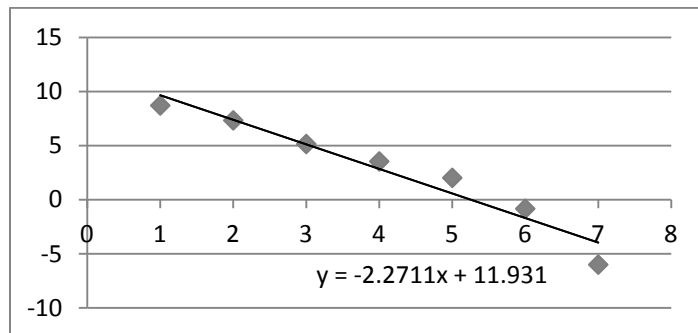
When represented in this way, power functions look like straight lines. This representation has two benefits for our purposes. First, because a logarithmic scale covers a wider range of numbers as you move away from the origin, this will allow us to look at the data in such a way that the need to look at large numbers (like 400 on the y axis or

²⁸⁹ This graph omits consideration of singleton verses, and poems with fractional lengths (like 2.5). These are very rare poem lengths, for reasons unrelated to the general considerations of length, and inclusion of that data would obscure any overall trend with respect to length.

100 on the x axis) won't prevent us from seeing the details of variation in smaller numbers (like the difference in frequency between poems of 8 lines and poems of 16, which is totally obscure on the graph above). The second advantage is that, as our samples get smaller and smaller (after 10 line poems there are often very few poems with any given line length) there is a lot of individual variation (between the count at a particular line length and the count at the line length one line greater, for instance) that's best explained by random chance (in the same sense that flipping a coin 400 times should almost certainly yield a result very close to 200 heads or 50% heads, whereas flipping a coin twice might well result in two heads or 100% heads). But if we can start taking averages of those numbers, which cover wider numbers of poem lengths as the numbers of poems with that length grow smaller, then that enables us to look beyond the noise in the data to observe the trend. This is also an intuitive way to compare results: 4 line poems read pretty differently from 2 line poems, but there's no particular difference between a 16 line poem and an 18 line poem.

The graph below shows the same data as Figure 18, this time taking a log of both axes base 2: thus every mark n on either axis corresponds to 2^n in Figure 18. The dot farthest to the left represents 2 (2^1) line poems; the second represents an average of 3 and 4 (2^2) line poems; the third represents an average of 5,6,7, and 8 (2^4) line poems, and so forth. Meanwhile, on the y axis, the highest point (also the furthest left) is about 8.7 high, meaning that there are $2^{8.7}$ (or about 415) poems of that length. The figure above confirms: for poems of 2 (2^1) lines, there are about 415 ($2^{8.7}$) poems in the lyric corpus.

Figure 19: Log2/Log2 Graph of Poem Frequency vs. Poem Length



We can see first that the log log graph is indeed approximately linear, confirming the hunch that the sequence of poem frequencies as line number increases approximates a power function. We learn from this that the popularity of 2 line poems is not a fluke. Quite the contrary, the number of poems of any given length will be (on average) greater than the number of poems of any longer length. As it turns out, we can make this a stronger claim. If this log log linear function had a slope of -1, that would mean that there were approximately the same number of 2 line poems as 3 and 4 line poems put together, and the same number of 3 and 4 line poems as 5-8 line poems, etc. Since the slope (as found for the line that approximates our data above) is considerably steeper than -1, we can say that in our data set, there should be more 2 line poems than 3 and 4 line poems put together and so on down the line.

2.1.2 Breakdown by Genre

The results above represent the sum of all the lyric poems of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz; however, we’ve got good reason to believe that these results would not be uniform across all the lyric genres. For instance, in chapter 1 we had cause to note that only 4 genres, *zuhd*, *ghazal*, *wasf*, and *sharāb*, had more than 50 examples of couplet poems. However, there are more *ṭarad* poems than *zuhd* poems altogether—this means that if poem frequency by length in both genres is log log linear, at least the slopes of the two must be different. Perhaps the slopes of genres like *mu’ātabāt*, *ṭarad*, and *rithā’* might even be positive, and that effect is counteracted in the composite data by the extreme negativity of the slopes in genres like *wasf*, which have lots of short poems. In order to answer these questions, it’s possible to use the logarithmic graph tool explained above to compare the rates of change in different genres:²⁹⁰

Figure 20: Log2/Log2 graph of Poem Frequency vs. Poem length: *Ghazal*

²⁹⁰ This comes with the caveat that, especially in genres with fewer poems, we should expect more discrepancy between individual data points and the overall line. The reason for this goes back to the coin flips: the more data we have, the more likely it is that the data will conform to a general trend rather than displaying random variation.

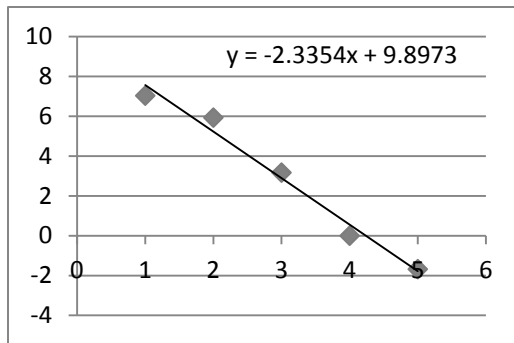


Figure 21: Log2/Log2 graph of Poem Frequency vs. Poem length: *Zuhd*

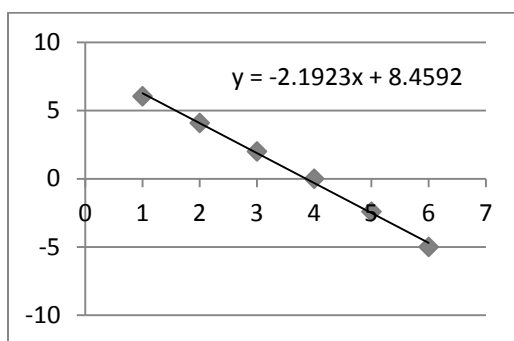


Figure 22: Log2/Log2 graph of Poem Frequency vs. Poem length: *Wasf*

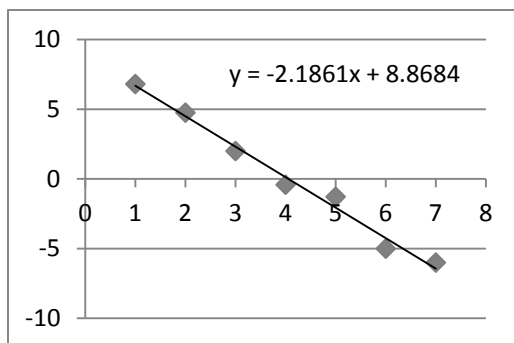


Figure 23: Log2/Log2 graph of Poem Frequency vs. Poem length: *Zuhd*

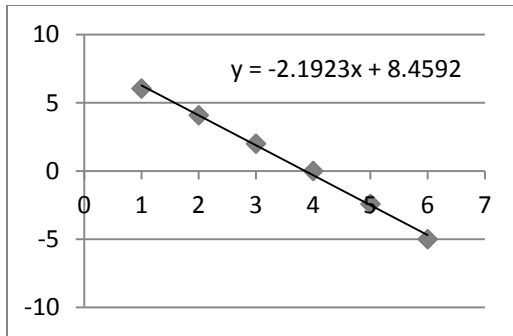


Figure 24: Log2/Log2 graph of Poem Frequency vs. Poem length: *Sharāb*

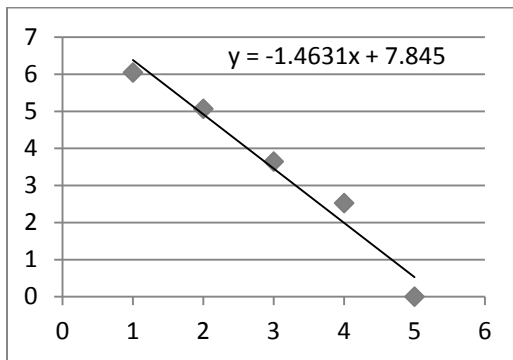


Figure 25: Log2/Log2 graph of Poem Frequency vs. Poem length: *Rithā'*

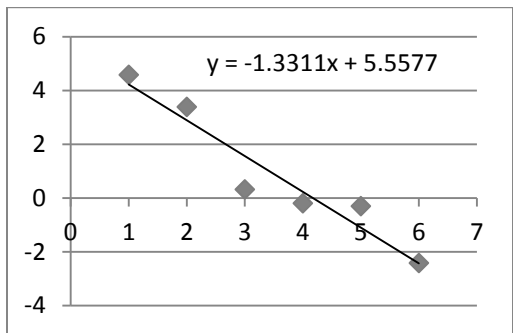


Figure 26: Log2/Log2 graph of Poem Frequency vs. Poem length: *Mu'atabāt*

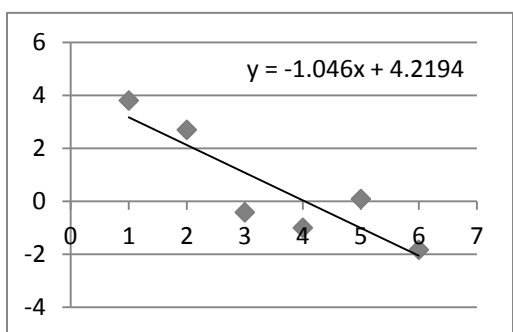
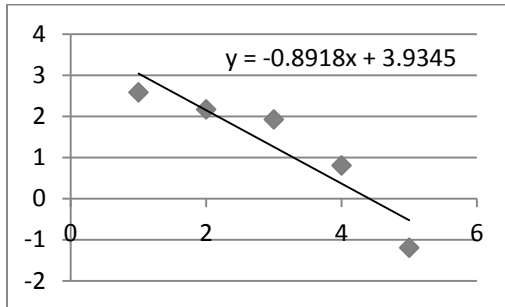


Figure 27: Log2/Log2 graph of Poem Frequency vs. Poem length: *Ṭarad*



All of the graphs are log log linear, and all are negative, even those genres (*mu'ātabāt*, *rithā'* and *ṭarad*) that feel heavy on long poems. In fact, of all the lyric genres, only one, *ṭarad*, has a slope that is shallower than -1—in all other cases, there are not only more 5-8 line poems than 9-16 line poems on average, there are more 5-8 line poems than 9-16 line poems altogether.

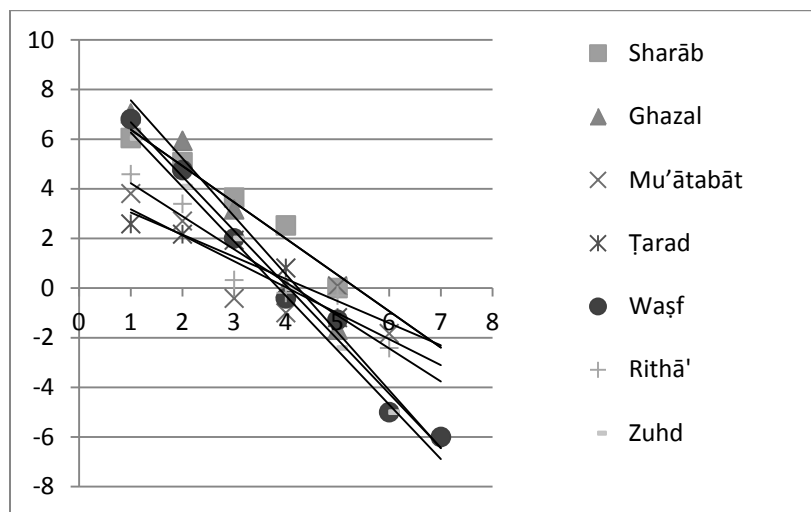
In terms of overall length, most of the genres have no poems longer than 32 lines. The *mu'ātabāt* and *rithā'* genres have some poems that range in length from 33-64, and the *wasf* poems include one poem which is 124 lines long (this poem, it should be said, is an outlier in several respects and will be discussed at some length in chapter 4.²⁹¹)

When looking at these various graphs, a pattern emerges: there is a perfect correlation in ranking between the steepness of the slope and the size of the y intercept (or the number

²⁹¹ See pg. 165 below

of 2 line poems). That is to say, the higher the number of 2-line poems in a genre, the faster the descent. What might this signify? In looking for a relationship between the frequencies of the poems from different genres, we can start by plotting them one on top of the other:

Figure 28: Log2/Log2 graph of Poem Frequency vs. Poem length—all Genres



With the exception of the *sharāb* poems (represented by squares), which combine a large number of couplets with an uncharacteristically shallow slope, these graphs appear to fall almost neatly into two categories. The three “long poem genres”, *mu'ātabāt*, *rithā'*, and *ṭarad*, have trendlines that begin between 2 and 4 and end between -2 and -4. The three “short poem genres” (excluding *sharāb*), *ghazal*, *waṣf*, and *zuhd*, have trendlines that begin between 6 and 8 and end between -6 and -7. Moreover, all six of these genres appear to converge around (4,0)—that is to say, in all lyric genres but *sharāb*, the *dīwān* of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz appears to include poems at an average rate of 1 poem for each

different poem length between 17 and 32 lines. The difference between the length profiles of long poems and short ones (and the corresponding differences in the sizes of different genres, excepting again *sharāb*) seems to be that the short poem genres have relatively fewer poems longer than that and more poems that are shorter, whereas the long poem genres have relatively more poems that are longer than 32 lines, and relatively fewer poems that are shorter than 17. The exceptional nature of the *sharāb* trendline remains a puzzle.

The purpose of this section is not, of course, to impute any conscious intent on the part of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz in organizing the distribution of poem lengths in his *dīwān*. Whereas the study of individual poems, or small groups of poems, focuses heavily upon determining auctorial intent, quantitative examinations of large groups of poems are more effective in identifying unconscious biases that shape auctorial behavior gradually. In this case, we can learn a few things about the habitual practice of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz in writing lyric poems. First and foremost, there are really a lot more short poems in his lyric corpus than long ones, for any possible definition of “short” and “long”²⁹². Secondly, this is true across all genres, including those which feel dominated by longer poems. Thirdly, the frequency of medium length poems (16 to 32 lines) is pretty similar in all of the genres represented in this *dīwān* (excepting *sharāb*); the difference between short poem and long poem lyric genres is that long poem genres lend themselves to relatively more very long poems (longer than 32 lines), whereas short poem genres lend themselves to relatively

²⁹² It is even the case that there are more lines of poetry occurring in short poems than in longer poems; the number of lines of 2 line poems is greater than the average number of lines in 3 and 4 line poems, which is in turn greater than the average number of lines in 5-8 line poems, etc. There are not more lines of 2-line poetry than lines of 3 and 4 line poetry combined, however.

more very short poems—this fact also accounts for the tendency of genres with more short poems to have more poems altogether than genres with more long poems.

2.2 Concentrations of Features Over the Course of a Poem

Chapter 1 studied the distribution of a variety of features throughout couplets. As we widen the scope of our study to include all the lyric poems, we will concentrate our examination upon four features which are especially easy to identify and study in large numbers: address/content, *wāw rubba*, if/then, and simile. These four features, when taken together, include two openers (address/content and *wāw rubba*) and two closers (if/then and simile) in addition to two argumentative features (address/content and if/then) and two descriptive features (*wāw rubba* and simile).

2.2.1 Openers and Closers overall

As indicated above, there are a variety of ways that the concept of openers and closers of couplets might be applicable to poems generally. In undertaking this investigation, we will begin by comparing feature frequency in the first vs. the second half of every lyric poem. That is, we take every occurrence of the feature in question (let's say "simile" in this case), and see whether the line in which it occurs falls into the first or the second half of the poem in which it appears. If the former, we add a mark to our tally for "first half"; if the latter, we add a mark to our tally for "second half".²⁹³ If the line on which the

²⁹³ This is a slight simplification. In fact, the feature-counting method used in this chapter only counts one feature in each line. That is, if line 3 of a 6 line poem includes two "if/then" structures, we count it the same way as if it only has one. This procedure makes counting simpler; it also probably serves to understate the effect of the results. It is unlikely to confound the result, however.

feature occurs is the middle line of the poem (say the fifth line of a nine line poem) we calculate the poem's midpoint (at 4.5, in this case) and therefore give half of the tally for the middle-line feature to the first half of the poem, and half to the second.²⁹⁴ The results of that count are given for each of the features under consideration in the four graphs below. In each case, the final tally for features in the first half of the poem determines the height of the bar marked "1", and the final tally for features in the second half of the poem determines the height of the bar marked "2".

Figure 29: Address/Content

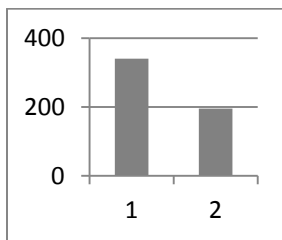


Figure 30: *Wāw rubba*

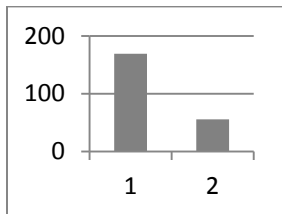


Figure 31: If/Then

²⁹⁴ In the event that a poem has a trailing hemistich at the end, that poem is counted as having N.5 lines; in this case the allocation of a feature that occurs in the middle line to the first and second halves is slightly more complicated. For example, when a feature occurs in line 7 of 13.5, the midpoint of the poem is 6.75, three quarters of the way through line 7. As a result .75 of the feature is counted in the first half and .25 as counted in the second half. This is why, in some of the cases below, the sum of the tally ends in .25 or .75.

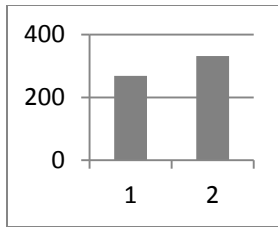
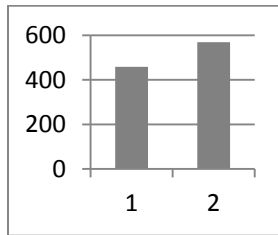


Figure 32: Simile



In the first two graphs, which correspond to features which we have already identified as “openers” in the couplets, the first bar is significantly higher than the second; and in the third and fourth graphs, which correspond to figures identified as “closers”, the second bar is significantly higher than the first.²⁹⁵ This suggests that the opener and closer effects observed in the couplets also applies to the lyric corpus generally.

One might fairly inquire at this point: is it possible that the entire effect as shown above is explained by the couplets? After all, couplets account for a third of the poems in the corpus by themselves, and we already know that the opener and closer effects are evident

²⁹⁵ The word “significant” is used advisedly here. What it means is that the disparity between the sizes of the first and second bars has a less than 5% chance of having occurred by random chance, which is the standard for statistically significant results in the social sciences. In order to test the probability that this disparity could have occurred by chance, we can imagine that all instances of features were assigned to the first or second halves of their poems by a coin flip. For example, the number of “if/then” structures occurring in the second half of their poems is 331.5. What are the odds that if you flipped a coin 600 times, it would land on heads 331 or more of those 600 times? These odds can be calculated from a binomial distribution. According to the binomial distribution, the odds of 600 coin-flips yielding 331 or more heads are .006, considerably less than 5% (.05). Therefore, the preference of if/then for the second half of the poem is considered statistically significant. This study gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the binomial distribution calculator at (Stat Trek n.d.), and the patient guidance of Joshua Von Korff in approaching statistical questions.

there. In order to answer this question, we can see what would happen if we looked at the same data without including any of the couplets. In fact, in each case we can compare two charts side by side: a chart that shows only the couplets, and one that includes only non-couplet poems:

Figure 33: Address/ content (couplets left, non-couplets right)

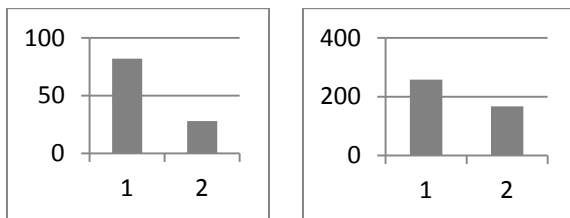


Figure 34: *Wāw rubba* (couplets left, non-couplets right)

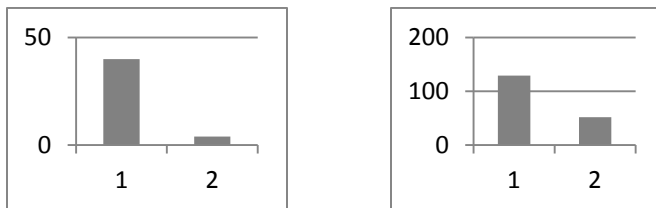


Figure 35: If/Then (couplets left, non-couplets right)

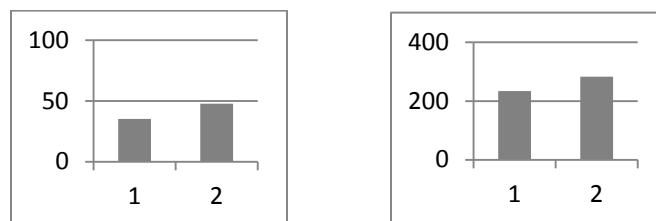
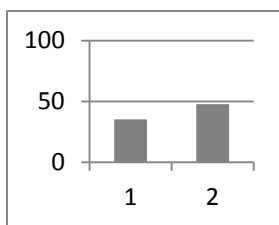
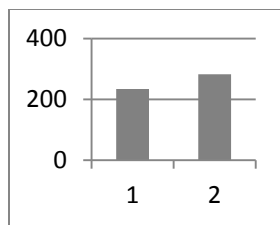


Figure 36: Simile (couplets left, non-couplets right)



In all of these cases but if/then,²⁹⁶ the features evince a statistically significant tendency to appear as openers (in the first two cases) or closers (in the third and fourth cases) even when the couplets are omitted from consideration. However, comparison of the couplets with the non-couplets in each case reveals an interesting trend: while the non-couplet graphs also tend to demonstrate significant opener and closer effects, in all four cases the effect is stronger in the couplets than in the non-couplets. Why should that be so? What does it signify?

2.2.2 Closers in Short vs. Long Poems

Upon closer investigation into the difference in closer and opener effects in long and short poems, an interesting result emerges in the two closers (if/then and similes). While the closer effect remains among non-couplets, at a certain length it disappears. For if/then, the point at which the effect fades seems to be between 4 and 5 lines; for similes, it's between 7 and 8. In both cases, poems on the short side of the divide demonstrate a

²⁹⁶ Actually, the if/then couplets also fail to evince a statistically significant closer effect, although (as noted in the previous set of charts), the closer effect does become significant when the two are put together (owing to the larger sample size). The methodology in identifying structures in this chapter is somewhat different from that used in the previous chapter—whereas the previous chapter noted repeat occurrences of structures in the same line, this chapter does not. The result of this, as previously noted, is to dilute the effect of the data to some extent. In this case, it had the result of rendering the if/then closer effect of couplets below the threshold of statistical significance. Further evidence later in the chapter will support the statistical significance of the if/then closer effect in non-couplets, and will be flagged as such when it occurs in footnote 357.

strong and statistically significant closer effect, and poems on the long side demonstrate none. This difference is shown in the following graphs:

Figure 37: If/Then structures in poems of 4 lines or fewer (left) vs. 5 lines or greater (right)

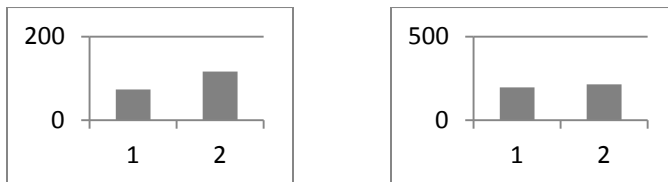
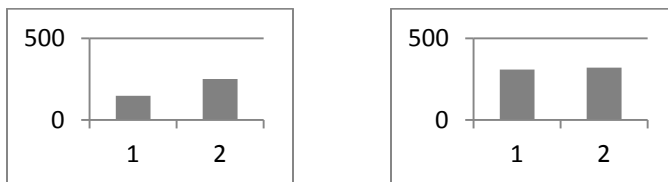


Figure 38: Similes in poems of 7 lines or fewer (left) vs. 8 lines or greater (right)



For the opener structures, in contrast, while (as we saw in Figure 33 and Figure 34 above) the opener effect seems to be strongest in short poems and to grow gradually weaker as poems get longer, there is no length at which a significant opener effect ceases to be observable.

The implication of this finding is worthy of some discussion at this point. As was noted in chapter 1,²⁹⁷ our finding of similes as closers in couplets contrasted with findings to the contrary by Scheindlin and Hamori. However, Hamori's study was based upon the study of long poems, and Scheindlin specifically omitted some short poems from this

²⁹⁷ Footnote 17 of chapter 1, Chapter 1.2.7

observation when he found them to contradict his otherwise-strong generalization²⁹⁸. The graphs above provide evidence of a structural distinction between short poems and long ones. Rather than short poems failing to follow the generalizations that apply to longer ones (on account of being poorly constructed, for instance) it would appear that short poems follow rules of their own, and that these rules cease to apply as poems get longer—somewhere between 4 lines and 7. As we know, these short poems account for significant majorities of the lyric corpus: 70% of poems in the lyric corpus are 4 lines or fewer, and more than 80% of poems are 7 lines or fewer.

Recalling Hamori's identification of similes as serving a cadential but not concluding function in the *qaṣīdas* he studied²⁹⁹, we may posit that this structural distinction between short and long poems may be related to the length at which poems cease to be purely monothematic. Short poems have space to develop only a single idea, and in rising to their conclusion they employ closer devices that serve to intensify the poem's ending. For example, in the three-line poem that follows, the poet opens with a general address in the first line, and then proceeds to describe a situation in the second line which culminates in a third line simile.

Poem 130³⁰⁰

I Oh my night in Karkh, stay forever thus!

²⁹⁸ (Scheindlin, Form and structure in the poetry of Al-Mu'tamid Ibn 'Abbād 1974, 112)

²⁹⁹ (Hamori, The composition of Mutanabbī's panegyrics to Sayf al-Dawla 1992, 20) While not finding any similes at the ends of poems, Scheindlin does note that similes serve a resolving role on the level of individual lines (Scheindlin, Form and structure in the poetry of Al-Mu'tamid Ibn 'Abbād 1974, 62)

³⁰⁰ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 236, #103)

Oh my night, don't go, don't go!

2 The messenger came bearing good news of a visit

After a long period of distance and anger

3 And in his hand was an apple which had been made to hold

*marks³⁰¹ she had bitten, **like** the two horns of a scorpion.*

Correspondingly, the following four-line poem begins with two lines of exposition and then rises to an argumentative climax in the third and fourth lines; while the parallel structure is the primary driver of the two-line rise, the if/then structure in the final line lends the concluding line an added structural force.

Poem 131³⁰²

1 The heart has rejected everything except the love of the one who is leaving it

And the one who is forgetting me, and the one whom I am remembering,

2 And the one who is shunning me whenever I approach

And the one who won't accommodate me, and the one I am forgiving.

3 So what shall I do with a beloved who is loved and desired—

Shall I conceal from him my affection for him, or reveal it?

*4 And how do you think, **if** his refusal becomes apparent to me—*

Shall I leave myself in sorrow or try to overcome it?³⁰³

³⁰¹ The word translated as “marks” has been read as an accusative here, contrary to the nominative markings here, in order to make better sense of the line.

³⁰² (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 288, #171)

³⁰³ In the interest of a smoother reading, I adopted an alternate reading provided by the editor. The manuscript reads as follows:

Likewise in Poem 132, the poet opens with an injunction in the first line, proceeds to outline a situation in lines 2 and 3, and closes with a punchy argument built upon two parallel if/then structures in line 4.

Poem 132³⁰⁴

1 May God rebuke my two friends with blame instead of me

Because the two of them chastised me about you, oh Gazelle of the boudoir.

2 They have chastised me about you in the evening

When they had greeted me in the morning with blame, at the gleam of dawn.

3 I was smitten by the eyes of a singer, and I fell in love with her

And I have avoided what sins are feared regarding her.

*4 So **if** that's meritorious, **then** I will consider it meritorious*

*And **if** that is sin, **then** forgiveness, oh possessor of forgiveness!*

While shorter poems are typically monothematic, longer poems tend to address multiple topics or moods and thus employ the use of internal cadences. The devices of closure employed in short poems, we suggest, can take on the role of heightening these cadences. But because they occur repeatedly throughout the poem itself, they become insufficient to the task of concluding a poem that includes numerous cadences. In the poem sited below, there's a clear internal cadence between lines 5 and 6, where the subject changes from the

"Shall I conceal from him my affection for him, or leave him?
And how do you think, **if** his refusal appears to me—

Shall I leave him in my sorrow or break with him?"

³⁰⁴ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 299, #186)

boat that brings the narrator to the sites of revelry to an account of the revelry itself. This cadence is marked by an if/then structure in the last line of the first section, and by *wāw rubba* in the first line of the second.

Poem 133³⁰⁵

1 In Karkh and Maydān I have a dwelling place

And al-Qufṣ and Quṭrabbul are my neighbors.

2 I have flying horses of water,

Turning me back (if I wish) or forward.

3 The oars strike the water;

Laden, bearing, it is borne along.

4 Its destination is the castle of Ḥumayd, and in

The garden of joy it spends most of its time.

5 So if it finds a lapse in the river rope,³⁰⁶

It flies to al-Qufṣ and doesn't delay.

*6 **Many's the** night I've spent in luxury*

With the morning rushing into the darkness.

7 A delightful young man drank with me then,

Staying up late and not getting tired.

8 He doesn't hinder the wine-passer when he comes to him

And he drinks a quantity and doesn't ask questions.

9 And we have a white antelope whose waist is slender

³⁰⁵ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 190, #777)

³⁰⁶ Ropes were put across rivers to obstruct the path until a passage fee was paid (Lane 1968, 63)

Who emaciates with his glances, or kills.
10 Slender, he has a stature that doesn't grovel.
His eyelid is bekohled without kohl.
11 Beauty has buttoned up his clothes over him
And his lower back shakes his upper back.

Likewise, the below-cited poem discusses three separate subjects: the vagaries of fate (lines 1-3), the enticement of Shirr's saliva (lines 4-5), and the intoxicated friend (lines 6-8). Lines 3 and 5, which are internal cadences, are both marked with if/then structures, while line 7 (the first line of section 3) is marked by *wāw rubba*.

Poem 134³⁰⁷

1 Don't grow bored of spurring us on and giving us drink;
The morning has appeared to us and it has become manifest to us.
2 And kill my care with a pure wine
And leave fate alone, for what it wishes will occur.
3 Indeed its indignities have the burn of care
And if they persist over man, they grow easier to bear.
4 And mix my cup with the saliva of Shirr
Sweet for the thirsty, as a watering place and a tavern,
5 From a mouth where pearls had been set
With pure saliva if saliva is typically treacherous.

³⁰⁷ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 232-233, #815)

6 And many's the friend

Whose eye and tongue were sickened by intoxication,

7 Whom we excused from the cup until

He was cheerful to the cupbearer and stretched out fingertips.

8 He continued racing while he was unrestrained;

Then we hung reins on him.

Several examples of short poem closers functioning in internal cadences are examined in depth in chapter 4, sections 4.1.2 and 4.1.3; other examples will be noted in passing as they arise.

2.2.3 The Shapes of the Closer and Opener Effects

Having observed an opener effect throughout the lyric corpus and a closer effect operating in short poems, we may now ask: What form do these effects take? How can we account for the difference between the concentrations in the first and second halves of poems? What does the increase/decrease of features over the course of the poem look like?

We can answer this question by expanding upon the method used in the last section.

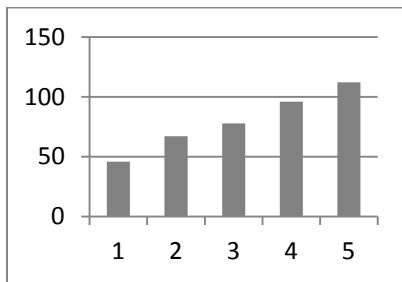
What if, instead of dividing each poem in half and comparing the two halves, we divided them up into more pieces? We will replicate the procedure described above, dividing features (based upon the line in which they occur) into quintiles, and sorting them

accordingly.³⁰⁸ Such a procedure would be useless in examining a small number of features, but by looking at hundreds of examples at once we can look for patterns. We can also compare short vs. long closers on this scale in an effort to see where exactly they diverge.

2.2.3.1: Closer Shapes

The graphic representation of similes sorted by quintile throughout poems of 7 lines or less is quite striking:

Figure 39: Similes in Short Poems by Quintile



It appears to form a very close approximation of a linear progression from the beginning to the end of the poem. Simile frequency ranges from fewer than 50 similes observed in the first quintiles of short poems, to more than 100 in the final quintiles. This means that, while similes do occur at every part of a short poem, the likelihood of encountering a

³⁰⁸ This sorting by quintile is more simply said than done. In particular, complications arise in attempting to sort lines of poems which are not multiples of five. The methodology used for that was similar to the one employed for poems with N.5 lines, described in footnote 294; if the dividing point between quintiles of a poem should fall, say, 20% of the way through a line that's being sorted, 20% of the tally for that poem is placed into one quintile, and the other 80% into the other. The excel spreadsheet that computed these tallies (from a simple listing of x feature appearing in the y line of a poem of z length) is available upon request; the author is much indebted to Tony Vila for masterminding the spreadsheet's design and providing technical support as needed.

simile increases steadily with every new line, such that the reader is more than twice as likely to encounter a simile at the end of a poem as at the beginning. Since there are a number of similes in the opening quintiles, we would expect that it is entirely possible to find individual poems that have more similes earlier in the poem than later on, as in the following poem:

Poem 135³⁰⁹

1 Lightning is in his smiling

And wine is in his kissed lips.

2 And his face within his hair

*Is **like** a full moon within its darkness.*

3 My guardian slept, drunk,

Supervising me in his dreams.

4 And the one I love spent the night with me,

Feeding me the saliva of his mouth.³¹⁰

However, it is easier to find examples of poems with more similes later in the poem than earlier on. The poem that follows provides another example of the by-now familiar case where a short poem begins with declarative exposition that moves towards imagery and culminates in a vivid simile.

Poem 136³¹¹

³⁰⁹ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 389, #327)

³¹⁰ As a mother bird feeds her young, with the bill

1 We were rained on; rather, we were immersed in the middle of an ocean

And I was not one who called for the falling of rain.

2 The sun continued³¹² to look at us with a glance,

Sick, emaciated, from behind a veil.

3 It tries to rend the clouds, as they refuse

***Like** an impotent man who wants to deflower a maiden.*

The following longer poem begins with a traditional call to pass around the wine, and moves from there to an extended imagistic passage. The last line closes up in an extended simile—the most vivid and specific one in the poem—but other similes are involved in the development of the descriptive passage, and they’re not concentrated neatly at the end of the poem.

Poem 137³¹³

1 Pour me a drink and make thrilling music

And hand around the cup and select

2 The daughter of the vine whose part has grown white,

And she has spent eras in her jug.

3 She is clothed in chain mail of silver

***You’d think** what lay beneath was gold.*

*4 And it’s **as though** the water, when it was mixed*

³¹¹ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 523, #1018)

The word translated as “continued” also has a meaning relating to shade³¹²

³¹³ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 32, #612)

Were stirring up flame in her cup.

5 Within its sides it churns

Bubbles, with which it induces bubbles

*6 **Like** the deeply colored horse which the cavalier*

Reins with pearls around the neck.³¹⁴

In other poems, however, the density of similes increases as the poem approaches its end.

In the 4-line poem that follows, the third line introduces one simile, and the fourth line builds upon the image with an accelerating parallel simile construction.

Poem 138³¹⁵

1 Circulate the cup among us

Oh cupbearer, for the sake of ecstasy

2 Don't you see the night turning away

As the light of morning draws near?

*3 And the Pleiades are **like** a cup*

When it appears and then sets

*4 For it's **as though** the rising were a cupbearer*

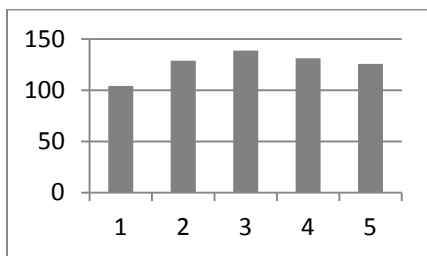
*And **as though** the setting were drinking*

³¹⁴ The "deep color" can refer either to a dark red wine or to a dark bay horse. The word translated as "reins" can refer either to putting a rope around a horse's neck, or to putting on a necklace.

³¹⁵ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 34-35, #617)

How does our graph of similes by quintile in short poems compare with the corresponding graph of similes in poems that are longer than seven lines? We know that there's no notable difference between the first and second halves of the poem; does that mean that in longer poems the similes are distributed randomly throughout the poem? If that were the case, we should expect the graph of a large number of similes distributed through long poems to be flat.

Figure 40: Similes in Long Poems by Quintile



Let us first observe the profound difference between the placements of similes in long and short poems. The difference in shape, alongside the absence of statistically significant closer effect, supports the decision to treat the occurrence of similes in long and short poems separately. We should, however, also note that the shape of the graph of similes in long poems—while much more like a flat line than is the graph of similes in short poems—is not exactly flat either. The top does seem to form a shallow arc, where there are fewer similes at the beginning *and* at the end than in the middle. The drop-off at the end appears to counteract any statistically observable effect of the drop-off at the beginning.

Naturally, there are no shortage of examples of long poems which have more similes in the middle than either the beginning or the end. By way of example, the poem that follows contains the highest density of similes towards the middle. The similes in this long poem can partly be understood with reference to cadences—the similes in lines 13 and 22 occur in cadential lines—but not entirely so, since the similes in lines 2 and 9 do not occur near cadences.

Poem 139³¹⁶

1 Is it on account of the dwelling place in the valley,

And the abode of the threadbare ruins ?

*2 And the stones, **like** wetnurses*

Standing against an imitation calf?³¹⁷

3 That you were childish in passion, despite having nearly reached years of discretion

In conviction of faith and clarity of mind

4 At the time of heads growing white

And blame for error

5 And repairing the whiteness with dye

—And what repair is there for whiteness?

6 I reared against calamities

A strong horse, reliable runner

7 He is given the milk of the camel herd to drink

³¹⁶ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v.II, pg. 364, #892)

³¹⁷ The skin of a baby camel is stuffed with grass and given to the mother camel when its baby has died, so that she’ll continue to give milk. (Lane 270)

- And is not made gaunt by ill-treatment*
- 8 *And when the man riding behind³¹⁸ wobbled*
- Because of the well-grown flesh*
- 9 *We squeezed him into an enclosure*
- Like** the squeezing of the rope into an iron chape,³¹⁹*
- 10 *An excited horse who makes the rider secure³²⁰*
- Against fatigue and stumbling*
- 11 *Whom the irons make unhappy—*
- A galloper with a joyful step*
- 12 *Among the noble riding horses.*
- He follows behind them, urging them on.³²¹*
- 13 *Their locks are **like** palm-branches*
- And the tails are **like** Cypress.*
- 14 *But there was one who was sprawled out³²²,*
- Charming in flirtation and vanity*
- 15 *Beyond all comparison—*
- He sought to overcome his baser impulse towards me.*
- 16 *I was daring with him—*
- It takes a sorrowful man to be daring.*
- 17 *And I left behind the bride of sleep*

³¹⁸ i.e. the farther back of two people riding on the same camel

³¹⁹ The meaning of this line remains obscure

³²⁰ I read *fārisa* rather than *fārisu* here

³²¹ Camel drivers urged on camels by singing to them (Lane 533)

³²² The Arabic means literally “cast aside”; the best I could do in interpreting this was to imagine him cast upon the ground due to intoxication.

And dreams for the lonely one.

18 And I came to a full moon

Which filled my eyes with light.

19 And we spent the night in the hands of fear

Harvesting the fruits of pleasure.

20 And his teeth gave me to drink

A wine from a sweet mouth.

21 A gazelle with slender flanks

And a delicate waist

22 And the fruits of the fingertips

*Of his hands grew ripe **like** a bunch of dates.³²³*

23 Oh, you who threaten me! Shorten

The step of haughtiness

24 And don't spit out malice for me

For I am not mastered by violence.

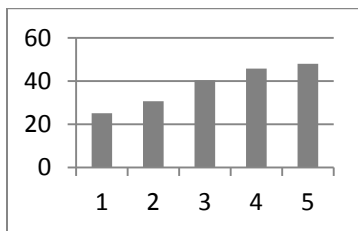
25 And give to me, despite yourself,

And take from me what I offer freely.

³²³ According to the editor, since dates grow red when they grow ripe this refers to the use of henna on fingertips

Having examined the frequency curves of similes in quintiles throughout short and long poems, we may now do the same with if/then structures. In this case, of course, the “short poems” will refer to poems of 4 lines or fewer, while the “long poems” will refer to poems of 5 lines or more. The short poems graph is shown below:

Figure 41: If/Then in Short Poems By Quintile



We see here a progression very similar to that found with similes in short poems: a roughly linear progression upwards as poems proceed from beginning to end. As in the case of the simile, we can consider some examples of poems that behave in the same manner as the composite statistical poem. The following poem, for instance, starts by discussing the lover’s general situation and ends with a rhetorical twist—the concluding if/then structure serves not only to articulate an argument, but to personalize the discussion from the generalized lover to the narrator himself.

Poem 140³²⁴

1 The body of the lover wraps himself in the clothes of emaciation

And his eyelid bekohls itself with the tears of desire.

2 And how does someone emaciated and love-struck survive in this condition?

³²⁴ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 367, #294)

No trace or remnant of his endurance has survived
3 And his blamers have continued blaming him—Let him not!
*If they knew what I experience, **then** they wouldn't blame.*

Somewhat similarly, the next poem begins with two lines of generality, describes the specific situation in line 3, and concludes with a punchy (albeit somewhat sophistic) argument in the concluding line in the form of an if/then structure.

Poem 141³²⁵

1 The trials of a lover are long, long
And the endurance of a lover is short, short.
2 And the lapses of the messengers of love are beyond telling
And how many a lover has the messenger done in?
3 You have been suspicious of me, oh my lord
And suspicions about someone like me are not courteous.
*4 If I have been faithless, **then** who is there that is faithful?*
Do you know—may I ransom you—what you are saying?

Though the poem that follows is a fundamentally descriptive poem, it does not build to its conclusion using simile—each line of the poem has a simile in it. Instead, the poem uses if/then structures in the second and third lines to build up a description in the form of argument (as we have seen elsewhere).

³²⁵ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 361, #282)

Poem 142³²⁶

1 And there was a yellow wine which came to me by morning as the stars

Were throbbing like pounding hearts.

2 It was as though the bubbles, if it was decanted

Were threads of pearls upon gold.

3 You would think them a stirred-up firebrand

Which blazes if the winds scrape it.

And of course, there are many cases of if/then constructions that do not fit the trend of gravitating towards the ends of poems. In the poem that follows, the if/then structure occurs in the center of the poem, in the second line of three.³²⁷

Poem 143³²⁸

1 Oh, many's the cup I've been served, of her choicest wine

By one slender in gait, with clear, beautiful teeth.

2 If his glances partake of her redness³²⁹

You see silver gilded by the wine.

3 It was as though in his cheeks were some of what he came carrying

³²⁶ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 36, #619)

³²⁷ It would be disingenuous to ignore the fact that this poem ends (and culminates) in a simile. It's not infrequently the case that when closer features do not occur at the ends of poems they are being "displaced" by other closer features which do occur at the ends. A quantitative evaluation of that phenomenon is beyond the scope of this work, since it would require a more exhaustive cataloguing of closers (which should definitely include gnomic statements, and probably also prayers).

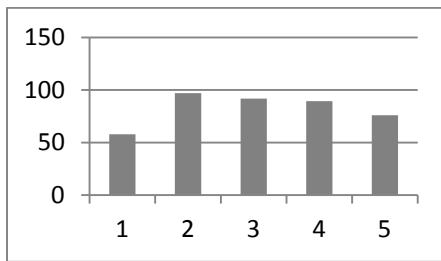
³²⁸ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 43, #628)

³²⁹ In some cases, such as this one, I find it helpful to retain the original grammatical gender of inanimate words in Arabic.

In his hands—the wine’s first gush, when it was mixed.

Having seen the distribution across quintiles of the if/then structure in short poems, we will now consider how the same structure is distributed in longer poems:

Figure 42: If/Then in Long Poems by Quintile



The distribution of if/then structures in long poems bears a strong resemblance to the distribution of similes in longer poems. We see once again that the distribution of features, while not notably greater in the second half than the first, is not flat. Instead, it is characterized by a low showing in the first quintile, which is balanced out by a gradual decline towards the end. As in the case of similes, it is of course easy to find examples of if/then structures clustered in the middle of longer poems. In the poem that follows, the two if/then structures both occur towards the early middle of the poem. In line 7, the structure serves a cadential function, wrapping up the 4-line aside to the friend (lines 4-7) by making an argument; the next line shifts reference and starts referring to the narrator’s specific predicament with the narrator in the first person. The if/then structure in line 9, by contrast, serves no obviously cadential function.

1 *She left you, blaming without a crime.*

She did you wrong, having become bold in wrongdoing.

2 *And thus the beloved, when he wants to hate*

Recalls sins, and insists on separation.

3 *Peace from Salma does not endure*

*And kind acts don't repay with affection from Nu'am.*³³¹

4 *Oh my friend, stop over at the remnants*

*In al-Aḥmadī—may you traces be given drink.*³³²

5 *And let the tears run, and what they do—*

There is no alternative to the tears of the careworn there.

6 *You*³³³ *had been heedless of the griefs which came to him by night*

And fixed his eyes along with the stars.

7 *If* *you don't help him, then leave him alone, when love*

Has blocked up paths of prudence.

8 *I've been informed: she is determined upon severance*

Indeed I have no resolve against it—

9 *The horses follow the headstrong horse and if*

They catch up to him, he rejoins them despite himself.

10 *She said "You have suffered" and my body has every right to*

³³⁰ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 374-377, #305)

³³¹ "peace" and "Salma" have the same root in the Arabic, as do "kind acts" and "Nu'am"

³³² According to the editor, al-Aḥmadī is one of the castles of al-Mu'tamid in Samarra.

³³³ The printed text reads "nimtu" (I slept), but the best sense of the lines seems to come from reading it as "nimta", and understanding this and the following lines as between the friend (you) and the poet/lover himself (referred to in the third person).

Have suffered. Have you allowed any of the body to survive?

11 The messenger has divulged your speech to me;

Take care lest he know too much—³³⁴

12 He is more of a gossip about the secret of my passion than my emaciation

And carrying more tales than my ear to my comprehension

13 Loose with my secret to enemies, for he doesn't stop

Feeding those who slander me.

14 Oh Shirr, love of you is killing me quickly

Or setting my skin directly upon my bones.

15 By God, no savor is left to life after you

And to the delightful assemblies.

16 What do you decree about a worried lover?

He has been forbidden healing, so he persists in emaciation.

17 Is what you have done with him done with serious judgment

Or is that your jest in judgment?

18 Oh Shirr, You have tortured me for some time—

Enough sins against me!

The poem that follows is much shorter—as we've noted, "short poems" as applied to if/then structures involve only poems of 2,3, and 4 lines. Even in this five-line poem, however, we may observe a noticeable cadence between lines 3 and 4—with the first section addressing the beloved's eyes and the second section addressing the narrator's

³³⁴ This translation follows an alternate reading provided by the editor—*yazdād* instead of *tazdād*

own eyes. The if/then structure in line 3 may thus be understood as an internal cadence (in the form of an argument).

Poem 145³³⁵

1 Say to the languid pupils

And the forelocks in ringlets,

2 Is there anything remaining

*In my heart or in my body unconquered by love?*³³⁶

3 If you will not slake my thirst

*Out of miserliness, **then** moisten my last spark of life!*³³⁷

4 Oh eye, whose eyelids are

Rent apart with sleeplessness,

5 You have remained in the bonds of love,

A wretch within the one who is wretched.

The distribution of similes and if/then structures are thus observed to resemble one another, in samples of both short and long poems (though these differ from one another). On the basis of these relationships, it is possible to posit a characteristic behavior of closers. Closers may be said to operate differently in short poems and in long ones

³³⁵ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 338, #247)

³³⁶ Literally: “is there in my heart for love or my body, anything remaining?” Clause order was compromised for the sake of clarity in translation.

³³⁷ It is the languid pupils being addressed here, with the suggestion that they moisten the beloved’s last hours with tears.

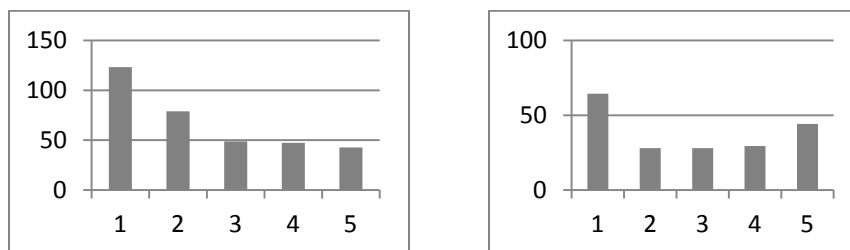
(though the border between the two varies according to the feature). In short poetry, the closer tends to increase in frequency in a linear fashion as one reads from the beginnings of poems to their ends. In longer poetry, closers avoid the beginnings of poems and grow gradually less frequent again towards the ends.

2.2.3.2 Opener Shapes

As we observed in section 2.2.2, the opener effect, unlike the closer effect, was found in evidence for openers of all lengths. However, as we observed in section 2.2.3.1, dividing poems into quintiles can provide a lot of information about the shape of frequency distributions throughout poems that are invisible when the poems are divided only in half. Assuming that the features are distributed in the same way through long and short poems, the graphs corresponding to each should look relatively similar. If they do not, we can learn something about the way opener function changes as poems get longer.

In the case of address/content, dividing poems at 7 lines (the same division point we applied to similes) produces an instructive contrast. The two graphs are shown side by side below:

Figure 43: Address/Content in Short Poems by Quintile (left) and in Long Poems by Quintile (right)



While the opener effect is clear in both of these graphs, the shapes of the two are somewhat different. Both graphs have a particularly high instance of address/content structures in the first quintile, followed by a rapid drop-off in the second and third, quite unlike the linear trend evident in the closers—this leads to the speculation that the opening effect might be due in large part to a preference for statements beginning with “Oh!” in the opening lines of poems—a preference which is widespread enough in Arabic poetry to qualify as self-evident³³⁸; the following poem provides an illustration of this well-known trend:

Poem 146³³⁹

1 *Oh my friend, don't revile me and don't blame*

For love is the most inevitable disaster of nobility.

2 *Little Shirr has turned away, and she does not talk to me.*

How long is this false accusation against the lover, how long?

3 *Her beauties work together against my blood*

But hold the enchantment of her eyes responsible for my blood.

4 *Slender of hip, her face is a moon*

From which the darkness of black nights is split asunder.

³³⁸ Supposing that the opener effect in both graphs is due to a high rate of address/content in the opening lines of poems, the fact that the graph of short poems has a more gradual drop-off from the first quintile than the graph of longer poems can be explained by the way the graphs are made. In a poem of two lines, an instance of address/content in the first line is marked equally in the first and second quintile, and even has some effect upon the third. In a poem of more than 5 lines, on the other hand, only the first quintile is affected by an instance of address/content in the first line—and this difference could explain why the drop-off after the first quintile is more sudden in longer poems.

³³⁹ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 385, #320)

5 Her anklets call to her locks

So they come from her head to foot.

The two graphs differ most notably in what happens after the first hemistich. In the short poems, the graph seems to level off after the third hemistich. In the long poems, by contrast, there's a notable bump upward in the fifth quintile. This bump may represent a secondary closer tendency in "oh" in long poems, a tendency perhaps reflected in Scheindlin's observation of apostrophe at the ends of poems.³⁴⁰ There's no shortage of examples in the corpus of address/content structures serving as a sort of coda to a poem. The two poems that follow are not reproduced in their entirety, but they both illustrate 2-line address/content structures that bring a long poem to its conclusion.

Poem 147³⁴¹

1 May a downpour give the Jazīra drink,

With shade and trees, and Dayr 'Abdūn.

[15 lines intervene]

17 Oh profligate of gaze, oh sweetest of mankind,

Oh banisher of my hopes, oh summoner of my caution—

18 Look at a sick one who complains to you of his condition

If you wished, you would not afflict him with tears and sleeplessness.

³⁴⁰ (Scheindlin, Form and structure in the poetry of Al-Mu'tamid Ibn 'Abbād 1974, 117-123); c.f. Chapter 1, note 120

³⁴¹ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 102-106, #693)

1 Oh hard earth, may the rains be generous to you!

In you is my heart's desire, as long as I live.

2 Oh, the perfume of your fragrance when the dawn smiles

(and in it there are rumors of the garden)

3 It is as though it touched the carnations or

A perfumer scattered camphor upon it.

[17 lines intervene]

21 Oh branch of the Ben tree, which a girdle binds

And neck of a gazelle which buttons enfold,

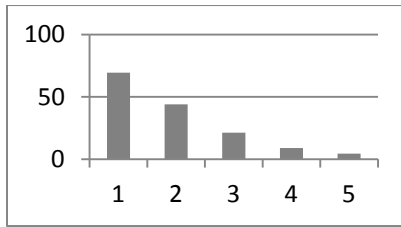
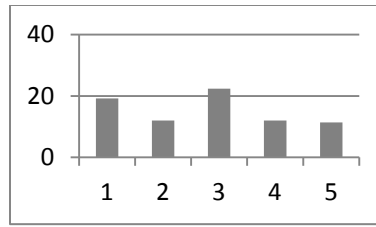
22 You think my people waste my blood—

But it has never happened that Hāshim's vengeance has been wasted.

We can make a similar comparison between long and short poems for *wāw rubba*. In the case of *wāw rubba* it is necessary to move to considerably longer poems before detecting a difference between longer and shorter poems. We will therefore compare, on the left, poems that are twelve lines or fewer, and on the right, poems that are 13 lines or longer.

Figure 44: *Wāw Rubba* in Short Poems by Quintile (left) and in Long Poems by Quintile (right)

³⁴² (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 112-115, #699)



Whereas the graphs of similes and if/then structures resembled one another in both short and long instantiations, neither the *wāw rubba* graphs for short or long poems resemble their address/content counterparts very closely. In the case of the short poems, the decline in feature frequency over the poem is approximately parabolic; like the closer graphs, the curve is consistent over all five quintiles rather than declining rapidly after the beginning of the poem and then leveling off in the way address/content structures appear to. While the chart accounts for the casual observation that there are many instances of *wāw rubba* in the first lines of short poems, this fact cannot account for the steady decline in feature frequency through the graph. This comes as something of a surprise: the propensity of short lyric poems to begin with *wāw rubba* should be readily apparent to anyone reading through the *dīwān*, but the consistent decline in device frequency throughout short poems is not. Nonetheless, the corpus does contain examples of poems where *wāw rubba* occurs early in a poem but not in the first line. In the short poem that follows, for instance, *wāw rubba* occurs in the second line of five:

Poem 149³⁴³

I I went for a cup by morning, and by evening

³⁴³ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 148-149, #737)

And I saw no harm in what the soul desired.

2 And there was one who resembled the moon in the eyes of mankind,

He's a man, but he is the most charming of men.

3 He gave me wine to drink from his hands and from his saliva

And he intoxicated me two intoxications, rather than my companions.

4 If ever he is generous to me when sneaking off with a kiss

I find coolness in it, upon the heat of my breaths.

5 How many a drinking companion precedes me to slumber!

How many a drinking companion have I preceded to the cup!

In long poems, by contrast, *wāw rubba* frequency is elevated in the first and third quintiles, and otherwise quite steady. While noting that the sample size for *wāw rubba* in long poems is too small to make any definitive statement about it, we can posit that in long lyric poems *wāw rubba* occurs in two main capacities: near the beginnings of poems, and around the middle. In the long poem that follows, for instance, *wāw rubba* occurs in the second line of 13 (the first quintile):

Poem 150³⁴⁴

1 Blamers, stop blaming me! Take a drink! And give me some too!

Is life—be honest!—anything other than that?—by my life!

2 Many's the fabricator of feuds, who rebels against reins

Twisting his sleeves³⁴⁵, wicked in actions.

³⁴⁴ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 46, #633)

3 *He has a gaze that doesn't settle in place,*
Wandering about, a vagabond among glances.

[10 more lines follow]

Correspondingly Poem 139 (cited in full on pg. 181 above) provides an example of *wāw rubba* occurring in line 14 of 25 (the third quintile). The lines immediately surrounding are reproduced here—as generally when *wāw rubba* occurs in the middle of a poem, it's serving as the opening line of a new section.

12 *Among the noble riding horses.*
*He follows behind them, urging them on.*³⁴⁶

13 *Their locks are **like** palm-branches*
*And the tails are **like** Cypress.*

14 *But there was one who was sprawled out*³⁴⁷,
Charming in flirtation and vanity

15 *Beyond all comparison—*
He sought to overcome his baser impulse towards me.

Unlike the closers, the openers differ significantly from one another. *Wāw rubba* and address-content differ in their distributions throughout poems: in the short poems, *wāw*

³⁴⁵ The exact significance of this image is unclear. Perhaps the sleeves are twisted in order to hide something inside or behind them, or in order to whisper behind them?

³⁴⁶ Camel drivers urged on camels by singing to them (Lane 533)

³⁴⁷ The Arabic means literally “cast aside”; the best I could do in interpreting this was to imagine him cast upon the ground due to intoxication.

rubba shows a steady decline throughout the poem, whereas address/content shows a peak at the beginning followed by a leveling off. In the long poems, both features show an elevated first quintile, after which *wāw rubba* shows a boost in the third quintile while address/content shows a boost in the fifth. However, the *wāw rubba* and address content structures do share one property, which is also shared between both short and long and short poems: a notable preference for the first quintile, regardless of what else might be going on in addition to that. The individual tendency of “address/content” and *wāw rubba* structures to occur as beginning gestures in lyric poetry is readily apparent; however, the combination of these tendencies enables us to propose a strong poem-initial preference as a characteristic of openers. This observation corresponds with the finding in chapter 1 that openers in couplets tend to concentrate, not only in the first line, but in the first hemistich. At the same time, the more gradual linear rise in closer frequency as poems progress corresponds to the observation in chapter 1 that closers often encompass the full second line of a couplet. In chapter 1, we observed that openers tend to function more as ways of getting the attention of the reader at the beginning of a poem, whereas closers function more in providing a climactic rise to closure. We can thus say, at least for short poems, that this distinction continues to apply on a broader scale. The two examples that follow, which both begin with openers and end with closers, are selected as illustrations of this contrast. In both cases, the opener draws the reader into the scenario, while the closers constitute the essence of the poem’s rhetorical gist.

Poem 151³⁴⁸

1 **And there was** a pond which blossoms with a water lily

Whose colors are beautiful in quality.

2 Which looks during the day with an astounded eye

With eyelids fixed open.

3 And **if** the night appears, **then** its eyelids

Are turned downward into the depths of the pond.

4 It's **as though** all of its branches

Were carrying a jewel at their tops.

Poem 152³⁴⁹

1 **Oh** eye that was made heavy as it is heavy,

It passed lightly by us³⁵⁰, and didn't stop.

2 And a sorcerer smeared it with tar in order to kill me³⁵¹

So I repented from my preceding repentance.

3 He gazed, as powerful with his eye's glances

—a stratagem of Iblis—as the eye itself was weak.

4 And I am not forgetting what was wrought on his cheek

By the nūns of his forelocks, which were slanted.

5 God formed him in a wondrous form

*Which, **if** it is said 'like a branch on a sand-dune', —is disdainful.*

³⁴⁸ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 478, #982) Regarding a white water lily

³⁴⁹ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 249-250, #119)

³⁵⁰ Like a camel making a difficult journey

³⁵¹ The smearing of the eye with kohl is likened here to the smearing of camels with tar

2.2.4 First-line and Last-line Effects

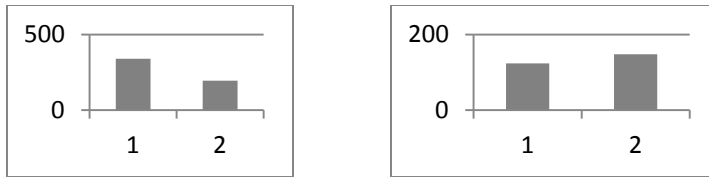
The discussion of the address/content structure in the last section raised a question that can be applied more generally: to what extent can opener and closer effects be accounted for by a preference for openers to appear in the first line specifically, or for closers to appear in the last line? We can test the effect of first and last lines on the overall opener and closer effects by removing the first or the last lines from the data-set, and comparing the results.³⁵² We can do this with each structure in turn:

2.2.4.1 Address/Content

Since the quintile distribution of the address/content structure led to speculation that its entire opener effect might be accounted for by a first-line preference, it seems appropriate to begin here. The two graphs below provide a side-by-side comparison of the address/content distribution (into the first and second halves of the poems), both including entries that occur in the first line (left) and disregarding them (right)

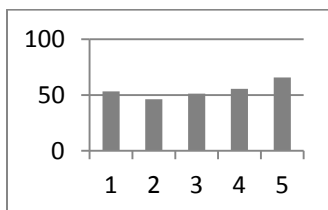
Figure 45: Address/Content distribution, with all lines (left) and disregarding line 1 entries (right)

³⁵² The protocol here is to remove all entries from the database in which the feature line/total lines reads 1/n (in the case of a first line effect) or n/n (in the case of a last-line effect). After that, it is necessary to reduce the total number of lines by 1 in all the remaining entry, and in the case where the first lines were removed, also reduce the feature line by 1. So if an entry originally read 2/4, after removing the first lines from consideration the entry becomes 1/3, and after removing the last lines it becomes 2/3. In either case, this has the effect of turning couplets into one-line poems, which are not helpful in determining distribution of features over multiple lines. Couplets are therefore removed from all samples that remove first and last lines—a rather significant omission which might well impose distortionary effects of its own.



The first graph (which we've seen before) shows a statistically significant preference for the first half of the poem, when considering all occurrences of the address/content structure. The second, which omits from consideration all entries of address/content in the first lines of poems, falls slightly below the threshold for statistical significance (when the number of entries is smaller, the effect has to be stronger in order to register); however, it appears to be depicting a mild *closer* effect. This contrast provides fairly clear evidence to the effect that the opener effect we've observed before is entirely due to the propensity of address/content structures to occur in the first lines of poems. It also provides a little bit of support for the idea (described in section 2.2.3.2 above and discussed again in chapter 3) that the address/content structure has a secondary closer effect, though this hypothesis would need to be tested with a larger sample in order to have robust support. This possible effect will be discussed further in chapter 3. We can get a better idea of what such a closer effect might look like by looking at a quintile division of the address/content structure without line one entries:

Figure 46: Address/Content Distribution by Quintile, Disregarding Line 1 Entries

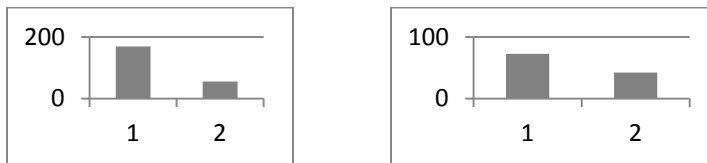


With the exception of the first quintile (which might be taken as a very slight echo of the first line effect in the early lines of the poem, perhaps attributable to parallelism) the subsequent quintiles display something like the linear increase in frequency which we associate with closers.

2.2.4.2 *Wāw rubba*

Turning to the *wāw rubba* structure, we can make the same side-by-side comparison between all *wāw rubba* entries and a set that excludes entries that occur in the first line:

Figure 47: *Wāw rubba* distribution, with all lines (left) and disregarding line 1 entries (right)



While the opener effect is slightly less pronounced in the second graph than the first, it retains an opener preference which (despite the smaller sample size) remains statistically significant. Does this bipartite division conceal changes in the opener effect that would be apparent with a more fine-grained observation? In order to find out, we can provide side-by-side comparisons of *wāw rubba* quintile distributions with and without the first-line entries, for both short poems (12 lines and fewer, as above) and long ones (13 and more):

Figure 48: *Wāw Rubba* quintile distribution in short poems, including all lines (left) and disregarding line 1 entries (right)

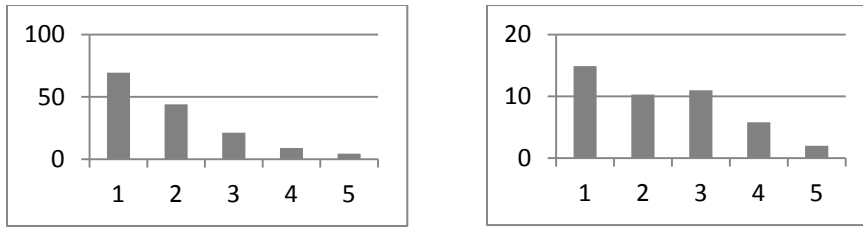
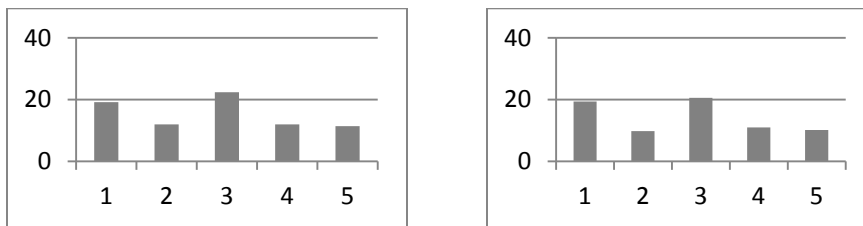


Figure 49: *Wāw Rubba* quintile distribution in long poems, including all lines (left) and disregarding line 1 entries (right)



The graph of short poems does change somewhat when we remove first line entries. The sample size is much smaller (unsurprisingly, given how many entries occur by two-line poems and in first lines of poems), and it's hard to tell how much of the change might be attributable to individual variation; however, it seems worth noting that with the first lines removed we can see a version of the third-line bump that's so prominent in the longer poems. This suggests the possibility that the proclivity of *wāw rubba* to mark transitions from one theme to another can also be found in poems of length shorter than 12 (this seems plausible given that we have plenty of evidence, as discussed in section 2.2.2 above, of polythematic poems that are shorter than 12 lines), though that effect is smaller than in longer poems.

The graphs of the long poems are distinctive for their extreme similarity. There are, of course, no couplets to remove from consideration in poems of 13 lines or longer; however, we might have expected a significant change to result from removing the first

line entries. As it turns out, virtually no such entries exist in poems of 13 lines or longer. This provides evidence of an inflection point that readers of Arabic poetry should be naturally inclined to anticipate: the point at which *wāw rubba* stops being used as a first line device for poems. On the other hand, now that we know that the heightened first quintile in long poems distribution cannot be attributed to occurrences of *wāw rubba* in the first line, we are left to conclude that it must be due to transitional *wāw rubba* occurring in the first quintile of poems, as shown here:

Poem 153³⁵³

1 Oh, provision us with a promise even if you will not provision us

And return an answer to my words with a generous temperament.

2 May God give drink to the days of youth and its era;

They gave me drink stingily, and they didn't quench my thirst.

3 Many's the barren, uncultivated desert— where the jinn whistle,

Featureless; in such places the weakling perishes³⁵⁴—

4 Have I crossed on a swift camel, agile

And frightened, when dawn was not yet unsheathed.

5 Cleaving the dark of a night whose stars are laid bare³⁵⁵ by northern winds

³⁵³ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. III, pg. 27-29, #1162). This poem was written in elegy of Abu Muḥammad ibn al-Mutawakkil, whose name was Muḥammad. This poem presents another excellent example of a polythematic poem which employs some closer features in internal cadences: the simile in line 7, and the if/then clauses in lines 10 and 16 (although in each of the latter two cases the if/then clause appears in the penultimate line of the section, and the final line of the section employs the well-established gnomic closing structure). Opening lines of new sections also employ *wāw rubba* (in line 3) and address/content structures (in lines 8 and 12).

³⁵⁴ The words translated as “weakling” and “perishes” look and sound very similar, particularly since poetic license has elided the *hamza* of “weakling” so that it resembles the *yā* of “perishes”.

*Blighting the fingers from the hand.*³⁵⁶

6 Until dawn appeared in the night, as though it were

A necklace of seashells on a black neck.

7 As though the camel's two hands (as she made pebbles fly)

Were the two hands of a money-tester or an ill-aiming archer.

8 My brother, don't be frightened of mishap, but stand firm,

And hold in contempt what you guard against for tomorrow.

9 Men are the sons of fate, ripped apart by its calamities

For all them depart with a severed limb.

10 And indeed I have seen fate numerous in its mishaps

And if a mishap hasn't already frightened, then it's as if it had.

11 And the only wealth is wealth of the soul, not of the hand

And generosity is only generosity before a promise.

12 My friend, no view is not pleasing in my eyes

The face of the earth has changed for the worse after Muhammad.

13 I see a time in which no catastrophes are left

Alas, so strike whom you wish, oh death, and exert yourself!

14 Leave me alone! May my eye be generous upon his grave with blood.

Do you know who is under the layered surface?

15 I have become weary of the blandishments of wishes after his death

With the weariness of one who puts his hopes on the mirage in a desert.

³⁵⁵ The translation "laid bare" results from reading *tu`arri* instead of *tufarrī*, as per an alternate reading by the editor

³⁵⁶ The word translated as "blighting" employs an alternate reading identified by the editor: *yakhbalna* for *yakhtilna*

16 *If he were to complain, he would complain that his hand is blocked*

From generosity and the huge Indian sword.

17 *May a low-hanging thundering cloud give you rain to drink.*

Whenever it grows faint, may its thunderclouds say "increase!"

2.2.4.3 Similes and If/Then

As we've seen above, similes and if/then structures tend to behave in very similar ways; it will be therefore simpler in this case to discuss them together. On the other hand, we will treat long and short poems separately since their characteristic shapes are so different. We can evaluate a possible last-line effect in the closers, as we did for the openers, by showing the original graphs side by side with corresponding graphs in which entries that occurred in the last lines of poems are omitted from consideration. We will begin by considering a possible last-line effect in short poems:

Figure 50: Simile distribution in short poems, including all lines (left) and disregarding last line entries (right)

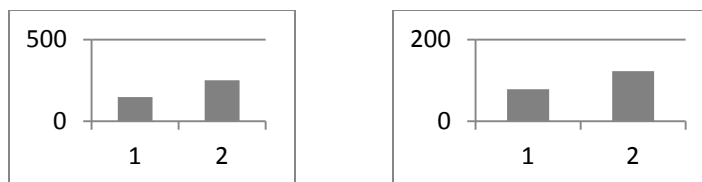
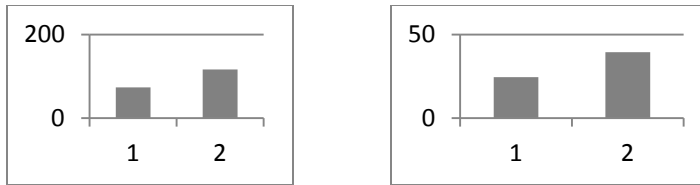


Figure 51: If/Then distribution in short poems, including all lines (left) and disregarding last line entries (right)



In both cases, while omitting the last lines of poems (and all couplets) from consideration reduces the sample size considerably, the omission appears to have a negligible effect on the strength closer effect. The closer effect is about equally strong after omitting the last line, and it's powerful enough to retain statistical significance even with the smaller sample size.³⁵⁷ For a closer examination, we can also break the poems down into quintiles:

Figure 52: Simile quintile distribution in short poems, including all lines (left) and disregarding last line entries (right)

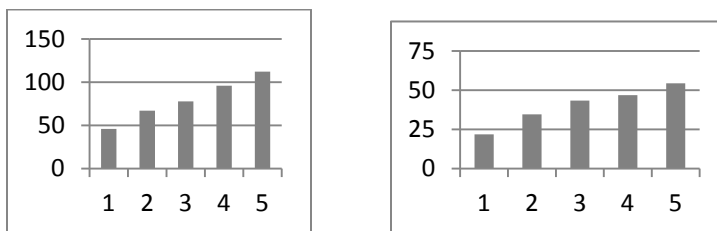
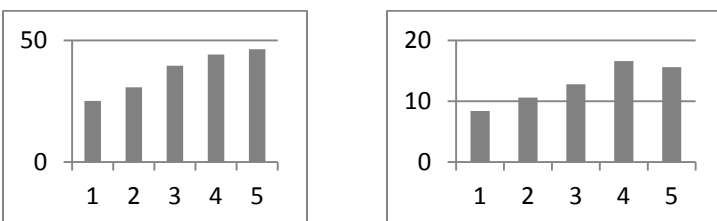


Figure 53: If/Then quintile distribution in short poems, including all lines (left) and disregarding last line entries (right)



³⁵⁷ This is an example of a graph that shows a statistically significant closer effect in if/then poems that omits couplets from consideration, as promised in footnote 296

Under closer examination, the graph of similes in short poems that omits last line entries from consideration is very similar to its equivalent graph including all entries. The if/then graphs are slightly more different, with the 4th quintile being slightly higher than the 5th; this difference seems likely to be due to the small sample size, but it's recommended that any future study that has a larger sample size of if/then occurrences keep an eye out for this effect recurring.³⁵⁸

Since long poems didn't show a statistically significant closer effect for if/then structures or similes anyway, there's no particular value to looking at the first-half/second-half division again. There is nevertheless some value to looking at the quintile distribution to see whether removing the last line from consideration changes anything in its shape.

Figure 54: Simile quintile distribution in long poems, including all lines (left) and disregarding last line entries (right)

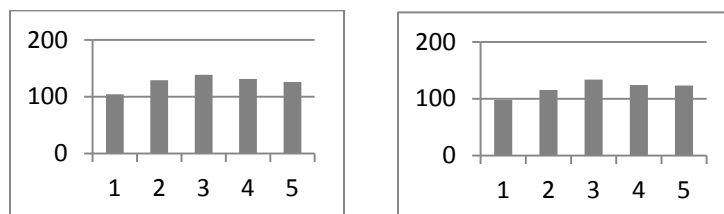
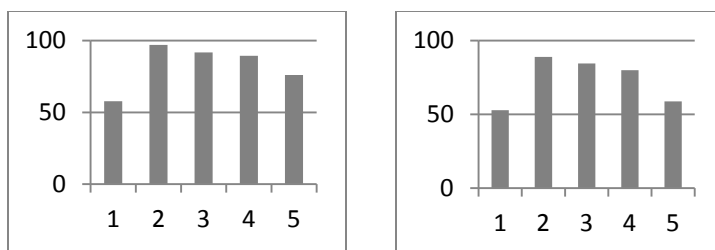


Figure 55: If/Then quintile distribution in long poems, including all lines (left) and disregarding last line entries (right)

³⁵⁸ The combination of the relatively small size of the if/then structure's closer effect with relatively small sample size of if/then attestations in the closers is acknowledged as a persistent issue in this chapter. In addition to leading to occasionally anomalous results (as in this case), it has the result that on more than one occasion analyses that require reducing the sample size results in the if/then closer effect losing statistical significance. Further study with other corpora will be helpful in addressing this issue, though in that case it will be necessary also to take into account characteristic differences between corpora. This will be discussed further in chapter 3.



The point to be made here is rather similar to the point made about the first-line *wāw rubba* effect in long poems: not only is there no appreciable effect in the shapes of the two graphs to removing instances of the feature that occur in the last line of the poem, there isn't even any appreciable effect in their *sizes*. That is to say, the number of similes and if/then structures that occur in the last lines of poems longer than 7 lines (in the case of similes) and 4 lines (in the case of if/then structures) is in fact negligible. The not-inconsiderable frequency of those features in the fifth-quintile of the left-hand graphs is not attributable to features occurring in the last line, to any relevant extent. Scheindlin's finding that similes are unlikely to occur in the last lines of long poems is thus corroborated here³⁵⁹.

Having determined that the closers manifest no evident last-line effect, it remains only to observe that, perhaps counterintuitively, both closers *do* manifest an evident first-line effect³⁶⁰. A side-by-side comparison of the graphs showing the distribution of all

³⁵⁹ On the other hand, Hamori's finding of if/then structures as a classic closing device in the last lines of poems in his sample appears to contrast with this finding (Hamori, *The composition of Mutanabbī's panegyrics to Sayf al-Dawla* 1992, 3). Of course, as this sample is entirely composed of lyric poems, whereas Hamori's study focused on *qaṣīdas*, that might account for the difference, along with any number of other potential confound factors.

³⁶⁰ For the sake of completeness, it should be noted that the openers manifest no interestingly corresponding last-line effect.

examples of the if/then and simile structures in short poems, vs. the same graphs removing first line examples from consideration, follows below:

Figure 56: Simile distribution in short poems, including all lines (left) and disregarding line 1 entries (right)

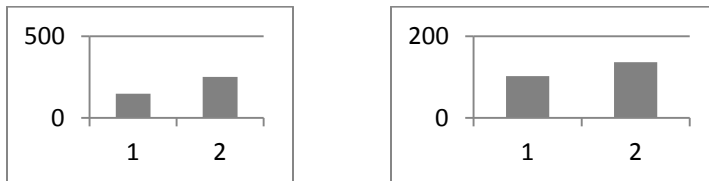
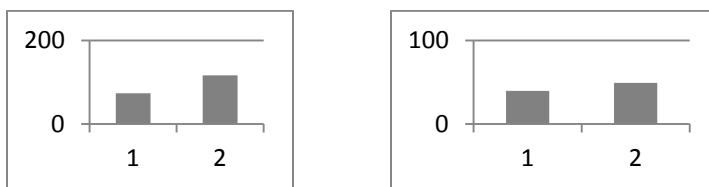


Figure 57: Simile distribution in short poems, including all lines (left) and disregarding line 1 entries (right)



While the closer effect is still visible after omitting last line attestations from consideration, the size of the effect shrinks in both cases; in the case of the if/then structure, the reduction in sample size combines with the reduction in effect size to drop the closer effect below the threshold for statistical significance. As usual, we can see the change more clearly by dividing the poems up into quintiles:

Figure 58: Simile distribution by quintile in short poems, including all lines (left) and disregarding line 1 entries (right)

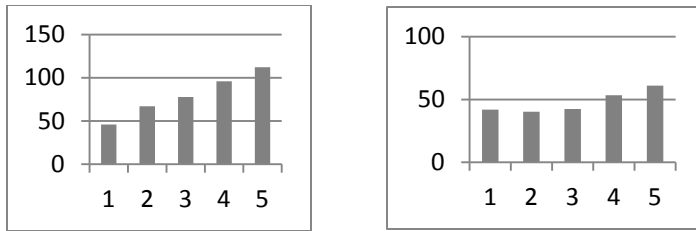
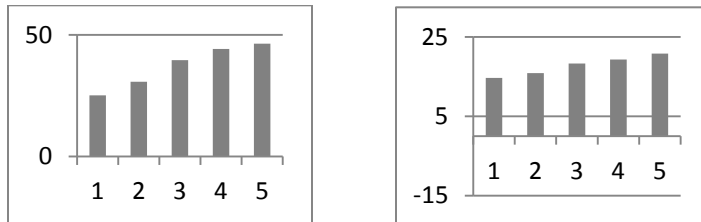


Figure 59: If/Then distribution by quintile in short poems, including all lines (left) and disregarding line 1 entries (right)



In both cases, the upward trend becomes noticeably flatter, especially at the beginning.

We thus learn that the linear upward trend, especially at the beginning of the poem, is

bolstered to a not-inconsiderable extent by a relatively strong aversion to the first line. As

it turns out, a similar effect can be observed in the long poems:

Figure 60: Simile distribution by quintile in long poems, including all lines (left) and disregarding line 1 entries (right)

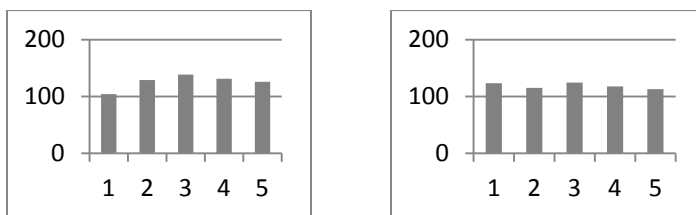
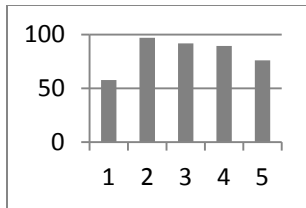
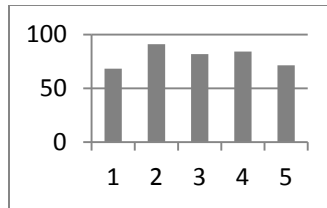


Figure 61: If/Then distribution by quintile in long poems, including all lines (left) and disregarding line 1 entries (right)



It was observed above in section 2.2.3.1 that the distribution of closers in long poems was marked by a jump upwards after the first quintile. We can see here that a noticeable fraction of that jump can be attributed to an aversion to closer structures occurring in the first lines of even longer poems. This is consistent with the explanation of the difference between the use of closers in long and short poems advanced above: if similes and if/then structures tend to occur in ending positions in short poems and intermediate cadential roles in longer poems, short and long poems ought to share an aversion to having these structures occur at the very beginnings of poems. It's easy to imagine that the poet characteristically resists putting these structures into first lines in particular, since first lines in particular should not sound cadential.

If short poems and long poems both begin with openers and avoid closers, the implication is that, for all their later structural differences, short poems and long ones tend to begin in more or less the same way. This is born out through examples of short and long poems whose opening lines are nevertheless very similar. The two examples that follow are perhaps a gimmicky demonstration of this principle—the second hemistichs of the first lines are actually identical—but this seems an effective demonstration of the principle that the aesthetic criteria applied to the first lines of shorter vs. longer poems are very similar.

Poem 154³⁶¹

1 Oh! Give it to me to drink; dawn has been walking in the darkness—

A wine like the color of fire, red, wine.

2 So he served me a cup that lit up his fingertips

It was poured out like a ruby and hollowed out pearls.

3 And when we gave it a taste of mixing, it ignited

And you'd imagine its radiance was shooting forth lightning when uncovered.

4 A friendly gazelle brought it around, a fawn

With a fluttering, sickly gaze and profligate glances

5 Knowledgeable about the glances of lovers, skillful

In surrendering his eyes whenever he's frightened.

6 His fluttering glance has continued whispering secrets to me

With the best and most pleasant of secret hopes.

7 And he diverts the secrets of love from their enemies

And through those glances he tosses out fruits that are hurriedly snatched up.

Poem 155³⁶²

1 Oh, the pleasant life is wine

A wine like the color of fire, red, wine.

2 It's as though the stars of night—when they are rising—

³⁶¹ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 167, #756)

³⁶² (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 170, #760)

are eyes, gazing at the cups and glancing.

2.3 Distribution of Features by Genre

In chapter 1, we observed that (for the most part) the syntactical features under study tended to divide into two discrete categories: descriptive features (including *wāw rubba* and similes) appeared more often than average in couplets in the *zuhd* and *ghazal* genres and less often than average in the corpora of *wasf* and *sharāb* couplets; conversely, argumentative features (including address/content and if/then) appeared more often than average in the *wasf* and *sharāb* genres and less often in *zuhd* and *ghazal* couplets. Does this distinction hold true for the address/content, *wāw rubba*, if/then, and simile structures in non-couplet poems? And if so, how do the three genres without enough couplets to categorize in chapter 1 (*tarad*, *mu'ātabāt*, and *rithā'*) fit into this schema if at all?

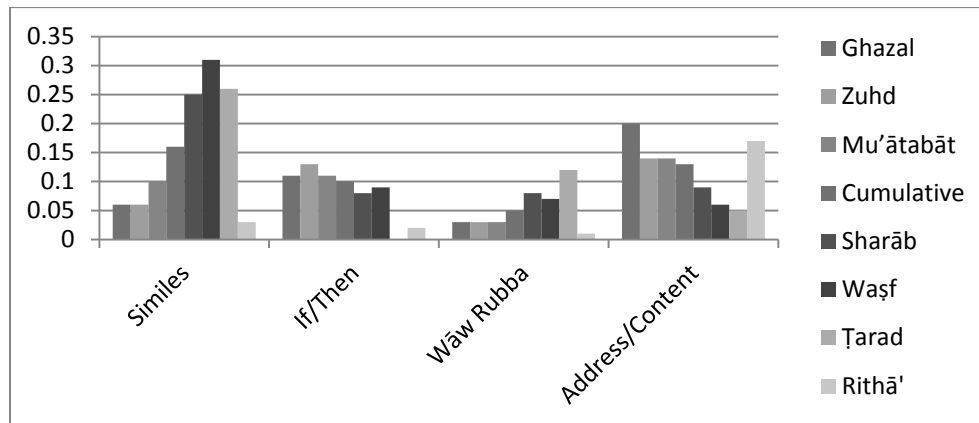
In addressing this question, we must first address a methodological question: how do we want to calculate the density of features in these genres? One approach would be to count the number of lines evincing a particular feature in each genre, and divide that by the number of lines of poetry in each genre to yield a percentage. This would be the right approach if the goal were to evaluate the uses of features in a given line of poetry from a given genre (as for instance in the case of examining individual lines cited in books of rhetoric); however, since the focus of this study has generally been on the evaluation of whole poems, we will adopt the slightly different approach of adding up the number of

lines evincing a particular feature in each poem, dividing by the number of lines in that poem, and then averaging the individual densities of each poem in the genre³⁶³.

2.3.1 Distribution of Features by Genre in Short Poems

For reasons that will shortly become apparent, we will be looking at short and long poems separately. When we look at short poems, conservatively defined as encompassing poems of 4 lines or fewer, we get a chart that looks like this:

Figure 62: Feature Densities in the Average Short Poem, by Genre:



The “cumulative” bar (4th from the left) represents the density of each feature in the average short poem from all lyric genres, the “cumulative average poem”. As we can see, in all four cases, the average *ghazal* and *zuhd* poem has fewer similes and *wāw rubba* structures than the cumulative average poem, and more if/then and address/content

³⁶³ These two methods yield the same result when analyzing couplets, but they begin to diverge when considering poems of different lengths. The effect of the method adopted here is that the feature density of a short poem is weighted equally with the feature density of a longer poem, rather than longer poems being weighted more heavily because they have more lines.

structures. Conversely, in all four cases, we see that the average *wasf* and *sharāb* poem has more similes and *wāw rubba* structures than the cumulative average poem, and fewer if/then and address/content structures. So the generalization made in the couplets extends as far as all short poems for the genres already discussed. The poem that follows exemplifies *ghazal* in a classically argumentative mode—it utilizes address, parallel imperatives, and if/then structures in order to construct an appeal to the beloved.

Poem 156³⁶⁴

1 *Oh Shirr, by God, be fair*

Regarding a lover who has been afflicted by you.

2 *Don't accept, don't accept*

The account of the scolding slanderer.

3 *Don't hurry to cutting me off,*

*Don't rush so much that you make me quicker.*³⁶⁵

4 *If courtesy isn't a natural disposition*

*Of yours, **then** adorn yourself with it.*

The next poem, by contrast, exemplifies a *wasf* poem in a descriptive mode, using simile to render the scene of a night rainstorm:

Poem 157³⁶⁶

³⁶⁴ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 370, #299)

³⁶⁵ i.e. quicker to breaking things off himself

1 How many deserts have I crossed to you—

Where the only drops of water were the blacks of eyes—

2 In a night where the sky is lurking,

*Black, dark, **like** the heart of the unbeliever*

3 And the lightning dazzles from the gap in the clouds

With the dazzlement of the heart for a meeting from a visitor

*4 And the clouds are flowing, streaming, **as though they were***

The tears of one bidding farewell to the last trace of a friend.

How about the new genres? The average *mu'ātaba* poem seems to fall squarely on the argumentative side of the ledger—with fewer similes and *wāw rubba* structures than the cumulative average poem, and more address/content and if/then structures than the cumulative average poem. The following poem provides an example of a *mu'ātaba* poem which utilizes address/content and if/then structures in order to argue for the injustice of the poet's predicament.

Poem 158³⁶⁷

1 Oh my Lord, change everything except

The opinion of Abu 'Abbas, and leave him to me.

2 He had been the keeper of a sweet watering place for me

³⁶⁶ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 529-530, #1027) Describing night

³⁶⁷ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 354, #884) Said in reproach of Abū al-'Abbās and Abū al-Ḥasan, the sons of al-Furāt. Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn al-Furāt was the counselor, mentioned in section 0.1.1 above, who counseled against giving Ibn al-Mu'tazz the throne during the succession struggle ultimately leading to the latter's death. We see in this poem evidence of earlier antagonism between the two men.

*Once, but now it has been mixed with colocynth.*³⁶⁸

3 An evil eye has smitten his affection—may it never see

The face of an approaching lover ever!

4 If Aḥmad is pleased that I should do something

Then ‘Alī will not be pleased that I should do it.

Conversely, the average *ṭarad* poem seems to fall squarely on the descriptive side, with more similes and *wāw rubba* structures than the cumulative average poem, and fewer address/content and if/then structures than the cumulative average poem. Both of these two findings accord with intuition: the *mu’ātabāt* are poems devoted to complaint, so it is of little surprise that they should have a argumentative focus; meanwhile, the hunting poems are devoted primarily to describing hunting animals like dogs and horses and falcons, so it is unsurprising that they should have a descriptive orientation. In the *ṭarad* poem that follows, the poet uses *wāw rubba* and copious similes in order to portray the speaker’s hunting dog.

Poem 159³⁶⁹

1 And there was a dog—she’s invisible as she runs

Whenever was loosed from her knot

*2 I plunged with her into a night that seemed **like** her hide*

*It was **as though** it had borrowed the color of her cloak*

3 And she saw ten dogs—she came from behind them

³⁶⁸ A citrus fruit known for its bitterness

³⁶⁹ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 398, #914)

When she was loosened, so that she erupted from her leash
4 Like the arrow, she doesn't go right save by her effort.
May the merciful one cause me to lose the day she loses.

It must be said that *rithā'* falls into neither of these categories. The average short *rithā'* poem has a large concentration of address/content structures, and a lower than average concentration of all other structures. *Rithā'* couplets were noted as an oddity in chapter 1, in that they seemed to possess a lower concentration of features under study than any of the other genres. This finding would seem to corroborate the earlier observation. With the exception of address/content structures, which are more frequent in the average short *rithā'* poem than in any genre but *ghazal*, the frequencies of the other structures are very low—noticeably lower, in almost all cases, than the corresponding frequency in any other genre, including those genres already noted to have a lower than average concentration of a given frequency.³⁷⁰ In accommodating short *rithā'* poems into our schema, we must therefore consider that they are neither descriptive nor argumentative. Rather, as we might understand from poems that focus on bereavement, their focus settles on the apostrophic wail. The following poem exemplifies this spirit:

Poem 160³⁷¹

I You have proclaimed, Oh death announcer—may you be bereft of a close friend!
Why not someone else? For you have announced the death of a great man.

³⁷⁰ The only exception to that generalization is the if/then structure, of which there are no examples at all in short *tarad* poems.

³⁷¹ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. III, pg. 81, #1198)

2 *I would have no generosity, the morning I lost him*

Were my tears over him not generous.

3 *Woe is me over the calamity of time and what it has committed*

It brought him low, when time escaped unscathed.

4 *You were a hope for me, and you became a calamity.*

Oh *many the possessor of aspirations which became cares.*

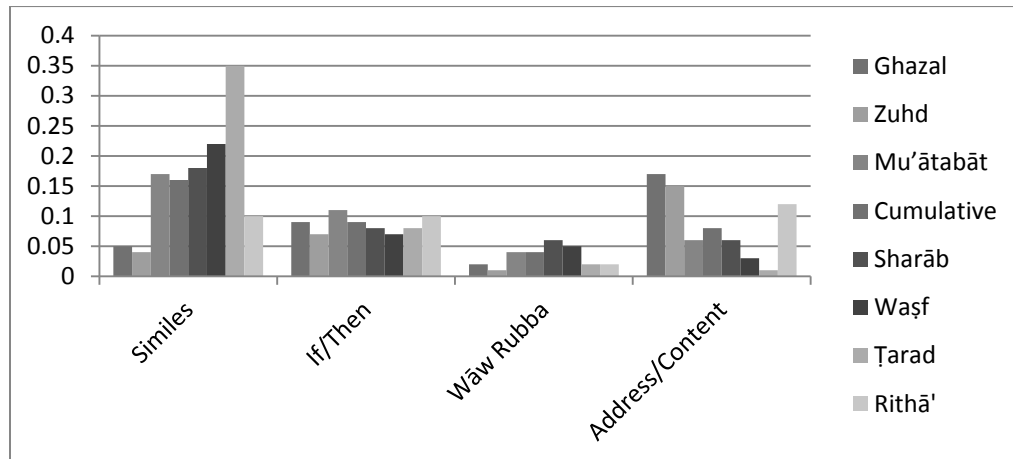
5 *Now time has engendered its calamities*

When it had been barren of them.

2.3.2 Distribution of Features by Genre in Longer Poems

When we look at the same distribution graph when applied to longer poems (poems of 5 lines or longer) the results are quite different.

Figure 63: Feature Densities in the Average Long Poem, by Genre:



In the average poem of longer than 4 lines, the argumentative/descriptive divide falls apart. Many of its elements remain, to be sure; however, inconsistencies begin to proliferate. There are more similes than average, and fewer address/content statements than average in the average long *mu'ātaba* poem. There are fewer if/then statements than average in the average long *zuhd* poem, and fewer *wāw rubba* structures than average in the average long *ṭarad* poem.

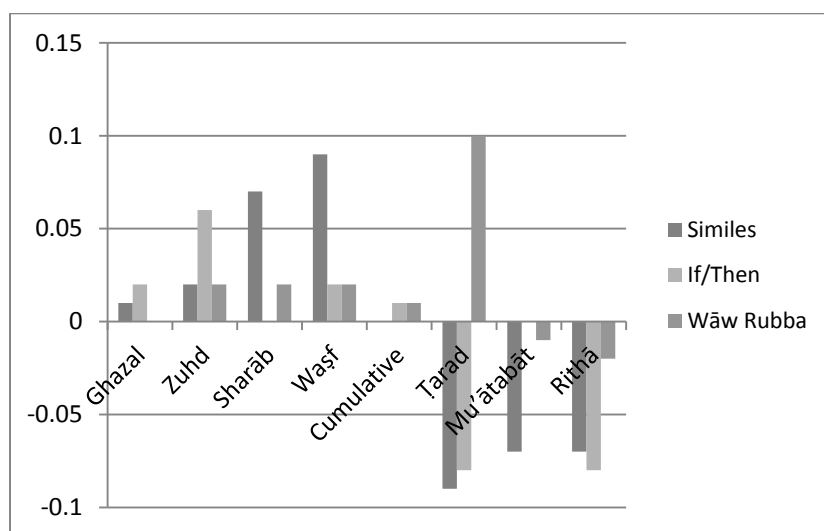
How did these concentrations change as the poems got longer, and why? While the research backing this study has not been successful in providing an answer to this question which can be produced with confidence, it's possible to venture some tentative observations and suggestions.

The first involves the consideration of ways in which differences in poem length profile may exert pressures that distort the feature concentrations in longer poems away from the patterns observed in short poems. The concentration of address/content statements was lower in long poems than in short ones, for every genre except *zuhd*. An explanation for this may be readily supplied: because the address/content structure has a special affinity with the first line of a poem, it makes sense that it should be more concentrated in short poems than in long ones. That is, if a 4 line poem and a 20 line poem each have an address/content statement in their first lines, the concentration of lines containing address/content statements in the 4 line poem will be .25, but only .05 in the 20 line poem. We should not expect this decline in feature frequency between the short poem set and the long poem set to affect all genres equally—it should affect the genres with more

long poems more strongly than the genres with more short poems. This fact can explain why *ghazal* and *zuhd*, which have more short poems and fewer long ones, have lots of address/content statements in Figure 63: Feature Densities in the Average Long Poem, by Genre: (above), whereas their fellow argumentative genre *mu'ātabāt*, which has relatively more long poems and relatively few short ones (for any value of short and long, as discussed in 2.1 above) has a much lower concentration of lines with the address/content structure—with the result that it falls below the concentration in the cumulative average poem.

In the case of the other three features, the length profiles of different poems is also correlated with the ways their feature concentrations change between short and long poems, though in a different way. The chart below shows the difference in concentration between long and short poems—When the bar is positive, that shows a higher concentration of that feature in short poems than in longer ones; when it's negative, that shows a higher concentration of the feature in long poems than in short ones; when there's no bar, that signifies that the feature concentrations are the same in short and long poems.

Figure 64: The Differential Between Feature Concentrations in Short vs. Long Poems



In every case, the concentration of features in the short poem genres (*ghazal*, *zuhd*, *sharāb* and *wasf*) is equal or greater in short poems than in long ones, while in every case but *wāw rubba* in *ṭarad*³⁷², the concentration of features in the long poem genres (*ṭarad*,

³⁷² The change in feature frequency in *ṭarad* between long and short poems is quite striking. The upswing in occurrences of if/then can perhaps be seen as regression to the mean, since the short *ṭarad* poems have no examples of if/then at all. However, the dramatic reduction in *wāw rubba* concentration, combined with the dramatic increase in simile concentration, has the result that long *ṭarad* poems have a less than average concentration of every feature except similes, and a far higher concentration of similes than any other genre. Indeed, in the average long *ṭarad* poem, similes appear in more than a third of the lines. It thus cannot be argued in the case of *ṭarad* poems that they take on a wider variety of thematic modes as they become longer; quite the contrary, it seems as though, whereas short *ṭarad* poems appear to be rather generic descriptive poems, long *ṭarad* poems become almost aggressively dedicated to similes. By contrast, whereas short *rithā'* poems seem to focus exclusively on the apostrophe of the address/content structure, longer *rithā'* poems seem to expand outward from this purpose, increasing in concentration of the other

mu'ātabāt and *rithā'*) is equal or greater in long poems than in short poems. While an explanation for this intriguing trend has thusfar remained elusive, these observations provide fertile grounds for further study.

It is also possible to attempt to account for the departure in longer poems from the argumentative /descriptive dichotomy evident in short ones with an entirely literary argument. If short poems tend to be monothematic and poems become increasingly polythematic as they get longer, it may be the case that monothematic poems in a genre are more to the point in achieving that genre's primary objectives than are polythematic poems.

It is perhaps relatively easy in a polythematic poem to write a descriptive passage in order to achieve ultimately argumentative objectives, or vice versa. In that case, the argumentative/descriptive divide observed in the couplets and later confirmed in other short poems can be taken to reflect something about the boiled-down essences of different genres; as poems in any genre become more complex, however, they begin to deploy a wider range of stylistic modes, and the full deployment of that range ends up obscuring the relative prominence of the formal features associated with the core message of the genre.

three features under study and thus apparently taking something like the frequency profile associated with the argumentative mode (with a greater than average concentration of address/content and if/then structures and a less than average concentration of *wāw rubba* structures and similes).

2.4 Conclusion

The overriding conclusion of this chapter is that short lyric poems are structurally different from longer ones, in several characteristic ways. This can be seen in the distribution of formal devices throughout poems: while long and short poems begin in similar ways, formal features (like if/then and similes) that accompany closure in short poems cease to do so as poems get longer. It is speculated that these devices take on an internal cadential role as poems become more polythematic, and in so doing they cease to be particularly identified with the very ends of poems. Likewise, while short poems maintain a complementary distribution between descriptive and argumentative features, which tend to gravitate towards different genres, this regular pattern breaks down as poems get longer. It is speculated that as poems become more polythematic, they can accommodate a wider range of expressive modalities, with argumentative modes serving ultimately descriptive ends and vice versa. While the quantitative methodology employed in this chapter cannot serve to test these explanations, they are explored in greater length in chapter 4.

Chapter 3: Beyond the Lyric Corpus

In Chapter 2, we identified a variety of structural trends in the lyric poems of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, the most significant of which are concentrated in the short poems. We determined that in short poems, address/content and *wāw rubba* structures tend to concentrate at the beginnings of poems, whereas if/then structures and similes tended to concentrate at the ends with a linear increase in frequency as one proceeds through a poem. We also determined that in short poems address/content and if/then features tend to gravitate towards genres dubbed “argumentative”, whereas *wāw rubba* and similes tend to gravitate towards genres dubbed “descriptive”. Of all of these effects, only the opener effects of address/content and *wāw rubba* can be found to exist to any significant extent in long poems—the closer effects and the complementary distribution of features in genres are not evident in poems of longer than 7 lines.

In this chapter, we will explore the applicability of those trends beyond the corpus in which they were initially observed. Such comparisons can serve several functions. First, they help us to understand the extent to which the findings already reported are idiosyncratic to the corpus under study, and to what extent they are reflective of broader poetic trends. Are these trends peculiarities of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s writing? Are they peculiarities of lyric poetry? Or are they broadly applicable (in part or entirely) to classical Arabic poetry in general? For that matter, to what extent are the very categories we’ve used for the discussion generally applicable? We’ve observed some structural differences between different lyric genres in Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s poetry. Do these genre divisions correspond to genres as constructed in other corpora to the degree that it’s

possible to compare them, or would that be comparing apples and oranges? Corpus studies necessarily give rise to these sorts of questions, and extracorporeal comparisons can help to better understand the findings that have already been made.

Secondly, if our findings are at least partially applicable to the work of other poets, that enables us to use techniques already developed to situate the work of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz within his literary canon. In what significant ways does Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s poetry differ from that of other poets along the axes we’ve been defining? For example, as discussed in the introduction, Ibn al-Mu‘tazz was renowned among his contemporaries for his similes; by comparing the simile density of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s poetry with simile density of other poets who wrote in similar genres, perhaps we can show that Ibn al-Mu‘tazz employed an unusually great density of similes. Perhaps, on the other hand, Ibn al-Mu‘tazz was renowned for the quality of his similes despite not writing more of them than his contemporaries.

Finally, these comparisons can potentially provide the opportunity to better understand the structural relationships between short and long poems, which emerged as a major finding of the last chapter. The hypothesis that short poems may be structurally similar to short segments of longer poems has been mentioned in earlier chapters. This hypothesis has hitherto been justified by assorted pieces of circumstantial evidence. One such piece of evidence is that *wāw rubba*, which in *qaṣīdas* serves to signify a transition into a short narrative passage, serves in lyric poems as a typical opening gesture: this serves as an example of a structural feature that occurs both at the beginning of short poems and as the

beginning of a short segment in a longer poem. We also know that Arabic literature has a robust tradition of excerpting short sections from longer poems and presenting the excerpts as free-standing entries in anthologies. This tradition suggests that excerpts from long poems can be enjoyed as independent literary items. In many cases, of course, these excerpts are composed of but a single line; however, many other excerpts are composed of several lines. Might the anthologists have selected excerpts that conformed to the structural norms of free-standing short poems? We can test this possibility by comparing the trends we've already identified in the lyric poetry of Ibn al-Mu'tazz to the contents of anthologies.

As need hardly be stated, an exhaustive application of the trends already observed to Arabic poetry in general could easily form the subject of a lengthy monograph in its own right, and cannot possibly be attempted in the course of a single chapter. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a preliminary survey of these questions, which serve to provide some very tentative answers to the above questions while pointing towards areas that might be illuminated through further study.

3.1 Beyond the Discrete Poem: Comparisons with Anthology Extracts

This section will compare the results observed in the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu'tazz with poetic extracts from two anthologies: the *Ḥamāsa* of Ibn al-Shajārī and *al-Muḥibb wa-al-Maḥbūb wa-al-Mashmūm wa-al-Mashrūb*, by al-Sarī Ibn Aḥmad al-Raffā'. The objective in selecting these two anthologies was to construct anthology samples that might approximate in content Ibn al-Mu'tazz's lyric genres *Wasf* (in the first case) and *Ghazal* (in the second)—an approach that has met with perhaps mixed success, as will be seen

below. In each case, rather than attempting to identify every instance of the features of interest to us in the entire anthology, we analyze a subset of the anthology which (1) seems to thematically approximate the genres in the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz to which they were intended to correspond, and (2) is large enough to produce statistically significant results but not very much larger than that. Thus, in the *Ḥamāsa*, we analyzed the first 10 *fuṣūl* of the lengthy chapter on “descriptions and similes”, which sample will henceforth be described as the *Ḥamāsa* “*Wasf*” corpus. Likewise, in *al-Muḥibb wa-al-Maḥbūb wa-al-Mashmūm wa-al-Mashrūb*, we analyzed the first 11 chapters of the second volume, *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb*, all of which are devoted to descriptions of various body parts of the beloved; this sample will henceforth be described as the *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb* “*Ghazal*” corpus.

3.1.1 The *Ḥamāsa* “*Wasf*” of Ibn al-Shajarī

The *Ḥamāsa*³⁷³ is a poetic anthology compiled by Hibat Allāh Ibn ‘Alī Ibn al-Shajarī (d. 1148/542), a Baghdadi grammarian and poet. The name of his anthology is a reference to the anthology of the same name by the celebrated poet Abū Tammām, and Ibn al-Shajarī is said to have boasted that his *Ḥamāsa* rivaled its namesake.³⁷⁴

The *Ḥamāsa* is organized by topic, and covers a broad range of subject areas, including some defined as genres in the *dīwān* of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, including elegy (*marāthī*), praise (*madīḥ*) and satire (*hijā’*), as well as others such as amatory prelude (*nasīb*), blame and censure (*al-lawm wa-al-‘itāb*), longing for the homeland (*ḥanīn ilā al-awṭān*), and

³⁷³ (Ibn al-Shajarī 1970)

³⁷⁴ (Richards 1998, v. I, pg. 371)

descriptions and similes (*al-ṣifāt wa-al-tashbīhāt*), which last category which we have interpreted as most closely approximate to Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s *wasf*.

In approaching the *Ḥamāsa* “*wasf*” corpus, we might begin by wondering where the poetic selections represented therein came from. In what sorts of poems did they originate? What genre? What length? Though we cannot answer this question in every particular, we can provide information (hopefully representative) about the origin of those poems in the corpus that were written by Ibn al-Mu‘tazz. The *Ḥamāsa* “*wasf*” corpus includes 6 poems attributed to Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, of which five appear in the *dīwān*. Of those five poems, three originated in poems classified in the *dīwān* as *sharāb*, one in *wasf*, and one in *fakhr* (a *qaṣīda* genre). All of the *Ḥamāsa* “*wasf*” selections by Ibn al-Mu‘tazz are two lines in length, whereas none of the source poems were couplets. Two of them (the *wasf* poem and one of the *sharāb* poems) were three-line poems; the other 3 were longer than 15 lines. Thus, we can describe all of the Ibn al-Mu‘tazz selections in the *Ḥamāsa* “*wasf*” corpus as excerpts rather than reproductions of entire poems; about half of these excerpts came from poems we would consider long by the criteria in chapter 2, while the others came from poems we would consider short.

3.1.1.1 Length Profile of the Ḥamāsa “Wasf”

We began our study of the lyric corpus by examining the relative lengths of poems. We discovered that the distribution of poems of different lengths approximated a power function, which has the useful property that it can be examined with better resolution when it is represented on a logarithmic scale. Upon dividing the length profiles by genre,

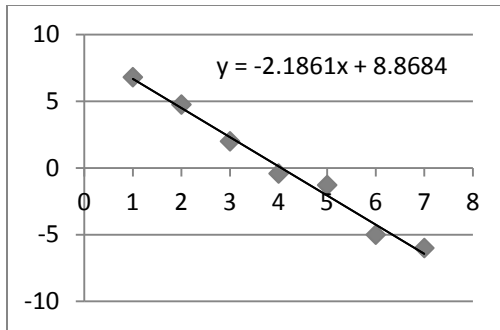
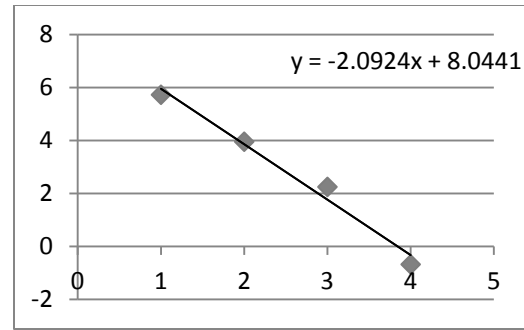
we determined firstly that all the genres were log log linear (even those genres we might expect to have a lot more long poems than short ones). We also identified a systematic difference in slope between “long poem genres” like *ṭarad*, whose log log linear slopes were around -1, and “short poem genres” like *waṣf*, whose log log linear slopes were around -2.³⁷⁵

When inquiring into the length profiles of the selections in the *Ḥamāsa* “*waṣf*” corpus, we have every reason to anticipate that the results might be totally different from the results reported above. Not only are we looking at a selection of poems from a variety of different authors, the poems we are looking at are extractions from longer poems. However, since we have hypothesized that excerpts from longer poems might have structural similarities to short lyric poems, comparing the length profiles seems like a reasonable place to start.

As it turns out, the selections in the *Ḥamāsa* “*waṣf*” corpus have a length profile that is approximately log log linear, just like the free-standing poems in the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz. We can compare the log graph of the *Ḥamāsa* “*waṣf*” length distributions with that of its intended analog, the *waṣf* poems of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz.

Figure 65: Logarithmic Length Profiles of the *Waṣf* Poems of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz (left) and the *Ḥamāsa* “*Waṣf*” (right)

³⁷⁵ The exception to this generalization being *sharāb*, whose length distribution was not accounted for by this bifurcation.



The two graphs are very similar in their slopes,³⁷⁶ which means that the ratio of 2 line poems to 4 line poems to 8 line poems (etc.) is very similar between the two samples. With a slope of about -2, the rate of decline in *Ḥamāsa* “*wasf*” frequency as the poems grow longer falls very neatly into the “short poem genre” classification described in chapter 2. That is to say, a reader scanning over the selections in the *Ḥamāsa* “*wasf*” corpus would be reading poetic fragments with relative lengths very similar to those found in one of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s short poem genres. While this fact provides no direct evidence of similarities in structure between the two corpora, it provides indirect support for the hypothesis that they may be structurally similar.

After noting the similarities, it should also be noted that there are two major differences between the length profiles of the two corpora. The first concerns the length of the line. Whereas the *wasf* poems of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz range in length up to 124 lines, none of the *Ḥamāsa* “*wasf*” poems are longer than 16 lines. This suggests that there’s an effective cap in the length of poems that will be considered as viable excerpts by the anthologist. It

³⁷⁶ The attentive reader will notice that the two graphs also have very similar y intercepts; however this is not significant of anything important. Independent of the slope, the size of the y intercept is reflective only of the size of the sample, which was determined somewhat arbitrarily from a wider selection of possible descriptive poems in the *Ḥamāsa*, with the only aim of picking a large enough sample to produce statistically significant data without analyzing hundreds of poems more than necessary.

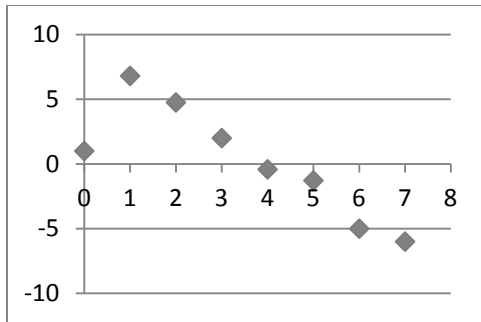
also means, in effect, that the vast majority of these excerpts qualify as “short poems” under any of our definitions from chapter 2 (80% of the excerpts are 4 lines or under, and 94% are 7 lines or under)—while we’re considering the possibility that the anthologist selected excerpts intended to resemble free-standing poems, we might as well consider that the profile of these excerpts is pretty nearly congruent with the category of *short* free-standing poems, which we know to be structurally different from long free-standing poems.

The other difference between the Ibn al-Mu‘tazz corpus and the *Hamāsa* “*waṣf*” corpus is invisible on the graph above. This is because both graphs omit mention of single-line selections. Single line entries are something of an anomaly in the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz—they do exist in places, but they are extremely rare³⁷⁷. If we look at a log log linear graph of the lyric corpus that includes the one-line poems, our graph looks like this:

Figure 66: Logarithmic Length Profile of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz *Waṣf* Corpus Including One-line Poems³⁷⁸

³⁷⁷ Since “rhyming” is part of the standard definition of an Arabic poem, and single lines mostly don’t rhyme, the paucity of such entries in the lyric corpus comes as no surprise. If anything, the surprise is that there are as many as there are. The existence of these one-line entries gives rise to the suspicion that there might have been other lines of these poems that were lost. In the interest of the author’s sanity, this study has not given much thought to questions of textual variation in surviving texts, though such variation certainly exists and should properly contribute its measure of doubt into all the findings that are reported throughout this paper. Even though some of the poem texts may be subject to doubt, there is no reason to doubt the overall trends that can be observed over the entire corpus. The existence of one-line selections can serve as a usefully humbling reminder about the limitations of these basic assumptions, however.

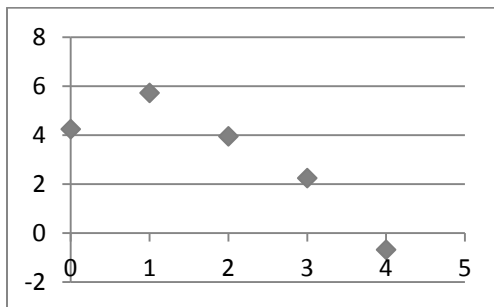
³⁷⁸ The one-line poems are represented as 0 on the logarithmic x axis, since the general formula is #of lines in the poem = $2^{\text{number represented on the x axis}}$, and $1 = 2^0$.



Unsurprisingly, there are very few one-line *waṣf* entries in the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz—only 2—and they’ve been excluded from previous graphs because they’re so obviously and understandably an outlier.

The corresponding graph for the *Ḥamāsa* “*waṣf*” corpus is represented below:

Figure 67: Logarithmic Length Profile of *Ḥamāsa* “*Waṣf*” Corpus Including One-line Poems



There are 19 one-line selections in the *Ḥamāsa* “*waṣf*” corpus; given the roughly similar number of 2-line attestations in the two corpora, that’s a really noticeable difference. The one-line selections still mark a noticeable outlier from the log log line evident within the range of 2-16 lines. It’s necessary to conclude that in selecting excerpts for the *Ḥamāsa* anthology, the author was much more comfortable including single-line selections than Ibn al-Mu‘tazz (or his editors) in including single-line entries. Given that single lines of poetry appear frequently in works of contemporary literary criticism, this comfort is

understandable coming from an anthologist whose selections otherwise resemble the length profile of short lyric poems freestanding in Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s *ḏīwān*. This discrepancy in 1-line entries represents the only significant departure from an otherwise-robust pattern of correspondence.

3.1.1.2 Openers and Closers in the *Ḥamāsa* “*Waṣf*” Corpus

To what extent can the opener and closer trends we’ve observed in the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz be found reflected in the *Ḥamāsa* “*waṣf*” corpus? We display graphs of the breakdowns of each feature into the first and second halves of poems, below:

Figure 68: Address/Content

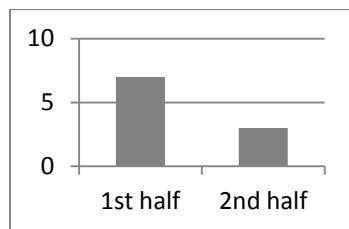


Figure 69: Wāw rubba

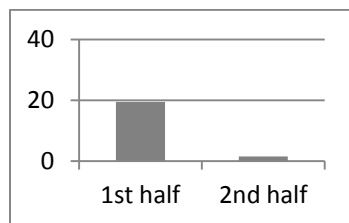


Figure 70: Similes

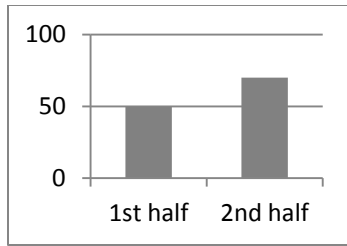
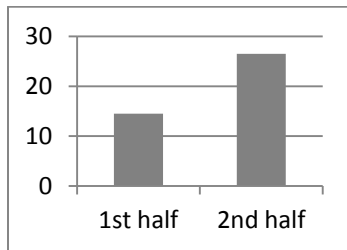


Figure 71: If/Then



In all four cases, these feature distributions resemble the opener and closer effects observed in the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz—address/content and *wāw rubba* structures gravitate towards the first halves of poems, while if/then structures and similes gravitate toward the second halves.³⁷⁹ At the most basic level, then, we can thus describe the structural trends evident in the *Ḥamāsa* “*wasf*” corpus as being similar to those identified in the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz.

³⁷⁹ The closer effect of similes and the opener effect of *wāw rubba* are definitely statistically significant. The closer effect of “if/then” is on a cusp—it’s not possible to use the binomial distribution to calculate statistical significance for a non-integer, and if/then has 26.5 occurrences in the second half out of a total of 41. When we calculate the statistical significance of 26 occurrences, the result of this occurring by chance is .058, ever so slightly above the standard statistical significance threshold of .05. When we calculate the statistical significance of 27 occurrences, the result of this occurring by chance is .029, well within a comfortable margin of statistical significance. Lacking the mathematical background to handle this case, we will adopt the unscientific strategy of describing the if/then closer effect as being within spitting distance of statistical significance. The number of address/content structures in this sample is so small that the effect in this sample does not achieve statistical significance, although the graph suggests that a significant opener effect would be likely with a larger sample. The relative frequency of simile and *wāw rubba* occurrences in this sample will be discussed in section 3.1.1.3 below.

Although a breakdown by quintile cannot be justified by the size of this sample,³⁸⁰ we can venture a few further observations about the opener effects as evidenced in the *Ḥamāsa* “*wasf*” corpus. As in the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, the address/content opener effect seems unambiguously concentrated in the first lines of poems. Those occurrences of address/content which do not occur in the first lines of their poems all occur in the second half (corresponding to our observation in chapter 2 that, once the first-line effect is taken into account, the address/content structure appears to exhibit characteristics of closers).

Unlike the lyric corpus, the *wāw rubba* opener effect seems to be likewise concentrated in the first line to an extreme degree—out of 21 instances of *wāw rubba* in the *Ḥamāsa* “*wasf*” corpus, 20 occur in the first line. It would be necessary to accumulate a larger data set in order to determine whether, of those instances which do *not* occur in the first line, there is a preference for the first half of the poem.

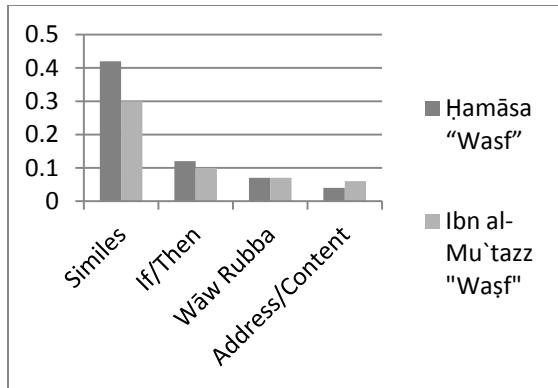
3.1.1.3 Genre Complementary in the *Ḥamāsa* “*Wasf*” Corpus

The title of this section is somewhat misleading. “Genre complementarity” was a term coined to describe a situation specific to the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz wherein, when we took all the features from the entire lyric corpus and considered the density of each

³⁸⁰ The *Ḥamāsa* “*wasf*” sample is small enough that the results of a quintile representation seem likely to introduce enough randomness not to be useful; as we saw in section 3.1.1.1, the size of this corpus is comparable in size to the number of *wasf* poems in the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz. The quintile distributions in chapter 2 were always based upon the entire lyric corpus (which is of course considerably larger than the *wasf* poems by themselves), and the small size of feature counts from individual genres provided our principal motivation for omitting a comparison of opener and closer effects by genre in chapter 2, which might have been otherwise tempting.

feature within an average poem, “descriptive” features appeared more often than average in some genres and less often than average in other genres, whereas “argumentative” features appeared more often than average in the genres where the descriptive features appeared less often than average and vice versa. This sort of complementarity is meaningless when we look at the relative concentrations of features in a single genre-bounded corpus such as the *Ḥamāsa* “*waṣf*”. We could look for complementarity in the *Ḥamāsa* as a whole, but since the *Ḥamāsa* categorizes its genres differently from the *dīwān* of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz the comparison would not necessarily be meaningful. What we can do is compare the relative concentrations of each feature in the *Ḥamāsa* “*waṣf*” corpus with the corresponding relative concentrations of each feature in the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz. If the two are not similar, this could mean either that the relative frequency of features in Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s poetry is idiosyncratic and not representative of comparable genres as written by other poets in terms of feature frequency; alternatively, it could mean that our constructed *Ḥamāsa* “*waṣf*” corpus is not a good approximation to Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s *waṣf*. Conversely, if the two are similar, this provides evidence both that the *Ḥamāsa* “*waṣf*” is approximately of the same “genre” of poetry as Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s *waṣf*, and that the preferences for relative feature concentrations in Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s *waṣf* corpus are reflected in the *Ḥamāsa* “*waṣf*” corpus. The graph below compares the density of features/line in the average poem from the *waṣf* poems of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz vs. the *Ḥamāsa* “*waṣf*” corpus.

Figure 72: Features Per Line in the Average Poem from the *Ḥamāsa* “*waṣf*” corpus (left) and Ibn al-Mu‘tazz *waṣf* corpus (right).



In this case, the feature frequencies appear to be quite similar between the two corpora—with the *Ḥamāsa* “*wasf*” corpus sharing the descriptive orientation of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s *wasf* poems.

The only noteworthy difference is in the frequency of similes, where (somewhat surprisingly) Ibn al-Mu‘tazz (celebrated author of similes) wrote *fewer* similes per line in the average poem than are found in the selections in the *Ḥamāsa* “*wasf*” corpus. There are several possible explanations for this result. Perhaps it is due to a difference in the constitution of the two genres as categories. The *Ḥamāsa* section from which the *wasf* corpus was selected is called “descriptions and similes”, whereas the full name of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s *wasf* section is “descriptions and witty verses” (*awṣāf wa-mulaḥ*)—perhaps the former category is more interested in similes in particular than the latter. Another possibility is that anthologists have flexibility to select poetic fragments that are best suited to the themes of the chapter (which in this case explicitly includes similes), whereas the editors of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s *dīwān* were constrained to sort every poem the poet ever wrote into one of 10 genres and therefore must compromise the integrity of the genre in places (for instance, Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s *wasf* genre includes an extremely long

poem in *rajaz muzdawij* which is in many respects not representative of the genre and was in fact cited as a standalone work in some classical accounts of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s literary output).³⁸¹ Another possibility is that the genres are correctly aligned but that Ibn al-Mu‘tazz in fact wrote fewer similes into this sort of poetry than the selection of poets represented in the *Hamāsa*. One explanation for that might be that similes grew more popular over time, so while Ibn al-Mu‘tazz was a pioneer in the use of similes, later poets (Ibn al-Shajarī lived more than 200 years after Ibn al-Mu‘tazz) used similes more often than he did³⁸². Further study could provide greater insight into which if any of these explanations accounts for the difference in simile concentrations.

3.1.2 The *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb* “*Ghazal*” of al-Sarī al-Raffā’

Al-Muḥibb wa-al-Maḥbūb wa-al-Mashmūm wa-al-Mashrūb is a poetic anthology by al-Sarī al-Raffā’, a 10th century poet principally active in Baghdad and Syria.³⁸³ The volume entitled *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb* (The Book of the Beloved) is divided into sections by theme, with one chapter devoted to description of the hair of the beloved, another chapter devoted to her teeth, etc.

As was the case with the *Hamāsa* “*wasf*”, we can get a preliminary sense of the origins of the selections cited by looking at those selections attributed to Ibn al-Mu‘tazz. Of the 19 selections attributed to Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, 16 could be located in the *dīwān*; of these, 7

³⁸¹ (Ibn Khallikān 1948-1950, v. III, pg. 73, #241)

³⁸² As noted by Heinrichs (Heinrichs, *The hand of the northwind : opinions on metaphor and the early meaning of isti’ āra in Arabic poetics* 1977), simile-like “new” metaphors became more popular during the ‘Abbāsīd period; similes themselves might have become more common during the same period. Such a shift would be consonant with the evolution of *badī’* during the ‘Abbāsīd period.

³⁸³ (al-Sarī al-Raffā’ 1986, introduction)

were found in the “extras” section, where the editor put poetic citations attributed to Ibn al-Mu‘tazz in other sources but not transmitted by al-Ṣulī.³⁸⁴ Of the remaining 9 citations, six come from poems classified as *ghazal*, two from *sharāb*, and one from *fakhr*. Three of the citations (all *ghazal*) are cited in their entirety in the *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb* “*ghazal*”; the other three *ghazal* citations come from short poems (of 3, 4 and 5 lines), while the citations from *sharāb* and *fakhr* come from poems that were longer than 10 lines. Thus, in this sample, the origins of the selections are evenly split between poems cited in their entirety, selections culled from short poems, and selections culled from long poems.

3.1.2.1 Length Profile of the Kitāb al-Maḥbūb “Ghazal”

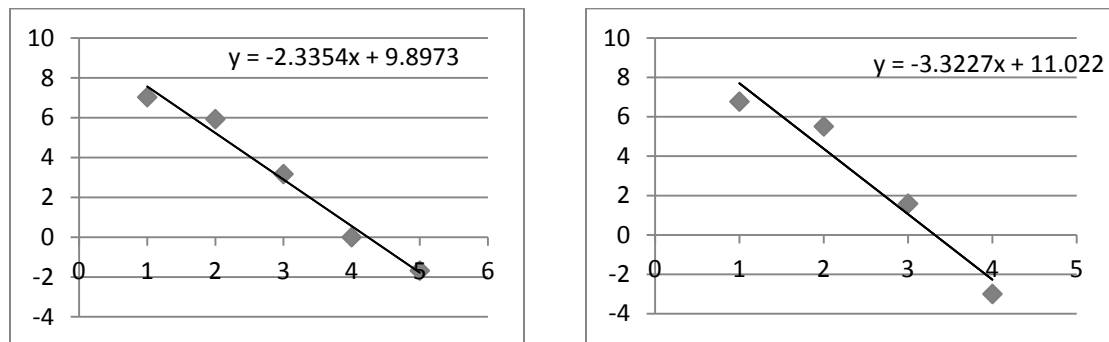
Once again, we will begin our examination of a corpus by examining its length profile. As in previous cases, this entails a graphic representation of poem length (on the x axis) vs. number of poems in the corpus with that length (on the y axis). Both the x and y scales remain logarithmic with a base of 2, so that a point plotted (2,6) would indicate that there are 64 (2^6) poems in the corpus of length 4 (2^2).

Our study of poem length, first in the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz and then in the *Ḥamāsa* “*wasf*” corpus, leads to two speculations: first, that log log linearity of poem

³⁸⁴ The contents of the “extras” section is not analyzed in this study, but a few words about it are in order. The fact that it contains citations made to Ibn al-Mu‘tazz from sources external to the *diwān* might lead us to suspect that it is a collection of poetic selections rather than free-standing poems. An analysis of its length profile supports this hypothesis, in that it resembles that of the anthologies (discussed below in section 3.1.2.1) much more closely than that of the rest of the *diwān*. Like both the anthology corpora and unlike the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, the Extras corpus has a high instance of 1-line poems, and a cut-off after 16 lines. All the poetic selections in the *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb* that corresponded to citations in the extras section were exactly the same length in both. Rather than understanding this to mean that all of these selections were complete citations of entire free-standing poems, it seems reasonable to assume that the “extras” had a source in common with the *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb* such that both are citing the same poetic selections which may or may not have originally been entire freestanding poems.

length is a property common to both anthology selections and free-standing lyric poems; and second, that the slope of the log log linear graph varies according to genre, and that most genres fall into the categories of “long poem genres” which have slopes of about -1, and “short poem genres” which have slopes of about -2. The *Ḥamāsa* “*waṣf*” length profile (on the log log scale) was a linear graph with a slope that was very similar to that of the *waṣf* corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, which also put it squarely into the category of “short poem genre”. Will the *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb* “*ghazal*” selections likewise follow in the pattern of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s *ghazal*, with a log log linear length profile that has a “short poem genre” slope? The log log length profile of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s *ghazal* and the *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb* length profile are compared in the graphs below:

Figure 73: Logarithmic Length Profiles of the *Ghazal* of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz (left) and the *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb* “*Ghazal*” (right)



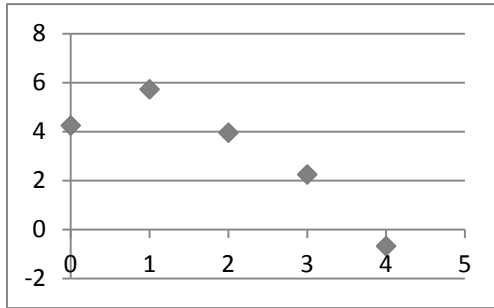
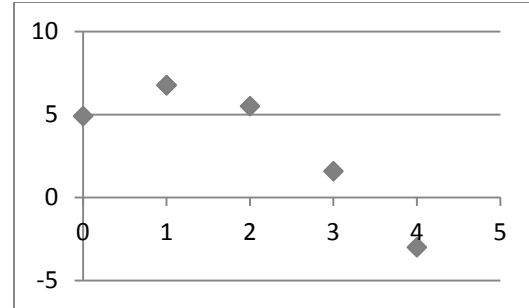
The case to be made for similarity between these two graphs is much sketchier than the corresponding argument made about the *Ḥamāsa* “*Wasf*” in the last section. The graph of the *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb* “*ghazal*” is log log linear; the slope, however, is quite a bit steeper than the analogous graph of poem lengths in the Ibn al-Mu‘tazz *ghazal*, or indeed, any of the Ibn al-Mu‘tazz genres. The log log linearity is noteworthy in and of itself,

corresponding to the pattern we've seen before in freestanding poems by Ibn al-Mu'tazz as well as the *Ḥamāsa* “*wasf*” corpus. However, since we are conjecturing that slopes vary by genre, the slope of the selections in the *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb* “*ghazal*” corpus (which we might describe, following our earlier schema, as a “very short poem genre”) does not correspond closely to that of Ibn al-Mu'tazz *ghazal* corpus, or indeed, to any genre we've seen in Ibn al-Mu'tazz's corpus.

It should be noted that both of the differences noted between the *Ḥamāsa* “*wasf*” corpus and the Ibn al-Mu'tazz *wasf* corpus are also evident in this comparison. Like the *Ḥamāsa* “*wasf*”, the *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb* “*ghazal*” seems to deal almost exclusively in short selections—we see above that there are no selections longer than 16 lines. In fact, in this case there are no selections longer than 10 lines, and only 2 longer than 5 lines. We can thus describe the selections in the *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb* “*ghazal*” as comparable in length to our freestanding “short poems” pretty comfortably.

Likewise, the *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb* “*ghazal*” corpus, like that of the *Ḥamāsa* “*wasf*”, has in evidence a great many more one-line poems than any of Ibn al-Mu'tazz's genres (in fact, more than all of Ibn al-Mu'tazz's genres put together). We show below graphs of the *Ḥamāsa* “*wasf*” and the *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb* “*ghazal*” corpora side by side, each including 1-line selections:

Figure 74: Logarithmic Length Profiles, including 1-line poems, of the *Ḥamāsa* “*Wasf*” (left) and the *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb* “*Ghazal*” corpora (right)



The role of 1-line selections (shown by the dot with the x-coordinate of zero) relative to the general length profile appears to be very similar in these two anthology corpora.

While 1-line selections are substantially less common than 2-line selections, which are the most popular in all cases we've seen, they are nevertheless quite prolific. Though two examples do not provide compelling evidence of a pattern, we can tentatively suggest that the length profiles of anthology selections may be characterized by (1) a decline in selection frequency as poem selections get longer that approximates a power function, starting with 2-line poem selections; (2) a cut-off after 16 lines (or shorter); and (3) 1-line poem selections which are, while less common than 2-line poem selections, nevertheless substantially in evidence.

3.1.2.2 Openers and Closers in the *Kitāb al-Mahbūb* "Ghazal"

Having observed what lengths of selections are found in the *Kitāb al-Mahbūb* "Ghazal" corpus, we now proceed to the central question: do they demonstrate the opener and closer effects we've come to expect from the short poems in that corpus? Do address/content and *wāw rubba* tend to appear in the first halves of these poems, and do similes and if/then structures tend to appear in the second halves? We produce graphs below that show the distribution of these features into the first and second halves of poems.

Figure 75: Address/Content

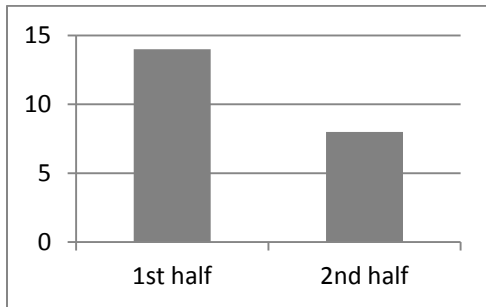


Figure 76: *Wāw Rubba*

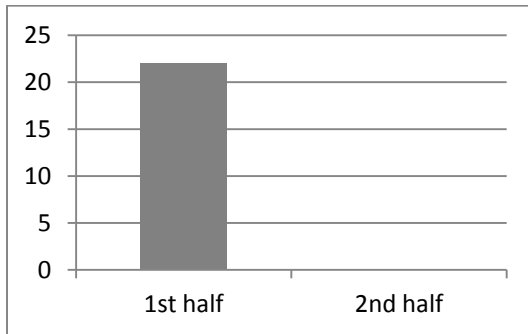


Figure 77: Similes

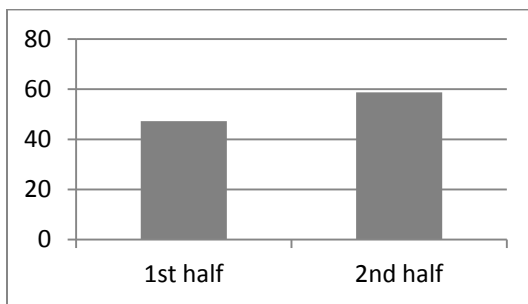
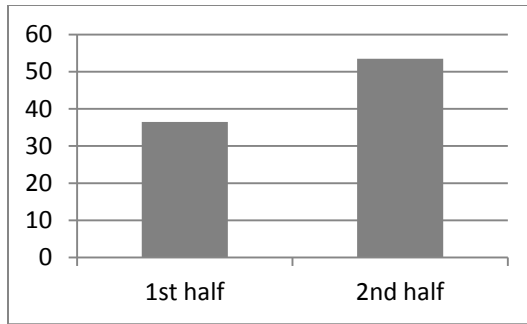


Figure 78: If/Then



As in the *Ḥamāsa* “*wasf*” corpus, the opener and closer effects found in the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz are also evident here.³⁸⁵ While again the sample size is too small for a quintile representation to be helpful, we can again venture a few observations about the natures of these effects, especially the extent to which the opener effects appear to be owing to a preference for occurring in specifically the first line. In the case of address/content, nearly 2/3 of attestations occur in the first lines of their selections; after eliminating the first-line attestations from consideration, 7 of the remaining 8 attestations occur in the second half of their selection. Thus it seems reasonable to suggest that in the *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb* “*ghazal*” as in the *Ḥamāsa* “*wasf*” corpus and the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, the address/content opener effect is owing to a specific preference for the structure to occur in the first line, with a secondary preference for appearing towards the end of the poem once the first-line preference is accounted for. Moreover, all three of these corpora seem to suggest the possibility of a secondary closer effect, which becomes

³⁸⁵ Both closer effects are statistically significant, as is the opener effect of *wāw rubba*. As in the *Ḥamāsa* “*wasf*” corpus, the sample of address/content features is sufficiently small that, while an opener effect seems likely given the distribution of features in the sample we’ve got, the effect does not achieve statistical significance. We may thus say that while our evidence for an opener address/content effect in the anthology corpora is suggestive, we would need more evidence to make that assertion confidently. It should be noted, however, that of all four opener and closer effects studied in chapters 2 and 3, the opener effect of the address/content structure is by far the one most widely attested throughout the study of Arabic poetry. The fact that there are not enough instances of the address/content structure to demonstrate a significant opener effect in a genre construction that’s intended to approximate *ghazal* is a separate problem, which will be discussed in section 3.1.2.3, below.

evident once the first-line attestations are removed from consideration; this effect would be worth investigating more closely with a larger corpus of examples.

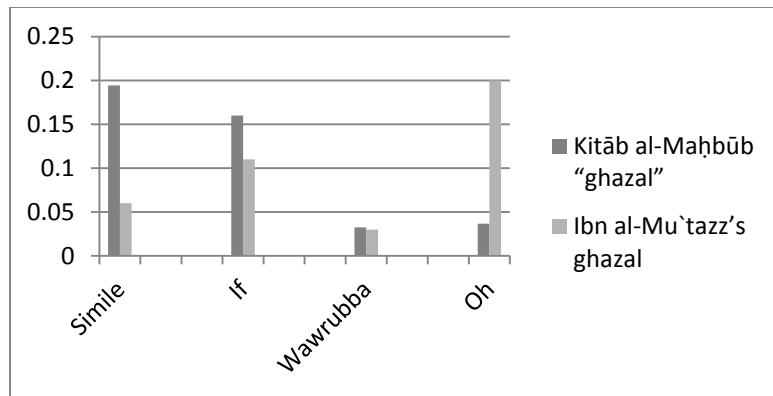
In the case of *wāw rubba*, every single attestation in the *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb* “ghazal” corpus occurs in the first line of its selection. This corroborates the finding in the *Ḥamāsa* “*wasf*” corpus of a *wāw rubba* opener effect that is concentrated in the first line of selections—indeed, one might just as well talk about the “*wāw rubba* effect” overall being a purely starting gesture. These findings both contrast with our finding in the lyric corpus, in which *wāw rubba* (while appearing plenty often in the first line) demonstrated an opener effect even when the first-line attestations were removed from consideration. This difference could be due to a preference for *wāw rubba* as an opening gesture in anthologies, or to an idiosyncratic preference on the part of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz for concentrating *wāw rubba* in the first halves of poems when they don’t occur in the first line. It would be tempting to suggest that the difference between the function of *wāw rubba* in Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s lyric corpus vs. the anthologies is due to the fact that Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s lyric corpus has more long poems than the anthologies do; after all, one might imagine that *wāw rubba* is more likely to serve in a transitional role in longer poems. However, this explanation is contradicted by the data; *wāw rubba* in the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz demonstrates an opener effect even when first-line attestations are removed from consideration *and* only poems of 7 lines or shorter are considered.

3.1.2.3 Genre Complementarity in the *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb* “Ghazal”

We saw in section 3.1.2.1 that the *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb* “ghazal” and Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s *ghazal* had different slopes to the log log linear graphs of their poem length profiles. This

led to the suggestion that perhaps, despite the similarity in subject matter, the two corpora could not be considered to represent the same genre. Another way to test this is to compare the density of features per line in the average poem from each corpus. We saw in section 3.1.1.3 that the *Ḥamāsa waṣf* corpus had a similar density of features to Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s *waṣf* corpus; we can now repeat that experiment for the corpora of *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb “ghazal”* and Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s *ghazal*.

Figure 79: Features Per Line in the Average Poem from the *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb “ghazal”* (left) and Ibn al-Mu‘tazz *ghazal* corpora (right).



Unlike the comparison between the two *waṣf* corpora, this comparison between two *ghazal* corpora does not suggest any particular similarity in relative feature density between them. Whereas Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s *ghazal* genre is light on similes, the *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb “ghazal”* corpus has quite a lot of similes. Conversely, while Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s *ghazal* poems have a high density of address/content structures, the *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb “ghazal”* have very few. The highly increased proportion of similes might be understood in conjunction with the fact that the *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb “ghazal”* seem to be selected on the basis of their propensity to describe particular body parts of the beloved. Thus,

although these selections are clearly “*ghazal*”, they seem to be directed at a subset of *ghazal* which focuses on description and thus (we might conjecture) employs a larger number of similes than might be found in an anthology that sampled from the *ghazal* genre as a whole.

This argument cannot easily extend to explain the paucity of address/content features. One possible explanation for that might be that (as we know from chapter 2)³⁸⁶ the address/content feature is not merely an opener but also a first-line heavy opener, for poems of all lengths. Perhaps this can help us to understand why, in segments taken from the middle of poems, the address/content feature is less frequent overall than in it might be in comparable freestanding poems.³⁸⁷

Taking the data together, while the subject matter of the *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb* “*ghazal*” had initially seemed like it might resemble that of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s *ghazal*, the two corpora seem not to evince striking genre-specific similarities. In fact, it’s hard to imagine a corpus relative to which the relative density of features in the *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb* “*ghazal*” could be described as either descriptive or argumentative—it seems generally to have a lot more closers than openers, of either variety. Not only does the *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb* *ghazal* corpus differ in both length profile and feature density from Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s

³⁸⁶ see Figure 45: Address/Content distribution, with all lines (left) and disregarding line 1 entries (right), pg. 97

³⁸⁷ It might be suggested that the lower concentration of address/content structures is owing to their presumed infrequency in selections of only one line (because address/content is a set-up rather than a punch-line and single line entries should go straight to the punch-line). Given that such selections constitute a minority of the corpus, however, this would not fully explain the paucity of address/content structures.

ghazal, the corpus fails to fall into the genre-specific framework established for the lyric corpus, by either measure.

3.1.3 Conclusions from Anthology Comparisons

Comparisons between the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz and corpora drawn from the *Ḥamāsa* and *al-Muḥibb wa-al-Maḥbūb wa-al-Mashmūm wa-al-Mashrūb* support the hypothesis that selections from anthologies tend to share structural properties observed across the short lyric poems of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz. Selections from both anthologies demonstrated a distribution in poem length that approximated a power function, as does the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz (although there were a couple of variations in length profile shared by both anthology corpora). More importantly, both anthologies showed evidence of the opener and closer effects observed in the short lyric poems of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz (though the role of first-line *wāw rubba* in both anthologies differed from that observed in the lyric corpus). One implication of this is that the anthologists specifically culled poetic selections (from both long poems and short) which struck them as reading like independent short poems, rather than simply selecting pretty lines to quote without regard to their internal structure. Another implication is that there exist sections in long poems that share the structural tendencies of short lyric poems. We have, of course, no evidence for the *frequency* with which long poems have such subsections; this might be very rare or very common. Nevertheless, it suggests the possibility that scholars of long poems may find knowledge of the structures of short poems useful to their analyses.

Our conclusions are more mixed with respect to genre-specific claims. On the one hand, the corpus of the *Ḥamāsa* “*wasf*” seemed to be formally similar to the *wasf* corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, with respect both to length profile and relative feature density, and this supports the idea that generalizations made about short poem genres vs. long poem genres and descriptive vs. argumentative genres in the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz may have some applicability beyond Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s own work. These findings also support the idea that it’s possible to make formal generalizations of the sort we made in chapter 2 about genres in general: that is, it might be possible to apply the terms “descriptive” and “short-poem genre” to a broader poetic genre of *wasf* which transcends the work of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz. On the other hand, not only did the *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb* “*ghazal*” fail to conform to the specific formal profile of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s *ghazal*, it defied categorization as a short or long poem genre, or as a descriptive or argumentative genre. Therefore it seems safe to say that while these distinctions may have value in discussing Arabic poetry beyond the *dīwān* of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz—and even when discussing poetic selections made by anthologists—they are not applicable in all cases.

3.2 Beyond the Lyric: Comparisons with *Qaṣīda* Poetry

This study is devoted to the examination of structural trends in non-*qaṣīda* poetry. However, such a study raises the inevitable question of how its findings relate to the *qaṣīda* genres. Do the structures observed in lyric poems also occur in their *qaṣīda* counterparts? Do *qaṣīda* genres work entirely differently? Or do some trends carry over while others do not? In attempting to address this question, we’ll examine two small

qaṣīda corpora: the *madīḥ* genre in the *dīwān* of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, and the *madīḥ* genre in the *Ḥamāsa* of Ibn al-Shajarī.

3.2.1 The *Madīḥ* of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz

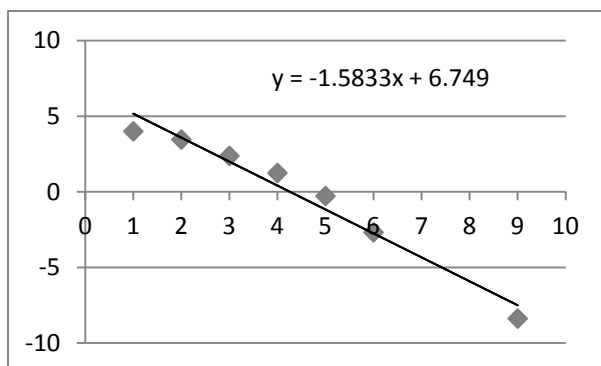
The *madīḥ* of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz provides the most direct opportunity to compare the structures of lyric and *qaṣīda* genres: since the *madīḥ* poems are written by the same poet as our primary lyric corpus, the differences between the two corpora can be ascribed with some confidence to the lyric/*qaṣīda* disjunction, since factors such as time period, literary school, and idiosyncratic preference of the poet need not be considered as confounding factors in the comparison. This corpus is composed of 84 poems, for a total of 1298 lines.

3.2.1.1 Length Profile in the *Madīḥ* of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz

Like all the corpora we’ve considered thusfar, the distribution of poem lengths in the *madīḥ* of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz is log log linear, as shown in the graph below.³⁸⁸

Figure 80: Logarithmic Length Profile of the *Madīḥ* of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz

³⁸⁸ There are no poems between length 64 and 128, or between length 128 and 256; there is however one poem between length 256 and 512, which, like the 124 line poem among the *wasf* poems, employs *muzdawij* rhyme.



Like all the other genres in Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s corpus save *sharāb*, the *madīḥ* line crosses the x axis at around 4 (i.e. between 16 and 32 lines, there is on average about 1 poem for each possible number of lines). The slope of the line, at -1.5, falls in between the length profiles of the “long poem” and “short poem” lyric genres.

3.2.1.2 Openers and Closers in the *Madīḥ* of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz

To what extent do the opener and closer effects observed in the lyric corpus (and in the anthology corpora in section 3.1 above) also apply to *qaṣīda* poetry? The frequencies of each feature in the first vs. the second halves of poems are shown in the graphs below:

Figure 81: Address/Content

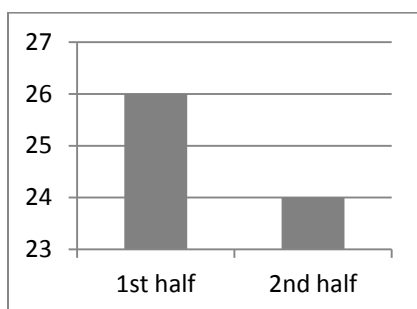


Figure 82: *Wāw Rubba*

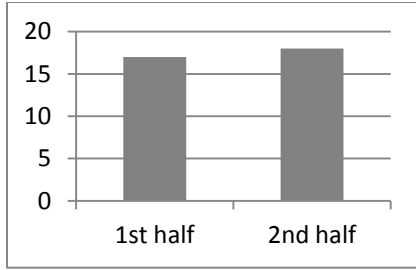


Figure 83: Similes

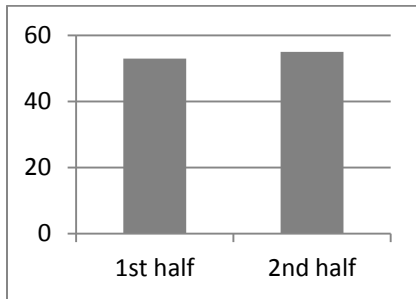
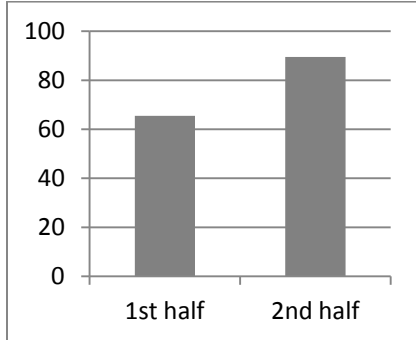


Figure 84: If/Then



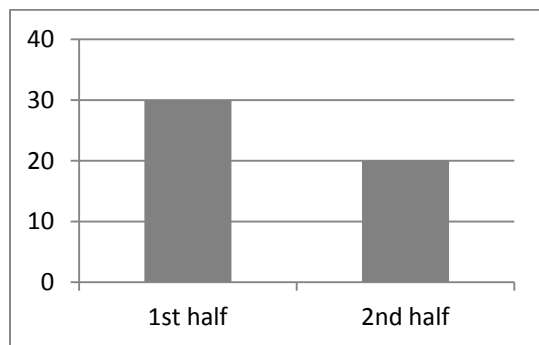
The address/content feature behaves as an opener in Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s *madīḥ*, and the if/then feature behaves as a closer³⁸⁹. However, *wāw rubba* shows no opener effect, and similes show no closer effect—they appear to be evenly distributed between the first and second halves of the poem. In the case of *wāw rubba*, we can partly understand this by noting that *qaṣīda* poetry, unlike lyric poetry, does not employ *wāw rubba* in the first

³⁸⁹ Both the address/content and the if/then effects achieve statistical significance

line. However, we know that in Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s lyric corpus *wāw rubba* functions as an opener even after we remove the first line from consideration—that effect is absent here. The lack of closer effect in the similes has no ready explanation, especially in combination with the significant closer effect observed for if/then structures.

To what extent is the opener effect of address/content accounted for by a preference for occurring in the first line? Once the first line effect has been removed, is there a secondary closer effect? The graph below shows the address/content feature distribution between the first and second halves of poems, after removing the first line and all its entries from consideration:

Figure 85: Distribution of Address/Content, first-lines omitted



Unlike other cases of the address/content opener (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s lyric poems and the two anthologies) it appears that the address/content feature in the Ibn al-Mu‘tazz *madīḥ* may display an opener effect beyond the first line; the opener effect in this graph is not statistically significant, but it certainly looks suggestive and might be demonstrable with a larger sample size.

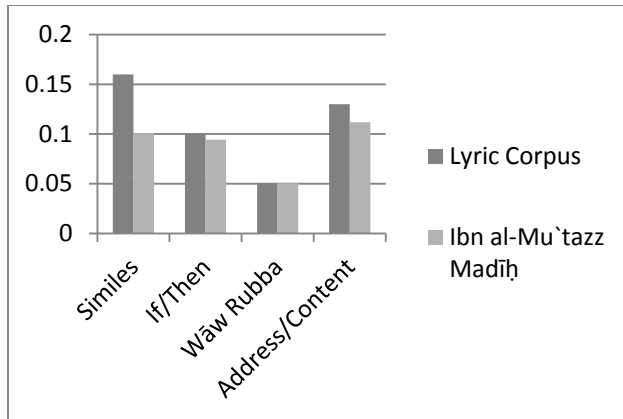
It appears that the *madīḥ* corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz shares some but not all of the structural properties found in the lyric corpora of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, the *Ḥamāsa* “*waṣf*” and the *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb* “*ghazal*”.

3.2.1.3 Genre Complementarity in the *Madīḥ* of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz

How do the relative frequencies of different features in the *Madīḥ* compare with those observed in other genres? Can the short *Madīḥ* poems³⁹⁰ be described as “descriptive” or “argumentative”? We can attempt to answer this question by comparing the relative frequency of different features in the *madīḥ* with the lyric corpus:

Figure 86: Feature Frequency per line in the average short poem from the lyric corpus (left) and the *madīḥ* (right) of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz

³⁹⁰ i.e. of 4 lines or fewer



Wāw rubba appears with about the same frequency in the *madīḥ* as in the lyric corpus.

The other three features appear somewhat less frequently in the short *madīḥ* poems of Ibn al-Mu'tazz than in his short lyric poems. Aside from the feature frequencies being slightly lower in the *madīḥ* than in the lyric corpus, feature frequency in the *madīḥ* conforms reasonably well to feature frequency in the lyric poems overall—including both argumentative and descriptive genres. The short *madīḥ* of Ibn al-Mu'tazz seem not, therefore, to exhibit the characteristic features of either a descriptive genre or an argumentative genre.

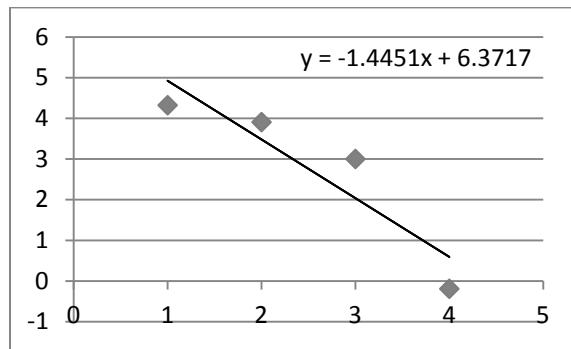
3.2.2 The *Ḥamāsa* “*Madīḥ*” of Ibn al-Shajarī

After comparing the lyric corpus with its most proximate analog in the *qaṣīda* genre, we'll now make the same comparison to another corpus containing *qaṣīda* material: the *madīḥ* chapter in Ibn al-Shajarī's *Ḥamāsa*. This gives us the opportunity to compare the trends we found in the *Ibn al-Mu'tazz madīḥ* against a body of poetic selections from the same genre (or at least, a genre with the same name) written by a variety of authors.

3.2.2.1 Length Profile in the *Ḥamāsa* “*Madīḥ*”

The length profile of the *Ḥamāsa* “*Madīḥ*” is the only length profile considered in this entire study to raise serious doubt about whether it’s really log log linear. It looks like this:

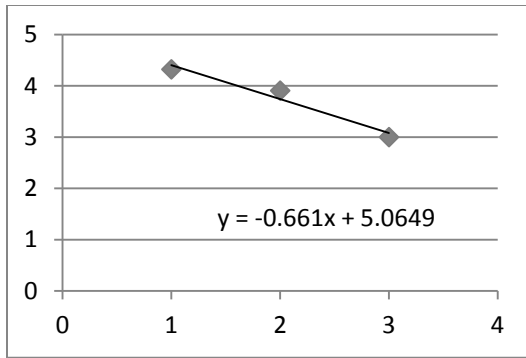
Figure 87: Logarithmic Length Profile of the *Ḥamāsa* “*Madīḥ*”



The linear fit to this set of data is relatively unconvincing.³⁹¹ Two possibilities suggest themselves: first, that the length profile of the *Ḥamāsa* “*Madīḥ*” is not in fact log log linear; or second, that the last point (4, -1) is an outlier and should be discarded from consideration. If we looked at only the first three data points, we’d get a much better-fitting line, with a considerably narrower slope:

Figure 88: Logarithmic Length Profile of the *Ḥamāsa* “*Madīḥ*”, eliminating the last point from consideration:

³⁹¹It may be helpful to make this point quantitatively. One measure of how well a set of data points approximate a function is called the Coefficient of Determination, or “ R^2 value”: this describes the proportion of variability in a data set that can be accounted for by a statistical model. The R^2 values in all the other log log linear graphs in this chapter and the last were over .9, and usually over .95. The R^2 value of this data set relative to its line is .83.



Attempting to argue for a linear trend on the basis of three data-points is somewhat dicey, however. In the absence of certainty about the slope or even the log log linearity, it's difficult to make a comparison with other slopes we've seen.

3.2.2.2 Openers and Closers in the *Ḥamāsa* “*Madīḥ*”

How does the distribution of features throughout poems in the *Ḥamāsa* “*Madīḥ*” compare with those of the lyric corpus and the *madīḥ* of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz? We cannot provide a graph of *wāw rubba* since there's only one example of *wāw rubba* in the corpus, occurring in the third line of four; however, graphs of the other three features follow:

Figure 89: Address/Content

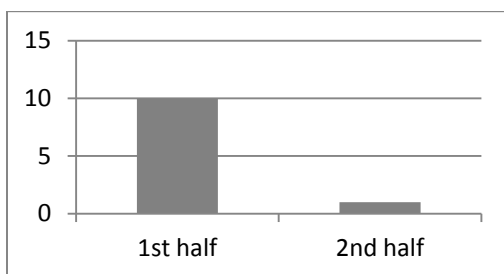


Figure 90: Similes

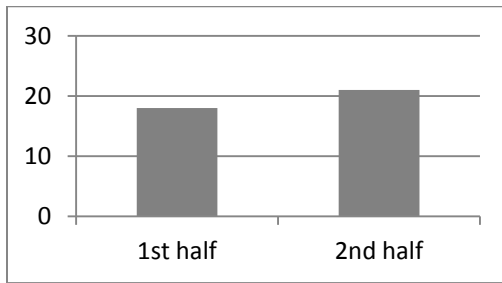
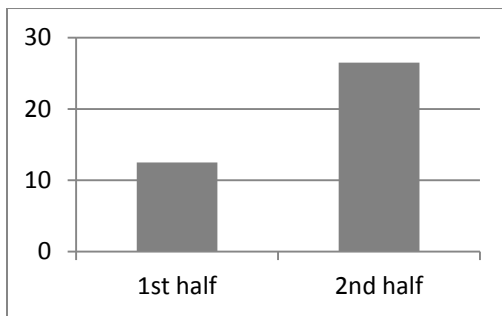


Figure 91: If/Then

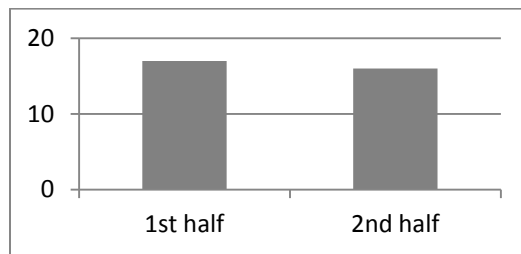


As in the Ibn al-Mu‘tazz *Madīḥ*, the address/content structure displays a significant opener effect, and if/then has a significant closer effect. On the other hand, *wāw rubba* was virtually absent—and the one instance of it in the corpus was in the second half of the poem. As for similes, there are three more in the second half than in the first—while a study with a larger corpus might have found a simile closer effect to be in evidence, we have no particularly compelling reason to believe that there is one.

The evidence is so far inconclusive. It could support the claim that the *Ḥamāsa* “*madīḥ*” selections display opener and closer effects like those found in the short lyric poems, except that there’s not enough data to demonstrate these effects in the case of *wāw rubba* or the similes. It could also support the claim that the *Ḥamāsa* “*madīḥ*” selections

display opener and closer effects like those found in the Ibn al-Mu‘tazz *madīḥ*, with no significant *wāw rubba* opener effect or simile closer effect. There’s not really anything to be said about the distribution of *wāw rubba* in this corpus, though more will be said in section 3.2.2.3 below about the lack of examples to draw upon. However, we can look more closely at the distribution of the similes. In order for a simile closer effect here to be similar to a simile closer effect in the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, it should be more pronounced in poems that are shorter than 7 lines. When we restrict our attention to similes in poems that are shorter than 7 lines, we get a result that looks like this:

Figure 92: Similes in Poems of 7 Lines or Fewer

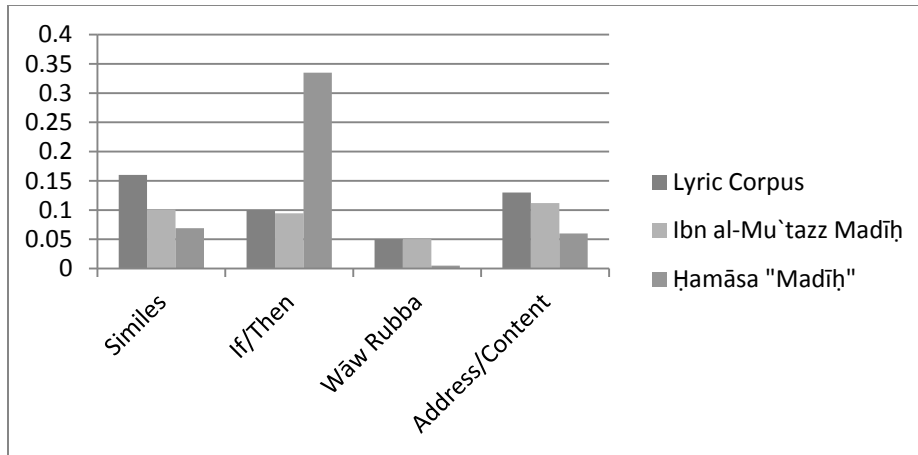


Looking at the distribution of similes in short poems from the *Ḥamāsa* “*Madīḥ*”, we see that there are in fact slightly *more* similes in the first half of the poem than in the second. Given that, the very slight preference for similes in the second half of the poem in the corpus as a whole looks a lot more like a fluke, and a lot less like the similes are following the opener/closer pattern of the lyric corpus. The *Ḥamāsa* “*madīḥ*” may therefore be tentatively supposed to resemble the opener and closer patterns of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s *madīḥ* poems—with if/then and address/content structures preferring the second halves of poems, and *wāw rubba* and similes evincing no particular preference for one half over the other.

3.2.2.3 Genre Complementarity in the *Ḥamāsa* “*Madīḥ*”

How similar is the relative frequency of different formal features in the *Ḥamāsa* “*Madīḥ*” to that of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s *Madīḥ*, and how similar is it to that of the lyric corpus? Here we replicate the chart in section 3.1.2.3 above, which compared the feature frequencies of a line in the average short poems of the Ibn al-Mu‘tazz *Madīḥ* and the lyric corpus, adding in the *Ḥamāsa* “*Madīḥ*”:

Figure 93: Feature Frequency per line in the average short poem from the lyric corpus (left) and the *madīḥ* (middle) of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, and the *Ḥamāsa* “*Madīḥ*” (right)



In the case of similes and address/content, the *Ḥamāsa* “*Madīh*” appears to have a comparable but somewhat lower feature frequency than the Ibn al-Mu‘tazz *Madīh*, which in turn has a comparable but somewhat lower feature frequency than the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz as a whole. The major differences between the Ibn al-Mu‘tazz *madīh* and the *Ḥamāsa* “*Madīh*” are firstly, that the *Ḥamāsa* “*Madīh*” corpus has virtually no *wāw rubba* structures, and secondly, that it has an enormously high concentration of if/then structures.

Various explanations might be advanced for these differences, and further investigation would be necessary to disambiguate between them. Perhaps the differences represent idiosyncratic preferences for writing *madīh* on the part of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, or preferences for selecting it on the part of the anthologist, or potentially a different understanding on the part of the two as to what “*madīh*” means. Alternatively, perhaps they reflect systematic differences between the outputs produced by poets vs. the outputs culled in anthologies. A poet writing a *madīh* poem might be expected to touch on many subjects

and employ many modes of discourse; the anthologist excerpting that poem might wish to extract the subset of that poem that most epitomizes *madīḥ*.

3.2.3 Conclusions

In many ways, our examination of *qaṣīda* genres has generated more heat than light. The *Ḥamāsa* “*madīḥ*” and the Ibn al-Mu‘tazz *madīḥ* corpora seem not especially similar by either of the standards—length profile slope or feature frequency—developed for internally comparing the lyric genres of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz. Whether this is because the two are notably different or the standards developed are ineffective as generic markers is unclear. It would, indeed, be tempting to dismiss the possibility of comparing “genres” as identified by different editors for different corpora altogether, were it not for the close correspondence of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s *wasf* poetry to the *Ḥamāsa* “*wasf*” corpus along all of the relevant axes. We know that this correspondence—between poetry and anthology selections—is unlikely to reflect poems being lifted in their entirety into the collection, since that was not the case in the selections taken from Ibn al-Mu‘tazz. If it is indeed possible to compare these two corpora as apples to apples, this raises the question of whether the similarities are the result of happenstance, or whether—if we searched farther and more systematically—other such correspondences could be found.

As for the cross-genre question of openers and closers, we’re able to advance a very tentative hypothesis that address/content and if/then structures function as openers and closers (respectively) in *qaṣīda* poetry and lyric poetry alike, whereas *wāw rubba* and similes function as openers and closers respectively only in lyric genres, not in *qaṣīda*

poetry. If true, this would perhaps account for Scheindlin finding similes rare at the ends of the poems he studied, and Hamori finding “if/then” clauses at the ends of the poems he studied—our hypothesis would predict that result supposing that both scholars were primarily looking at *qaṣīdas*.

3.3 Conclusion

This chapter has examined an assortment of corpora which share some properties but not others with the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, in an effort to contextualize the findings of chapter 2. We find that some of the chapter 2 conclusions are generalizable beyond the lyric corpus, and others less so. We found that the log log linearity of poem and selection length was a nearly universal property in the corpora we studied—the only possible exception being the *Ḥamāsa Madīḥ*. We found that if/then closer properties, and address/content opener properties, seemed in evidence in all corpora; in contrast, *wāw rubba* and similes appeared not to behave as openers/closers in the *qaṣīda* corpora, but they did so in both the lyric anthologies.

With the exception of the *Ḥamāsa* “*waṣf*” corpus and the *waṣf* corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz, which evinced formal similarities in both poem length profile and relative feature frequency, comparisons along these axes did not find that corpora whose genres were selected so as to be similar to one another exhibited similar traits. On the one hand, this indicates that these traits are probably not sufficiently constant across similar genres to be effective as an intercorporeal index. However, since the things they are measuring are of interest in their own rights, they remain useful tools for identifying differences and

similarities in different corpora, which are then (at least in some cases) possible to attempt to understand.

Finally, we return to address the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter. To what extent are the trends observed in the lyric corpus idiosyncratic to that corpus and to what extent broadly applicable? Looking back on the evidence presented in this chapter, we can assert with some confidence that the notion of openers and closers seems to be relevant beyond the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz: opener and closer effects of various sorts were evident through all the corpora we studied. Likewise, the log log linearity of poem length seemed broadly applicable to the corpora under study. The complementarity of genres into descriptive and argumentative modes, on the other hand, might well reflect an idiosyncrasy of the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz.

How does the information we have gathered help us to situate the work of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz within his literary context? Despite his reputation as a master of the simile, Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s lyric corpus actually has considerably *fewer* similes than the selections of either the *Ḥamāsa* “*wasf*” or the *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb* “*ghazal*”; it has somewhat fewer if/then structures as well.³⁹² Of course, this comparison is somewhat suspect as it involves comparing poems with anthology selections which (as noted above) may be subject to different selection criteria. The next step in pursuing this line of inquiry would be to compare the Ibn al-Mu‘tazz lyric corpus with lyric corpora by other poets—

³⁹² This doesn’t address the situation of the lyric corpus, but the differential in feature frequency between if/then in the Ibn al-Mu‘tazz *Madīḥ* and the *Ḥamāsa* “*Madīḥ*” raises questions about Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s position among his peers that could be answered by further study.

preferably representing a selection of time periods. Should these differences prove to be entirely explained by the difference between anthologies and *dīwāns*, this would in itself be informative. We have chosen (under the guidance of some intuition and some logistical considerations) to focus attention on a few structural features, asking the reader to suppose with us that these structures possess a sufficiently important rhetorical force as to be worthy of study. If indeed the lyric closers turn out to be disproportionately represented in anthologies, this would provide some evidence that the medieval anthologists agreed with this intuition.

What have we learned about the relationship between short poems and long ones? In comparing the *Ḥamāsa* “*wasf*” and the *Kitāb al-Maḥbūb* “*ghazal*” corpora with the lyric corpus, we find support for the idea that short poems act much the same as the segments of longer poems extracted by anthologists: They have similar length profiles, and—more importantly—they seem to employ openers and closers in the same way. In chapter 4, we’ll look closely at some sections of long poems that appear to follow similar structures to those we’ve identified in short poems.

Chapter 4: The Poems Themselves

In chapters 1-3, we attempted to study the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz as a whole, identifying trends that emerge most clearly when viewing poetry from a distance. This chapter takes the opposite approach, conducting analyses of individual poems. The purpose of this is twofold. First, it seeks a specific locus for exploring some broader questions about the corpus. How do the generalizations we’ve been making apply in specific cases, to short poems, long poems, and those in between? How are poems shaped? How do the various poetic genres differ, and how do they relate? How does the poet manipulate expectations in order to keep the reader enthralled and provoke excitement—pathos—humor?

Second and more importantly, this chapter aims to provide translations and discussions of poems on their own terms. What makes them beautiful? What makes them interesting? What makes them powerful? It may be possible, and even useful, to generalize about large groups of poems; but ultimately, there is no better way to understand poetry than to read a poem.

4.1 Short Poems and Long Ones: Openers and Closers in Practice

The previous several chapters have noted that certain features (including the address/content and *wāw rubba* structures) tend to congregate at the beginnings of short poems, while others (including if/then structures and similes) tend to congregate near the ends. We have also proposed a modal dichotomy between argumentative poems (which

feature a higher concentration of address/content and if/then structures, among others) and descriptive poems (which feature a higher concentration of similes and *wāw rubba* structures). But how do these facts play out in the analysis of an individual poem? What sorts of structural tendencies in short poems are reflected in these generalizations? And how might these tendencies inform our approach to longer poems, in which they are not observed? In this section, we will take a closer look first at a series of short poems, and then at poems of medium length, and finally at long poems.

4.1.1 Short Poems

This section features a selection of short poems. Their shapes are simple; their aims—whether descriptive or argumentative—straightforward. This does not by any means render them unambitious as works of art, however. The artistry that goes into poems of this length occurs at the level of fine detail, in the way ideas and images build, even over the expanse of a very few lines, in order to compose an exquisite snapshot.

Poem 161³⁹³

1 We stopped by the garden, which the dew had moistened,

When the morning light had a fire in the garb of darkness.

2 It was as though around³⁹⁴ the eyes of the fresh narcissus

Were oil flasks of pearl which were stuffed with carnelian.

³⁹³ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 559, #1085). ‘Describing a Narcissus’. This poem is referenced on pg. 12

³⁹⁴ The text in the Sāmarrā’ī edition reads *baynahu*, the antecedent of which is somewhat opaque but might perhaps be translated as “within the garden”. In the Ritter edition of *Asrār al-Balāgha* (Jurjānī 1954), where this line is quoted numerous times, the text reads *ḥawlahā*, i.e. “around the eyes”. I have adopted Jurjānī’s reading here.

3 *If the dew moistens them, you imagine that their tears*

Were the tears of eyelids, whose kohl was saffron perfume.

This short descriptive poem has the honor of being the poem most quoted in the four contemporary *balāgha* sources cited in the introduction³⁹⁵. The poem begins by setting the scene: the first hemistich provides a simple declarative explanation of the backdrop—a garden at dawn. The second hemistich builds on the backdrop by elaborating upon the quality of the morning light. Light imagery features prominently across the genres of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s lyric poetry, often developing genre-specific motifs; in this descriptive poem it simply heightens the sensibility of the exposition that preceded it, transitioning the poem into the two similes upon which the poem is built³⁹⁶.

Figure 94³⁹⁷



³⁹⁵ See pg. 12

³⁹⁶ The fact that the poem’s center of gravity lies in the intertwined images of the second and third line seems self-evident, but this view is also supported by the fact that Jurjānī’s citations of this poem skip the first line altogether.

³⁹⁷ (Bodhisagan's Plants and Rants 2007)

The images in the second and third lines can perhaps be best understood with reference to a picture of a narcissus. The striking reddish orange fringe around the center of the narcissus is compared in line two to carnelian, and in line three to saffron (saffron and carnelian are in fact very similar colors of orange-ish red). In the second line, the white petals around the “eye” of the narcissus are compared to an oil flask made of pearl, while the brightly colored center is likened to the reddish-orange sesame-based oil within it³⁹⁸; by analogy to the pearl ointment box, its contents become carnelian, a gem with a similar color.

In the third line, the same red color is described from a different vantage point: whereas the second line focuses on the petals and analogizes the red center to the stuffing inside them, the third line focuses upon the eye of the narcissus itself, drawing attention to the fact that the red color is in fact a fringe around its edge, like kohl applied around a human eye (if the kohl were instead the reddish color of saffron perfume). Meanwhile, the comparison of narcissus eye to human eye is shored up by the return of the dew, mentioned in the first line, to become the narcissus-eye’s tear.

The strength of this poem rests upon the complex relationship between the two similes in the second and third lines. First, they are describing the same thing (a narcissus, and specifically its reddish color) in two different ways—the first time it’s an ointment box

³⁹⁸ The word for oil flasks is *madāhin*. The primary noun derived from this root, *dūhn*, refers to “grease of any kind, or oil of sesame with which one anoints or greases or moistens the head or mustache or the hair” according to (Lane 1968, v. I, pg. 926-7) Not only is sesame oil itself a reddish orange color, other realizations of this root also make reference to reddish orange, e.g. *dihān*, “a red hide”, and *dahnā*, “a desert of reddish sand”.

and the second time it's an eye. Secondly, they describe the same reddish color from two opposing perspectives—from the outside looking in, and then from the inside looking out. Finally, while the two images are different, they intersect. The two images both involve cosmetics—oils in the first simile and kohl and perfume in the second. Moreover, the notion of the narcissus center as its “eye” is first introduced in line two and returned to in line three. In fact, the first hemistich of line two takes advantage of Arabic syntax to introduce the eye of the narcissus before introducing the petals. To directly translate the syntax of the line, we get “It was as though the eyes of the narcissus—around them were oil boxes of pearl whose stuffing was carnelian”. This shift away from the narcissus eye in the second line is thus counterbalanced by its return at the end of the third line.

The structure of this poem is a descriptive crescendo. It begins with an expository scene setting, and then proceeds to a striking simile, followed immediately by a second simile which engages with, contrasts and complements the first.

Poem 162³⁹⁹

1 The gazelle of the sand-dune has been protected by its lion;

His saliva is pleasant, but who will go down to drink it?

2 A drink whose watering place is pleasant

Its hail-stones are solid in the wine.

3 He is my illness when I lose him

And he'd be the cure of illness if I found him

³⁹⁹ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 274, #154)

This short *ghazal* poem fits squarely into the argumentative mode predicted by our investigations of feature frequency and feature distribution, beginning with a statement and ending with an “if”. But how do these facts operate on the level of this individual poem?

The poem begins by introducing the beloved as a “gazelle”, a rhetorical move so frequent as to be in and of itself a commonplace: by the time Ibn al-Mu‘tazz is writing, “gazelle” is freely used as a synonym for beloved, often without reflection. The poem gets its initial impetus by exploiting the implications of that simile: the gazelle was lifted into the love poem from a topos of pre-Islamic nomadic life, and this poem returns to those roots.

The first hemistich reports on the condition of a beloved whose guardian is keeping suitors away from the house, and it does this without departing from the metaphor of the desert gazelle, who is being protected by the lion that rules over the gazelle’s sand-dune. In recasting the lover’s dilemma into the situation of the gazelle, the poet introduces a thematic friction: it is an odd case that a lion should protect a gazelle, in the sense that gazelles are the natural prey of lions. The astute reader might wonder about how that friction carries over into the *ghazal* situation: perhaps it draws attention to the incongruity of a guardian, himself naturally inclined himself to seek out amorous encounters with young ladies, nevertheless serving as a fierce protector of the young ladies of his own household from interlopers.

The second hemistich departs from the conceit of the desert gazelle, praising the sweetness of the beloved's kisses and bemoaning their inaccessibility (presumably owing to the lion).⁴⁰⁰ However, the verb *warada*, "to go down to drink", primarily evokes the image of Bedouin camels going to drink from the watering hole. This reference thus continues the poem's pattern, drawing upon the imagery of pre-Islamic poetry at the same moment it withdraws from the original conceit.

The third hemistich of the poem expands out from the second, elaborating upon both the praise of the beloved's saliva and the comparison of a kiss to someone descending to a watering hole to drink—in this case, the mouth being likened specifically to a watering hole.

The fourth hemistich continues to describe the beloved's saliva, comparing it to wine. The beloved's teeth are compared to hailstones, which are a conventional image for both teeth and for the bubbles in the wine⁴⁰¹. With a subtle twist of imagery, the reader's metaphorical associations have journeyed in the course of two lines from the pre-Islamic wilderness to the 'Abbāsid wine-party.

The third line serves here as a sort of argumentative zinger. We haven't been building up to it—quite the contrary. The first line set the stage for a lover's complaint with a description of the predicament followed by a pointed question. But the second line digresses, picking up on the mention of the beloved's saliva (originally introduced in

⁴⁰⁰ As an aside, without being prepared at this moment to offer aggregate evidence to this effect, I believe that the beginning of poems with questions is quite common.

⁴⁰¹ See (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. III, pg. 141, #1263, ln 31) for another example of this.

service of a complaint about its scarcity) to elaborate upon its excellence and play with its associated imagery. Now in the third line, the poet reawakens to his original purpose, and abandons imagery altogether in favor of argument. The final hemistich is an excellent example of the conditional sentence being used to make an argument: the beloved in his inaccessible state is the cause of his illness, but *if only* he could meet the beloved again, he would become the illness's cure. The parallelism between the poem's and fifth and sixth hemistichs punctuates the urgency of this point, and its implicit request.

The shape of this poem begins by harnessing imagery towards argumentation (in the modal sense of the word as defined in chapter 1). It expands outwards to caress the imagery, and then as the imagery trails away it snaps back to a sharp argumentative focus.

Poem 163⁴⁰²

1 Oh! Serve me a choice wine, when the stars are sparkling in the darkness,

Whose light is burning like a fire,

2 As though the Pleiades were a camel-litter above a she-camel

Whom a shouting camel-driver drives towards the west.

3 If the eye encounters it, it imagines the Pleiades' stars

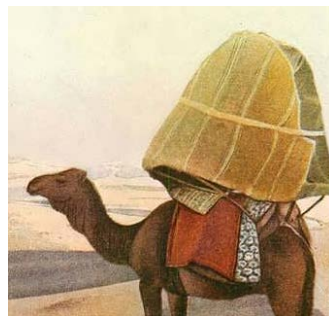
As flasks in which was trembling quicksilver.

⁴⁰² (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 64, #647)

This descriptive *sharāb* poem shares elements in common with both of the previous two, especially Poem 161. The poem begins with a *sharāb* opening formula “Oh, serve me drink!” which encompasses both an imperative and an apostrophe within the compact space of two words. As in Poem 161, the first line supplements the poem’s initial statement (in this case an argumentative demand for wine) with a light-centric description of the time of day in the form of a circumstantial (*ḥāl*) clause.

As in Poem 161, the poem moves from the introduction of the poem to an elaborate description. However, the description does not involve the wine, which we might have been led to suppose was the principal topic of the poem by the syntax of the first line (and by analogy to Poem 161); rather, it involves the stars. In this respect, the poem resembles in that the second line involves an imagistic expansion upon a subordinate theme of the first line. This image compares the shape of the constellation to a camel litter, a plausible likeness when we put the two side by side:

Figure 95⁴⁰³



⁴⁰³ Left image: (Astronomy 2010); Right image (Thompson 1940, 75)

We can even make out the outline of the camel underneath the litter, and see it heading into the west, just as stars appear to process westward across the desert of the night sky (though the shouting caravan driver must be left to the imagination).

At this point we might expect a return to what had been presented as the primary subject of the poem (as occurs in Poem 162) but again we are surprised. The poem continues with a second simile about the stars, this time comparing the flickering stars to the trembling of mercury in a flask. The poem's opening line proved to be a feint—the stars are the ultimate focus. As in the case of Poem 161, this poem produces two similes about the same object, but from different angles. Where Poem 161 looks first at the entire flower and then at the center, Poem 163 looks first at the constellation and then at the individual stars. And although we never return to the wine, it may be that the final image—the silver flasks—evokes a hint of silver winecups⁴⁰⁴.

With an “oh” at the beginning of the poem and an “if” at the end, this poem is a descriptive poem clad in the guise of an argumentative poem, as described in chapter 1.⁴⁰⁵ This may be an artifact of a gradual shift from rhetoric towards description as part of the development of manneristic poetry; alternatively, it might simply reflect Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s own cooption of an argumentative form to serve a descriptive end.

The structure of this poem is a shift—first tentative and eventually confirmed—from a description of wine to a description of stars. While not an unusual progression, especially

⁴⁰⁴ For examples of silver wine cups in ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s *diwān* see for example (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 57, #638, ln. 24; v. II, pg. 135, #720, ln 2)

⁴⁰⁵ This phenomenon is discussed on page 76

in wine poetry, it serves along with the other two short poems discussed to highlight the structural variation to be found within three not-dissimilar poems. In all three cases the poem builds to a third-line climax, but the shapes of the poems differ: in poem 1085 a descriptive topic is introduced in the first line (with a passing imagistic nod to the light at dawn) and crescendos to a descriptive culmination of that topic. In poem 154, the poem introduces an argumentative topic in the first line (with a passing reference to the beloved's saliva), digresses into description of the beloved's saliva in the second line, and snaps back to the argumentative punch-line in the third line. In poem 647, the poem introduces an argumentative topic in the first line (with an imagistic nod to the light of the stars), and then shifts into a decisively descriptive mode, producing two similes in tribute to stars whose mention had begun as an aside. In all three cases, the development of the poem, whether sudden or subtle, is based upon fine-grained nuances in the language. These nuances play upon and with the expectations of the reader, who reads on with interest to see where the language will take him.

4.1.2 Medium-length Poems: Sequences of Shorter Sub-Sections

This section looks at two poems of medium length—between 10 and 20 lines, demonstrating how the structures evidenced in the short poems of the last section can be found in longer poems, whether at the level of poetic subsections, or spread out across entire poems.

1 When the light of morning revealed and rent open

As pure water is revealed from under turbid water,

2 And the stars of night were ill in their glances

Following the Pleiades, some after others,

3 As though the Pleiades were, when morning divided and split open,

The central pearl among the pearls, shining

4 As though the Gemini at the top of the horizon

Were branches of blossoms or girdles of leaves,

5 And the dawn in the east was like the front teeth of the row

As though it were throwing a silver dish upon the earth,

6 I went forth in the morning in threadbare clothes of night

With one who flung his gaze on every horizon

7 Possessed of a hooked beak such that if he pierced, he rent asunder,

Dyed every day with clotted-blood

8 –And every bone is a joint if that beak grabs on—

And a gaze that tells him the truth when he looks

9 As though it were a narcissus with no leaves.

He tears into the back until it's slit open

10 With talons like halves of rings,

*Fortunate—for if he sees something to eat, than he has already been given his
sustenance*

⁴⁰⁶ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 425-427, #933)

11 *Or if he flies towards his prey, then he has already apprehended it*

And if a hand releases him, then he almost takes flame

12 *Outstripping the fear of the birds—he sets out so quickly*

That they see death before terror.

13 *He glimpsed from within the high-climbing blossoms of the garden*

The swimmers on the surface of a deep pool

14 *Like the white twilight-glow that gleams at dusk,*

From which the wind uncovers flecks of dust

15 *As the blacksmiths immerse the broadside of a drawn sword—*

So he flew like a quick-loosed feathered arrow.

16 *He didn't miss his target; he tore into it:*

Whichever of them he strikes or smites dies

17 *And he lets fly feathers upon the earth, torn to shreds.*

We can divide this *tarad* poem up into sections by syntax. The first section, spanning lines 1-5, introduces the scene in an extended subordinate clause. The first action verb of the poem occurs in line six, where the poet explains that he is going hunting with (though he doesn't identify the animal in so many words) a falcon. Lines 6-12 are devoted to description of the falcon's many excellent parts and qualities, all of which are presented in apposition with one another. Had the poet explicitly named the falcon as his companion, all these descriptions would be in apposition to the falcon; since the falcon was never explicitly identified, the string of appositive descriptions serve collectively to define the speaker's hunting companion. The second sentence of the poem begins in line

13, where the poet describes an actual incident involving the falcon's hunting prowess. This story is told in two sentences; the first, spanning lines 13-15, sets up the situation: He saw [the birds] swimming in the pond...so he flew. The second sentence, composed of line 16 and the single hemistich following it (which we'll call line 17), wraps up the situation in a brisk but vivid coda.

Let's now treat these four sections separately. Section 1 (lines 1-5) begins the poem with a leisurely setting of the scene.

1 When the light of morning revealed and rent open

As pure water is revealed from under turbid water,

2 And the stars of night were ill in their glances

Following the Pleiades, some after others,

3 As though the Pleiades were, when morning divided and split open,

The central pearl among the pearls, shining

4 As though the Gemini at the top of the horizon

Were branches of blossoms or girdles of leaves,

5 And the dawn in the east was like the front teeth of the row

As though it were throwing a silver dish upon the earth,

Let's compare this passage to the beginnings of other descriptive poems. The first line of Poem 161 goes like this:

*We stopped by the garden, which the dew had moistened,
When the morning light had a fire in the garb of darkness.*

While the first line of Poem 163 reads:

*Oh! serve me a choice wine, when the stars are sparkling in the darkness,
whose light is burning like a fire.*

In both cases, the opening line serves two purposes: to introduce the action, and to set the scene. The five-line opening sequence of Poem 164 is serving precisely the same function as the scene setting in the first line of the two shorter poems: “When the light of the morning reveals and rends open...” is not only structurally parallel to “When the morning light had a fire in the garb of darkness” and “When the stars are sparkling in the darkness, their light burning like a fire”, it is syntactically⁴⁰⁷ and even thematically parallel, describing the light in the sky at a particular time of day. The other function of the opening sentences of Poem 161 and Poem 163, describing the action, must wait for the second section of Poem 164.

⁴⁰⁷ It should be noted that the opening of 933 is not quite as syntactically parallel to the other two as it would appear from the English translation. The phrases in the two short poems are introduced with the *wa* of a circumstantial clause, while 933 begins with *lammā* which just means “when”. This may have something to do with the greater length of the phrase in 933—indicating the desirability of a stronger particle to establish its placement in the sentence. It would also be infelicitous to begin a poem with the *wāw* of circumstance, a situation which wouldn’t come up in 1085 and 647 since the descriptive phrase follows the introduction of the action in both cases. In either case, the syntactic parallelism remains despite the fact that precisely the same syntax is not employed.

How does this five line description progress? The first line follows the poetic conceit, common in the Arabic poetic tradition, that the darkness of night is rent open to reveal the daylight behind it. In this case, it's associated with the image of parting the scum that collects at the top of a well or pond to reveal the beautiful clear water underneath.

Having described the beauty of the dawn's light in the first line, the second line turns back to acknowledge the beauty of the departing stars. The illness of the night stars in the second line refers primarily to the malady of their fading away in the morning light, but the secondary comparison is nearly as strong: to the eyes of a beloved, whose flirtatious languor is often likened to the languor of illness. Since the lovers' liaison is supposed to end with the dawn, this imagery of the stars proceeding into the west after the Pleiades (as in Poem 163) is subtly imbued with the sorrow of a beloved with languid eyes slipping away along with the stars.

In the third and fourth lines, the poet expands upon the imagery of the stars, similing first the Pleiades to the central pearl of a pearl necklace (line 3) and then the Gemini to flowers and leaves (line 4). The third line emphasizes that these similes apply specifically to the stars at dawn—the beauty of the stars is undiminished by the fact that they are being supplanted by a new and brighter light. In line 5, the poet returns to describe the dawn that is supplanting them. This single line encompasses two similes about the dawn: the front teeth and a shining silver dish. The two dawn similes balance out the two similes about the stars, but they also occur in half the space. By spacing the similes in this way, the poet achieves two related effects. First, by creating an additional intensity in the last line, the poet makes the return from description of the stars to description of the

sunrise emphatic. It creates the effect of a sharp return to the original topic of the poem, rather like the expansion and contraction in Poem 162. At the same time, the increase in the tempo of the similes creates a formal climax to the section⁴⁰⁸. If this were a five line poem, this is where it would end. However, this is not a complete poem—it is in fact merely a subordinate clause. And thus, instead of ending, the poem proceeds on to the next section.

6 I went forth in the morning in threadbare clothes of night

With one who flung his gaze on every horizon

7 Possessed of a hooked beak such that if he pierced, he rent asunder,

Dyed every day with clotted-blood

8 –And every bone is a joint if that beak grabs on—

And a gaze that tells him the truth when he looks

9 As though it were a narcissus with no leaves.

He tears into the back until it's slit open

10 With talons like halves of rings,

*Fortunate—for if he sees something to eat, than he has already been given his
sustenance*

11 Or if he flies towards his prey, then he has already apprehended it

And if a hand releases him, then he almost takes flame

12 Outstripping the fear of the birds—he sets out so quickly

⁴⁰⁸ An earlier mention of acceleration and slowing patterns in closure was made in chapter one, pg. 56. It must be acknowledged that although acceleration and slowing are opposite, the effects they have in terms of cadence seem to be very similar.

That they see death before terror.

We now move to a section of the poem in which the speaker is introduced, along with what he is doing at dawn (this being analogous in function to the other half of the first lines of Poem 163 and Poem 161). In fact, this function is complete by the end of line 6. After the end of line 6, rather than move on to the next topic, the poem elaborates with a sequence of appositives linked to the initial description of the falcon. The section describes first the falcon's different physical features, and then (not unrelatedly) his qualities. Although this section does include some similes (in lines 9 and 10) the primary mode of description here is the if/then structure, which is leveraged throughout the section as a device for describing the brutal inevitability of the falcon's victories over his foes. Line 7 includes one such if statement, and line 8 includes two. However, the force of the acceleration in line 8 is disrupted by another formal artistic device, which will be discussed at greater length later on in this chapter: the paired hemistichs that form a line are jerked out of their moorings such that each hemistich is semantically paired with one from another line. Line 7 describes the falcon's beak, and the first hemistich of line 8 continues that description—not in and of itself extraordinary. Then, the second hemistich of line 8 introduces the new topic of the falcon's eyes, which continues into the first hemistich of line 9. The second hemistich of line 9 introduces another new topic—the falcon's talons. Line 9 uses simile rather than an if/then statement to describe the falcon's prowess, as does the first hemistich of line 10. In the second hemistich of line 10, the poet introduces a new trait of the falcon, this one a character trait rather than a simply physical one: he is fortunate or (perhaps more literally) blessed. In describing why he is blessed,

the poet employs three if statements in the course of three hemistichs, building up formal intensity yet again. This time, however, the force of the hemistich offset reinforces the buildup of ifs rather than subverting it: the three hemistichs devoted to a single subject serve to realign the semantic line with the formal line, providing a sense of resolution.⁴⁰⁹

The position of line 12 within the schema of the different sections is somewhat ambiguous. Whereas line 13 is the first place where a new sentence must begin; line 12 can serve as an adjunct to line 11, a preliminary adjunct to line 13, or a standalone. Likewise in terms of content, the line can serve either as a post script to line 11 or a foretaste of line 13. Given that the formal build-up of the second section leads so strongly to line 11, I elect to treat line 12 as a sort of transitional line, serving both as a postscript to the second section and as a harbinger of the third.

13 He glimpsed from within the high-climbing blossoms of the garden

The swimmers on the surface of a deep pool

14 Like the white twilight-glow that gleams at dusk,

From which the wind uncovers flecks of dust

15 As the blacksmiths immerse the broadside of a drawn sword—

So he flew like a quick-loosed feathered arrow.

⁴⁰⁹ This misalignment of hemistichs in lines is a property of poems written in the *rajaz* meter, which is the characteristic meter of *tarad* poetry. This phenomenon is discussed at greater length (with more examples provided) in section 4.2.2 Subverting Line Expectations, below.

The structure of this section is again one of expansion and rapid contraction. The narrative is captured entirely by line 13 and the second hemistich of line 15. The syntax is bipartite—x, so y—though it is not the sort of bipartite structure (discussed in chapter 1)⁴¹⁰ where the first half warns us that the second will inevitably come. Nevertheless, after explaining what the falcon saw in line 13, the poet proceeds in line 14 to introduce a simile to describe the beauty of the deep pool, and in the first half of 15 to introduce another simile to describe the way the wind uncovers flecks of dust from the pool's surface...and then the falcon abruptly strikes. The compactness of the second half of the sentence imitates the falcon's rapid descent.

16 He didn't miss his target; he tore into it:

Whichever of them he strikes or smites dies

17 And he lets fly feathers upon the earth, torn to shreds.

The final section of the poem is very short and to the point. It describes the falcon's inevitable defeat and destruction of the birds swimming in the pool, with an inevitability that we have been given to expect from section 2. There's very little description of the bloodbath itself, beyond the fact that it occurred. The reader is left with the vivid and haunting image of shredded feathers strewn upon the earth in the falcon's wake. The compact conclusion resolves 15 lines of build-up, providing a formal echo of the contractions at the ends of sections 1 and 3, on the scale of the entire poem. And it should not be omitted from mention that this poem, whose second section derived much

⁴¹⁰ See for example section 1.2.2 Address/Content, above

formal interest and energy from the offset of hemistichs from lines, concludes its short concluding section with a trailing half-line—a remainder left behind like the shredded feathers.

This analysis provides an example of how we can bring to bear what we know about the structures of short poems to think about long ones. On the one hand, it was possible in this case to see the poem as a sequence of short sections each of which (except the conclusion) evinced clear formal progressions of the sort that have been identified in short poems. At the same time, the patterns in short structures also operated on a larger scale on the entire poem itself, offering a satisfying sense of formal coherence which lent a supporting drama to the drama of the poem's content.

Poem 165⁴¹¹

1 Oh raincloud which has brought to us

When the sun was plunged in the late afternoon

2 Thunder, as though its groan⁴¹²

Were the moan⁴¹³ of one grieving, bereaved,

3 And lightning flashes, from which

The shining of a polished sword meets you

4 until the darkness on the horizon has settled,

With no appearance of whiteness—

⁴¹¹ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 579, #1115)

⁴¹² A sound expressing yearning or grief

⁴¹³ Cognate to 'groan' above, with a similar connotation

5 *The forenoon appears, but if it clears*

The gloom, it returns to setting

6 *Be generous to the dead earth*

Oh rainclouds, with abundant moisture

7 *Until the earth appears in*

Its fine, lovely gown,

8 *Sated with drink from the good dew*

A nice place for alighting or napping

9 *So that you see the branches, leaning*

With the leaning of friend upon friend

10 *Submerged in dew*

Weeping with abundantly flowing rain.

11 *The branches' surfaces are meeting the droplets*

And they flow from it as from a watercourse

12 *Like the cheeks of two lovers flow*

With tears in fear of the departure.

13 *How lovely is the world like this,*

If it were not for an imminent separation!

This *wasf* poem resembles Poem 164 in that it divides readily into subsections. This poem can be divided into three syntactically and thematically distinct parts. The first part, composed of lines 1-5, addresses the raincloud and describes the thunder, lightning, and gloom emanating from it. The second part, lines 6-12, enjoins the cloud to make the

world wet, and describes wet earth and wet branches. The third part, line 13, brings the poem to a stirring conclusion in a syntactically independent exclamation.

The first section, like the corresponding opening section in Poem 164, is composed of a half sentence of the sort that signals an inevitable second half-sentence to come. In this case, the bipartite structure in question is address-content, whose power of creating expectations has been discussed in chapter 1.⁴¹⁴ Thus the first two words in the poem set an expectation for a resolution which will be 5 lines in coming. The rest of the hemistich, meanwhile, creates another delayed expectation on the smaller scale—the object of the relative clause, that which the raincloud is bringing, is delayed through the second hemistich by a light-describing scene-setting circumstantial clause of the sort we’ve seen several times before. This second, smaller-scale expectation is satisfied at the beginning of line 2 with “thunder”, which is similized to the mourning of one bereaved. Line 3 parallels line 2 with the identification and description of lightning (compared, though not similized, with the flashing of a sword). Lines 4 and 5 explore the contrast between the darkness of the storm cloud and the brightness of the lightning: the storm creates the effect of night, while the flashes of lightning create brief and rapidly subsiding simulations of morning. This dichotomy elegantly culminates with the if/then statement in line 5.

The second section issues a conventional demand to the rainclouds: that they pour forth with generous rain upon the dead earth. This line provides the first concrete sense of the

⁴¹⁴ 1.2.2 Address/Content

argumentative intent of this poem, though the existence of some argumentative intent was foreshadowed by the direct address at the opening of the poem. The reference to mourning points backward to the simile in line 2, according it an after-the-fact significance in setting the emotional tone of the poem. Starting in line 7, the poem proceeds to describe the rain-soaked earth and its greenery. The associated imagery grows increasingly wistful, proceeding from “a fine, lovely gown” to “a nice place for alighting” to “the leaning of friend upon friend” to “weeping”, and finally culminating with a full-line simile in which the running of the rain-water off a branch is compared with the flowing of the tears of two lovers who fear separation off their cheeks.

The final line of the poem explicitly draws together the imagery of the rainstorm with the argument of loss. On the one hand, the relationship between the imagery and the intent of the poem has already been prefigured by the correspondence between the imagery of line 2 and the argument of line 6, and the imagery of line 12’s “imminent departure” provides a gorgeous segue into the closing line. At the same time, the structure of the explicit connection, when it comes, is surprising. The dripping earth is ultimately not portrayed as an expression of grief, but as an expression of the world’s beauty, marred only by the ephemerality of life and love and all beautiful things. Simultaneously, this stirring conclusion retrospectively picks up the closing image of section 1, with the dawn invoked by the lightning subsiding before the darkness of the storm.

The shape of this poem is a two-part build-up, occurring over the space of 12 lines, to a single-line conclusion. From the perspective of pacing, this structure is reminiscent of

that of Poem 164, which also builds up slowly to a compact conclusion; also, for that matter, to the shape of a Shakespearian sonnet, which builds through three quatrains to a turn in the final couplet.

4.1.3 Long Poems: Compound-complex structures

This section examines two poems between 20 and 40 lines in length—long poems by the standards of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s lyric corpus. Whereas the poems of medium length were composed of separate syntactic sections but possessed of a thematic and narrative unity, these poems are truly polythematic—they divide into separate parts which differ markedly from one another in theme and tone. The parts, in turn, divide into sections, which continue to bear a structural similarity to the short poems from 4.1.1 Short Poems. We will discuss how the sections build into parts, and how the parts combine to create a whole.

Poem 166⁴¹⁵

1 The vicissitudes of calamity have bitten me

And I see my hopes are lies.

2 Man desires the pleasure

Of the world, so he forgives the tragedies.

3 And if he milks her⁴¹⁶

She kicks him away⁴¹⁷ when the drinker is enjoying.

⁴¹⁵ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 249-252, #836)

⁴¹⁶ i.e. the world

4 *And I have prolonged my experiences of her—*

If only I were satisfied with the experiences!

5 *Fate has made shine the white of the head*

It is vicious, abundant of wonders.

6 *It calls youth to hope*

When death is closer than hope.

7 *Youth grows distant in spite of the length of the complaint*

So I have grown weary, and don't complain .

8 *Only the jealous have accused me*

And that is among the best of attainments.

9 *If you possess glory, you don't*

Possess the friendships of relatives.

10 *For glory and the jealous are linked;*

If the jealous depart, the glory departs too.

11 *And if you lose the jealous*

You have lost the best things in the world.

12 *So if what is evident is obedient to you*

*Then be patient over the troublesomeness of the hidden things.*⁴¹⁸

13 *Many's the high noon*

With whose heat the endurance of the riding beasts was scant

⁴¹⁷ This verb (*zabana*) encompasses the specific connotation of a camel kicking away the person milking her

⁴¹⁸ That is, since jealousy and its accompanying character smears are an inevitable byproduct of success, as long as one's supposed friends act friendly and obey you when you're successful, you have to endure knowledge of the fact that they will secretly resent you.

14 *Have I made a strong she-camel undertake*

With the breadth of the deserts stretching her steps

15 *When the sun was eating their shadows*

With a flame's eating of the woodcutter's branches

16 *And the day's mirage was wandering on hills*

When the dawn became hot.

17 *—Speed would almost set them flying*

If it were not for the halters and the saddlebags—

18 *And the reddish-white camels trampled the desert passes*

As though they were a torn piece of a travel sack,⁴¹⁹

19 *And it was as though the flecks of foam*

On their skulls were turbans,

20 *And it was as though the Ushar trees of the water course*

Are split open to reveal their foamy pith,⁴²⁰

21 *And it was as though their sweat-glands were wet*

With the spit of locusts,

22 *And it was as though their ribs were*

Bows of nab ' wood or drying racks,⁴²¹

23 *And it was as though their eyelids were*

⁴¹⁹ i.e. the camels trod the desert passes underfoot to shreds in their haste

⁴²⁰ This is a description of the froth coming from the mouths of the over-exerting camels. The pods of the 'Ushar trees are commonly likened with the faucial bags in the throats of camels, through which camels blow in order to bray (Lane 1968, 2051), while the word *zabad* may refer either to the pith inside trees or to the froth blown from a camel's mouth when it brays, or when it is in an excited state (Lane 1968, 1209).

⁴²¹ This word refers to tripods made from wooden sticks bound together at the top and spread out on the bottom, from which clothes can be hung to dry or water skins hung to cool. One imagines that these sticks would bend and strain under the weight of whatever they were holding up, and in this respect they resemble the contraction of a bow or the heaving of the chest of a racing camel.

Squinting over dry wells,
24 Until I saw the night in the horizons
Black of hair
25 As though it were, when it appeared, in the east
The first trace of a mustache.
26 And half of the sun was removed
And the west was red-flanked.

This *mu'ataba* poem represents a step up in structural complexity from the previous two. It is composed of two extremely different parts: lines 1-12 bemoan the state of fate, aging, and unreliable relatives, while lines 13-26 describe a harrowing journey across a desert with camels. These two parts, each more similar in length to mid-length poems we've looked at than to the short poems, are in turn composed of thematic subsections. We'll look at each part in turn, and then consider relationships between them.

While the subsections of part one cannot be as neatly categorized by syntax as in previous poems, it is nevertheless possible to make divisions on formal grounds. Lines 1-4 (section 1) deplore the cruelty of fate and the mortal world in general terms; lines 5-7 (section 2) complain about the inevitability of aging; while lines 8-12 (section 3) council forbearance in the face of resentful relatives. Section 1 begins by laying out the situation in a factual way and then escalating with two "if" statements in a row. Section 2 likewise begins with a statement of fact; though it does not culminate with a structure that we have studied, line 7 can be recognized as a local argumentative climax: since old age and death

are inevitable however much one might complain about them, there's no point in complaining. Section 3 seems to be the crux of the entire poem, at least if we trust the classification of Poem 166 among the *mu'ātabāt*. In terms of tone, it approaches the project of its complaint by combining the modalities of *fakhr*, self-praise, with *hikma*, which generalizes about human nature and counsels patience⁴²². The section begins with a statement of the speaker's virtue (which is such that only those who envy him can find fault with it), and proceeds to round off part 1 with a sequence of four "if" statements, which feature here in a purely argumentative mode. Indeed, the structure seems nearly to imitate the form of an argument in propositional logic. We are given a series of 3 generalizations about the way things are—if a, then b. The fourth line takes a stab at a syllogism that combines the previous three propositions into an argument for how his interlocutor (the poet himself in this case, since he seems to be talking to and about his own situation) should comport himself. The last line, in addition to being an "if" statement, also takes the form of "so-imperative", a structure which was identified in chapter 2 as being a frequent closer for *zuhd* poetry. Although this poem is classified as one of the *mu'ātabāt*, its rhetoric is decidedly redolent of the *hikma* mode of *zuhd*. While part 1 of Poem 166 does not digress into descriptions in the same way as Poem 164 and Poem 165, its component sections are more distinct from one another than either. Whereas Poem 164 and Poem 165 were each devoted to relating a single structurally simple narrative, the three sections of Poem 166 each take up different, albeit related, topics. The relationship between these three sections is one of argumentative progression rather than narrative continuity—the different subjects in the three sections differ in a

⁴²² *Hikma* is subsumed under *zuhd* in the *diwān* of ibn al-Mu'tazz.

fashion analogous to the body paragraphs of a five-paragraph persuasive essay. Section 1 makes a general complaint about fate's cruelty, and sections 2 and 3 specify different facets of it: the departure of youth and the envy of kin. Both of these facets are represented as being universal inevitabilities of the human condition, which happen at this moment to be afflicting the speaker, and sections 1 and 2 thus serve to frame section three in predisposing the reader to view hardship as unchangeable. The argumentative thrust of part 1 appears, therefore, to be aimed at the poet convincing himself that the jealousy and backbiting of relatives is just as inevitable as all other hardships: there's no more hope that complaining about it will change the situation than there is hope that complaining about old age will enable one to remain forever young.

Part 2 of Poem 166 is extremely different from part 1: it involves a description of the poet driving his camels at a breakneck pace through a desert at the hottest part of the day. Part 2 is composed of two sections. In the first section, (lines 13-23), the poet describes the excruciating journey, beginning with the classic descriptive opener *wāw rubba* ("many's the time I've done x") and ending with an extraordinary sequence of six similes describing the camels' extreme exertions in abstruse Beduin technicality. Section 2 (24-26) resolves the drawn-out tension of section 1 by showing the eventual coming of sunset—which hearkens a possible break in the journey and a promise of relief from the day's excruciating heat. This extended description of the camel's hardship followed by the compact description of its release reflects a by-now recognizable pattern of long anticipation followed by rapid resolution.

The obvious question to ask about Poem 166 is: how are parts 1 and 2 related? Part 1 is highly argumentative, abstract and general, wrestling with the convoluted personal politics of an ‘Abbāsīd prince whose relatives resent his success. By contrast, Part 2 is a highly descriptive and sensory passage in which the poet imagines himself as a nomadic warrior guiding his trusty camels successfully through a brutal battle against the elements. Part 1 ends with a sequence of four “if” statements, whereas part 2 builds tension with a sequence of 6 similes. Contrasts between the two parts jump out more readily than similarities.

A related question concerns the order of the two parts. *Qaṣīda* poetry is typically polythematic, so we might naturally search there for an explanation of this poem’s structure. Part 2 of Poem 166 is in fact very evocative of the *raḥīl* theme of the *qaṣīda*. However, the *raḥīl* most typically occurs as the second component in a tripartite *qaṣīda*. It serves in a transitional role, working up to a rhetorical climax of the poem which typically occurs at the end. In Poem 166, the argumentative climax of the poem precedes the description of the arduous camel journey rather than following it.

Part 2 appears to provide a counterintuitive, fantastical variety of resolution to the irresolvable challenges posed in part 1. Where part 1 emphasizes the poet’s helplessness to solve a structural social dilemma, part 2 makes the claim that the poet, as the heir to the Bedouin tradition, is likewise able to survive and triumph in even the most adverse of circumstances. Where part 1 laments the poet’s isolation from those who should according to traditional values be his staunchest supporters (his own kin), part 2 relocates

that isolation to a *topos* where self-reliance is not only celebrated but normal, natural, and a frequent precursor to the glorious reunion with the tribe—this transposition is perhaps a comfort even if the projected reunion never actually comes. When present realities prove unpalatable, Ibn al-Mu‘tazz elects to seek refuge in the evocation of a simpler classical past and his connection to it.

Poem 167⁴²³

1 Why aren't you like his other nights, oh Saturday night!

You have been filled with care and with sleeplessness.

2 What a fate, its wonders never cease

How many an eater of bitterness didn't harvest it by his own hand?

3 The most evil of your enemies is one you don't prepare for

Who walks among your intimates, concealed of body.

4 He gathers up what man lets drop in good faith

Hoarded for a day that's kindled with the light of evil.

5 And that state of affairs is a disease of men for which there's no cure

Whenever its rage returns to their state, it returns

6 [A man should have] a comprehending eye, but an inattentive ear

While the soul is attentive to excessiveness and insolence.

7 A viper, if his bite latches on to men

The distance between soul and body extends.

⁴²³ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. III, pg. 137-141, #1263)

8 *Because of his like, the edge of the sword becomes red*

And the tips of the broken spears blaze up in the battlefield.

9 *The souls of the loved ones are bereaved and the condition of everyone*

Is changed, so that some go away and others remain alone.

10 *The home becomes deserted, with no friend in it*

Among its people, and the surface of the land trembles.

11 *Oh my friend, my soul wonders —how much does it wonder!—*

At the one who laughs when death is lying in wait for him.

12 *And the soul, after its needs are satisfied, yearns*

For increase and growth in numbers.

13 *And many's the soul who goes down to a lake for water, who choked*

And perished while another slaked her thirst with a dirty puddle.

14 *I have heard the name of a faithful one, but have yet to see him*

Neither the hand of humanity nor my hand has found him.

15 *Empty your hopes and let down the saddles that rattle around*

Upon the riding beasts⁴²⁴, and trust in the eternal one.

16 *And swallow the sip of anger until you find its opportunity*

And don't jump as wild asses jump on the soil.

17 *How many a person submerged in the flood of dominion have you believed*

To be pleased, when he was careworn and sad?

18 *How many a knot-tier over money bags that he accumulated*

Has had the knots loosened after he died

⁴²⁴ i.e. stop exhausting your riding beasts in pursuit of false hopes

19 *How many a person has put his affairs in order and had fate destroy them?*

Oh men, does anyone triumph over fate?

20 *How many a despairer's rope traps have been filled with game*

And how many a hoper has been returned unsuccessful, having snared nothing?

21 *Oh Hind, The companions have made me suspicious, and my eyes are filled*

With dust, and my arm has been bereft of my community.

22 *And a fleeting joy for life has faded*

And everything in the world comes to an end.

23 *And my white hair is continuously stealing dye from me, though*

I wasn't deceiving the glances of maiden companionship with it.

24 *White hair is the light of a warning which I don't extinguish*⁴²⁵

I travel with it by night, on the road of truth and righteousness.

25 *You should leave if you don't say anything but falsehood*⁴²⁶

And truth is stripped of sin and falsehood.

26 *Have I gotten up except towards honor and glory?*

Have I sat down with unredressed grievances towards my enemies?

27 *Between me and them are the spears which I have dyed*

And the edge of a sword in the hand like a tent peg.

28 *And the horses are unkempt, and the champions are as though they were*

Bald when they were wronged—in helmets and chainmail.

29 *And the arrows stretch their necks forward in their reins,*

With milk of death, into the guts and the livers.

⁴²⁵ *aḥmada* as printed in the text; presumed to be a typographical error, read as *akhmada*

⁴²⁶ This is addressed to a female interlocutor—presumably Hind

30 *The bow is singing on the right hand of the one stringing it*

Like a trilling musician who moaned in his sounds.

31 *To whom the morning-drinker came early with a cup that you'd think*

A ground of gold which hailstones polished.

32 *Whoever looks for peace is bitten by war*

Like the bite of a spear-straightener⁴²⁷ upon a spear with a bend.

33 *So you see nothing other than a sword dripping with blood,*

Upon the dust, or a lion attacking another lion

34 *And horses bathing in hearts' blood, as*

The openings of the churner's new milk-skins burst open.

Poem 167 is like Poem 166 in that it divides into two distinct parts, though the difference between the two is more subtle. Part 1, which extends from lines 1-20, involves the poet making generalizations about fate's treacheries and life's ironies. Part 2, which extends from line 20-34, involves the poet addressing an interlocutor, Hind, to complain about his own condition and praise his prowess as a fighter.

Part 1 is composed of an introduction and 2 sections. After the introduction, which rails against the vagaries of fate, section 1 (lines 3-12) takes up the issue of treacherous people, who lie in wait to bring strife and war, while section 2 (lines 13-20) describes the ironic lack of connection between striving, success, and happiness. It should be noted that both sections 1 and 2 here end with address in the penultimate line. The propensity of

⁴²⁷ A tool used to straighten out bent spears

address/content to act as a secondary closer has been noted, and these lines are perhaps a good example of how that works: in both cases, the address content structure serves to regain the reader's attention after addressing the primary topic at some length, in order to bring the section to an end. In both cases, the address seems to be addressed to the reader if anyone—more likely an exclamation like “oh men” or “oh my friend” should be taken as simply an emphatic, like “Oy oy oy”. Section 2 builds up to a climax with a series of “How many a” questions (identified in chapter 1 as argumentative closers)⁴²⁸, accelerating in the last line to two “how many a” questions, one in each hemistich.

Part 2 is composed of two sections. The first section (lines 21-25) addresses a specific interlocutor, Hind, to describe how the generalizations of part 1 have affected him particularly: his friends have given him cause to suspect their sincerity, and he has grown old. At the end he even tells Hind that she should leave if she won't be honest with him—a reminder that Hind is a participant in the poet's life rather than simply an observer. In the second section (lines 26-34) the poet lauds his abilities to fight his enemies, drawing upon specific and graphic imagery of battle; the section draws its strength from similes, ending with one that is strikingly graphic.

The argumentative progression of Poem 167 part 2 is reminiscent of Poem 166: the poet begins by airing his complaints against his kin, and transitions into a descriptive passage that draws upon Bedouin imagery. In this case the connection is clearly stated in lines 26 and 27:

26 Have I gotten up except towards honor and glory?

⁴²⁸ See sections 1.2.8 “How Many A”, 1.3 Distributions of Syntactic Structures by Genre

Have I sat down with unredressed grievances towards my enemies?

27 Between me and them are the spears which I have dyed

And the edge of a sword in the hand like a tent peg.

The implicit connection between parts 1 and 2 of Poem 166 is spelled out explicitly here: the poet is promising that he has the courage and strength to take on his enemies and bring them down. He may recourse to the traditional language of poetry in describing his fighting spirit, but his enemies remain contemporary, except insofar as they are timeless (unlike Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s treacherous kin, the tribulations of fate, old age, and disingenuous lovers arise in every age). Although Poem 166 is classified as one of the *mu‘ātabāt* (the genre of complaint poetry) while Poem 167 is classified as *zuhd* (which encompasses poetry about old age), both poems address the issues of unreliable friends and old age as a pair. In both cases, the association of these two problems makes the problem of faithless friends seem more hopeless, while simultaneously making the problem of increasing old age seem more worth resisting. The pairing plays upon the contrast between fatalism and fighting back that arises when facing any intractable problem—a tension which had as much resonance for Ibn al-Mu‘tazz as for the pre-Islamic Arabs he invokes.

4.1.4 Conclusion

The previous sections serve to illustrate an account of how the structures of short poems—both the opener/closer contrast and the argumentative/descriptive modes—can serve as building blocks of longer poems even when a quantitative analysis shows no evidence of opener/closer or argumentative/descriptive dichotomies in longer poems. As

poems grow longer, they become more structurally complex: the opener/closer contrast may still exist on the level of poetic subsections while averaging out over an entire poem; likewise, the argumentative/descriptive contrast may remain in subsections of a poem while enabling the author to combine the two modes in order to craft the broader narrative—which can draw energy from modal contrast. It should be stated, at the risk of repetition, that the individual conclusions drawn from these close-reading studies cannot be taken as general to the entire corpus; nevertheless, they provide an example of how the structural assumptions built in chapters 1-3 can be harnessed to the analysis of individual poems of any length, providing a basis that can inform our expectations—and consequently generate surprise.

4.2 Other Formal Devices

The close-reading format also provides us with the opportunity of examining other ways in which poetic form can create expectations in the reader, which may then be either satisfied or confounded. Here we will examine two formal tools which, although they do not lend themselves readily to quantitative study, are wielded to dramatic and potent effect by Ibn al-Mu‘tazz.

4.2.1 Parallelism

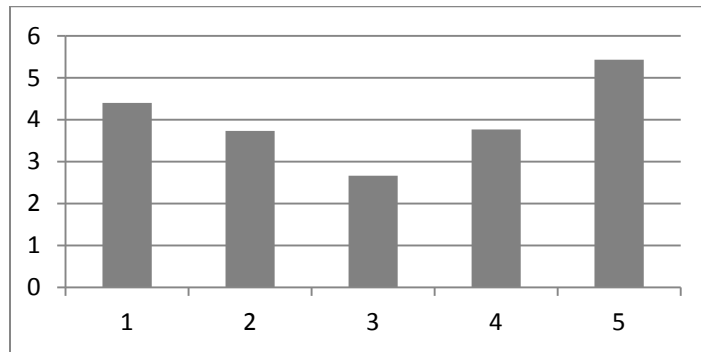
Parallelism plays a significant role in creating and fulfilling expectations in the poetry of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz. Unlike similes (for example), parallelism encompasses too many variations to be sufficiently well-defined for a straightforward study of its effects in bulk.

Repetition is one of the most fundamental ways to build expectation, and parallelism encompasses everything from repetition of individual words in a line to repetition of vaguely defined gestures or analogous structures within a poem. Even if it could be readily defined, most parallelism can't be studied using the methods developed for this study because it so often encompasses more than one line; this precludes assignment of each occurrence of parallel structure to a particular line, as can be done for other structures (with greater or lesser degrees of complication). Despite not having been given the attention merited by its centrality as a formal feature, parallelism has already been mentioned frequently in passing, because of its ubiquity and importance. Close-reading offers the opportunity to look at a few especially striking examples of parallelism being used in the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu'tazz.

There is one quantitative data-point that can be provided here, before we proceed to discussion of the poems themselves. Exact repetition of words or phrases within single lines is a rare occurrence in the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu'tazz but it does occur occasionally and when it does it is both straightforward to identify and straightforward to assign to a particular line in a poem.⁴²⁹ As a result, it is possible to provide a distribution chart for this special case of parallelism, though there few enough examples that it cannot be taken as more than suggestive of a pattern. Therefore, the chart below shows the distribution of 20 instances of such repetition over the quintiles of the poems in which they occur.

⁴²⁹ Additional examples of exact repetition can be found in Poem 130 and Poem 141, above.

Figure 96 Instances of Word Repetition by Quintile



Unlike other structures studied, which have tended to divide into openers and closers with a roughly linear progression from the beginning of the poem to the end, word repetition within lines appears to concentrate at both the beginnings and the endings of poems, declining in the middle.

Poem 168⁴³⁰

1 Here I am, oh you who has called me when he stumbled,

Here I am, two thousand times, oh my lord, here I am!

2 If I had been near to you where you hear me

I would have made my cheek into an earth beneath your feet.

3 May my body protect you from that pain which you complain about

And may the tear of my eyes ransom the tear of yours .

This poem provides an example of repetition of exact phrases at the beginning of the poem, and syntactical parallelism at the end. In the first line, “Here I am” is repeated 3

⁴³⁰ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 350-351, #266)

times in acceleration: once at the beginning of the first hemistich, once at the beginning of the second hemistich, and again at the end of the line. In addition to being performed, the repetition is explicitly referenced in the poet's declaration "two thousand times". The second line follows up aggressively upon the argument of the first with a counterfactual "if" statement that underscores his devotion. The third line builds upon the image of the second, generalizing the poet's eagerness to physically suffer in order to shield the beloved from any discomfort, in a sequence of two optatives which are parallel on the level of the hemistich. At the same time, the final image in the closing hemistich invokes parallels between the tear of the lover's eye and the tear of the beloved's—this would not constitute exact repetition of the sort counted in the chart above, since the two phrases serve different roles in the sentence rather than acting as a purely emphatic repetition. Nevertheless, the repetition of the two words in the second hemistich and the syntactical repetition between the first and second hemistichs combine to create an acceleration effect in the last line that recapitulates the acceleration in the first.

Poem 169⁴³¹

1 Fiercer than the blowing of the winds

Which endure all night until the morning,

2 Than the whips which have fire

Which hurl into the heart like arrows,

3 Than a descent to battle among swords,

Than wounds upon wounds,

⁴³¹ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. III, pg. 136, #1260) Regarding the preservation of face

4 Is the need⁴³² of the noble man who has been afflicted by damage

And by surrendering face to one who is impudent

This poem is a beautiful example of the build-up of expectation through repetition of a bipartite syntactical structure over the course of several lines. The poem is a single sentence. By inverting the standard ordering of the sentence “a is more b than c” into “more b than c is a”, the poet has accomplished the reverse effect of inverting structures like if/then and address/content: the inverted structure creates a necessary expectation of how the sentence must resolve which is not evident in its uninverted form.⁴³³ From the moment of the poem’s inception, the reader is waiting to know the identity of the “a” that is fiercer than the blowing of the winds. Instead, we learn more and more examples of “c”, things than which our mysterious “a” is fiercer. The magnitude of “c” increases as the poem progresses, from winds to whips to a battlefield to compounded wounds. In the first two lines, “c” is introduced in the first hemistich, and the second hemistich describes the action of that line’s “c”. In line 3, the parallel pattern accelerates: the second hemistich of line 3 introduces a new “c”, which turns out to be itself a compound repetition: “wounds upon wounds”⁴³⁴. Finally, line 4 relieves the pent-up tension by finally identifying “a”: the humiliating need of a wronged nobleman. The shape of this poem is reminiscent of others we’ve seen earlier in this chapter: a prolonged build-up to a

⁴³² i.e. the sort of need that requires one to ask a favor

⁴³³ See 1.2.2 Address/Content

⁴³⁴ The effect of this repetition is comparable to that of the repetition of tears in eyes in line 3 of Poem 168, in contributing to the overall effect of acceleration even though it is not exactly parallel to the primary structural acceleration.

snappy conclusion (one imagines stretching out a spring and then letting it snap quickly back to its original position).

Poem 170⁴³⁵

1 Oh fate! Oh fate! Oh father of wonder!

Oh night-bringer of care and sorrow!

2 Oh betrayer during the security of his fellow!

Oh choker of the suckling baby with milk!

3 Oh assailant with ruin upon the almighty king

Behind the doors and the curtains!

4 Oh attacker with death of the souls of men

Who flee upon black and grey horses!

5 Oh lifter of the valley along with lowering the hills

Maker of the head into the follower of the tail!

6 Oh everything that is bad, worst of those who

Affirm a promise to a suppliant!

7 Beware, oh community of humankind

And let him not deceive you with deception and falsehood!

Like Poem 168, this poem takes advantage of direct repetition in the first line to create an opening emphasis; like Poem 169, it takes advantage of syntactic repetition which builds up over the course of several lines to resolve in the last line. We've seen before that it is

⁴³⁵ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. III, pg. 119-120, #1237)

possible to generate momentum by repeating the same structure but varying the interval of repetition. In a number of instances in this chapter we've seen the pacing of repetition pick up towards the ending of a poetic section, most recently in Poem 169, line 3. What we see here is the opposite—a quick-paced repetition of the vocative structure at the beginning of the poem which gradually slows over the course of repetition. The poem begins in a very forceful way, with the repetition of an exact phrase, “oh fate!” twice in sequence. The second half of the hemistich includes another vocative, “oh father of wonder”, and the following hemistich includes only one. The second line has a vocative at the beginning of each hemistich, and subsequent lines have one vocative each.

As has been discussed above, direct address is a bipartite structure, which creates the expectation of a complementary clause that contains the content of the message to the person being addressed. This poem builds up tension through 6 lines of apposition with the initial addressee—fate. With each repetition of the address form, the tension mounts a little further, even as the frequency of the addresses slow from the initial frenetic pace. The 7th and final line is the first to begin with something other than the vocative particle. It begins with an imperative, a frequent complement to direct address. The resolution has finally begun, and we are all set for a compact resolution following upon five lines of build-up.

But there's a twist. The imperative is followed by yet another direct address...this time not to fate, but to humankind. The inverted address-content structure of line 7 had led us to believe that the anticipated resolution had arrived; in fact, however, it never does.

Instead, Ibn al-Mu‘tazz exploits the syntactical flexibility of the Arabic language to warn people about fate rather than to address any contentful speech to fate directly.

Expectations are thus masterfully created, nurtured...and confounded.

Syntactical parallelism, as in Poem 169 and Poem 170, is most commonly seen as a device employed on the scale of short poems or short subsections of longer ones; however, it is also possible to apply it on a grand scale. The most striking example of this in the lyric corpus is Poem 171, a *rithā’* poem addressed to caliph al-Mu‘taḍid (the poet’s cousin):

Poem 171⁴³⁶

1 Oh fate, woe unto you! You have left me no one!

You are an evil father--you eat the child.

2 I ask God's forgiveness, rather, all that is governed by fate

I am content with Allāh as my lord, one and eternal.

3 Oh dweller of the grave, in the dark dust

In Ṭāhiriyya, made distant of house, alone,

4 Where are the armies which you used to wield?

Where are the treasures you counted by number?

5 Where is the throne that you used to fill with gravitas

—He whose eyes saw it would tremble?

⁴³⁶ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. III, pg. 19-22, #1156) , ‘In elegy to al-Mu‘taḍid’. This poem is referenced in the introduction, pg. 7

6 Where are the lofty enemies, whose fiercest you humbled?

Where are the lions whom you made mountain-sheep?

7 Where is the hope that you used to guard?

Where are your aspirations for the world tomorrow and tomorrow?

8 Where are the delegations clinging to the doors

As sand-grouses flock to pure water which flows and constantly waters?

9 They wore thin the feet of every strong, quick-stepping camel

Gushing out froth from their jaw-bones.

10 Where are the palaces you built which rose high

In which the sparkle of pure gold shone so that it burned?

11 Where are the gardens whose creeks would flow

And invite the birds to answer it in song?

12 Where are the men, standing in ranks?

Whoever among them departed at night and wasn't buried was happy.⁴³⁷

13 Where are the serving girls, frisking like gazelles

Trailing new embroidered robes?

14 Where are the musical instruments and where is the wine, that you'd think

A ruby clothed in silver chain mail?

15 Where are the horses whom you gave socks of blood

And they used to carry a lion in your person?

16 Where are the spears whom you gave lunch with heart's blood?

Since you died, they have not gone for water to the heart or the liver

⁴³⁷ The meaning of this line is unclear to me. Perhaps it means that whoever broke rank by leaving his post at nighttime was lucky to survive the experience.

17 *Where are the swords, and where the arrows*

Which struck whatever opponent you wished, far though he might be.

18 *Where are the catapults, like elephants when*

They threw at the standing wall of a fort, it sat down

19 *Where are the good deeds that you used to pioneer—*

Though it is not generally believed that unsought kindness ever benefits the giver?

20 *Where is the leaping towards the enemies seeking*

The welfare of the dominion of the Banū ‘Abbās when it spoiled?

21 *You didn't stop compelling every lion among them*⁴³⁸

And you struck the presumptuous tyrant intentionally.

22 *Then! You died, with no substance and no trace*

Until it was as though you had never existed.

23 *Nothing remains except the good that you stockpiled*⁴³⁹

Kingship is not lasting for a man, and not eternal.

24 *So prepare yourself, while the pens are still running*

And repentance is accepted, for God has made his guarantees.

25 *Be not haughty about a world you'll be leaving;*

*For soon you will visit the grave and the tomb.*⁴⁴⁰

This poem is composed of three sections. The first section, lines 1-2, begins by addressing and cursing fate and ends with an affirmation of faith in God. The second

⁴³⁸ There is word-play here, since “compelling” comes from the same root as “lion”

⁴³⁹ In the sense that humans accumulate a list of good deeds on the cosmic balance sheet against eventual judgment

⁴⁴⁰ According to al-Sāmarrā’ī, the last two lines of this text appear in the margin of some sources.

section runs from lines 3-21. It also begins with direct address in line 3, this time to the deceased. Unlike other cases where the address half of the address/content structure is delayed over several lines, resolution to the address comes promptly in line 4. The content of the statement to the deceased is a question that could be paraphrased: “Where did your legacy go when you died?” Variations of that question are asked, over and over and over again, for the next 18 lines. The question is asked in more than a dozen different ways, focusing on different aspects of the king’s legacy and asking of each: where did it go? Though the expectation of the bipartite address/content structure has been satisfied, the relentless thrum of that resolution creates a new tension which grows and grows and grows. There’s a question...there are a lot of questions. In a sense, the questions are rhetorical—the way that they are asked tells us what the answer must be. The tension is thus motivated not so much by curiosity as by dread...when the answer finally comes, it won’t be the answer we hope to hear.

This tension is not, however, undifferentiated. The author plays with the pacing of the questions in order to relieve some measure of the monotony and provide a modicum of internal structure to this endless litany. The pacing of the “where” questions is unstable from lines 4-8: it begins with one question per hemistich in line 4, and then slows to one per line in line 5. Lines 6 and 7 each have one question per hemistich; line 8 has but one, and line 9, which is entirely devoted to an elaboration on the imagery from line 8, has none at all. In this set of lines it would seem that the fundamental pacing of the questions is one per hemistich, but that this slows in line 5 to dwell upon the grandeur of the caliph’s throne, and in lines 8 and 9 to describe the eagerness of his vassals to seek his

beneficence. After line 10, the “where” questions settle into a more steady pattern: one occurs at the beginning of each line. Lines 10-14 constitute a set which focuses upon the opulent elegance of the caliph’s surroundings, culminating in a gentle cadence in line 14: the “where” questions speed up to two in the first hemistich, and the second hemistich contains a simile. Lines 15-21 constitute a second coherent set, this one focusing on the caliph’s military accomplishments. This set culminates in a slowing cadence, where line 21 expands upon the description in the line before it without introducing its own “where” question.

The third section runs from line 22-25. It begins with a sharp resolution to the tension built up in section 2, making explicit the answer to the question we have come to dread: that is, when al-Mu’taḍid died, his worldly accomplishments all melted away as if they had never been. In the end, it is only God’s ledger that matters—the good deeds that the deceased accumulated towards his final judgment. The poem ends with two parallel imperative-for constructions, enjoining the listener (presumably no longer the dead king) to establish a good account with God while there’s still time. In this way, the third section of the poem returns to the religious language of the first section.

The use of parallelism on this scale suggests a way in which a lengthy poem can retain the thematic coherence characteristic of a much shorter one, while extending the motif of descriptive digression far beyond normal bounds in order to create a powerful argumentative point. In this case, that point is that the greater the accomplishments of a king, and the greater the benefits he confers on his courts and his people and perhaps

even his grateful cousins, the greater the sudden loss when all those things inevitably die away along with him.

4.2.2 Subverting Line Expectations

Of all mechanisms for generating expectation in Arabic poetry, the poetic line is perhaps the most fundamental. The baseline assumption in Arabic poetry is that every line in a poem will be equal in length, meter, and rhyme to every other line in the poem.

Moreover, each line is supposed to constitute a syntactical and semantic unit, which retains a form of internal coherence that transcends whatever relationships it might share with the lines around it.⁴⁴¹ Because these expectations are so firmly rooted, subverting them releases a great deal of poetic energy. If parallelism is difficult to study quantitatively because it is so common; subversion of the poetic line is difficult to study quantitatively because it is so rare. Nevertheless the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz does provide some examples, and close reading offers us the opportunity to look at some of them.

Although the boundary of the hemistich is typically much weaker than the boundary of the line, one way to subvert the power of the line is to strengthen the power of the hemistich. A small number of poems in the lyric corpus maintain the convention native to

⁴⁴¹ The precise nature of the rules governing the independence of each line and the relationships possible between different lines has been the subject of significant discussion; see for example (G. J. van Gelder 1982), and the introduction to (Scheindlin, *Form and structure in the poetry of Al-Mu‘tamid Ibn ‘Abbād* 1974). However, the basic idea that poetic lines constitute a structural and semantic unit seems to be a matter of consensus in both classical and contemporary criticism.

poems in the *rajaz* meter of end-rhyme at the end of each hemistich in the poem⁴⁴². This move bolsters the potential independence of the individual hemistich to a tremendous extent. Among the options it enables, the most obvious is a poem with an odd number of hemistichs—a poem which ends with a trailing half-line. In addition, *rajaz* hemistichs have the capacity to shift alignment, abandoning formal and semantic allegiance to the other hemistich on the line and forming a new partnership with an adjacent hemistich on a different line. We saw an example of this in Poem 164 above: while for the most part the lines retained the intra-line synergy between hemistich pairs we would expect from any other poem, at one point they jolt out of alignment so that they're paired in the opposite configuration; they then realign 4 lines later at the end of the section.

Poem 172⁴⁴³

1 Oftentimes I go out in the morning, when the morning is like white-hair

On a horizon like a perfume stone

2 With a horse that's set loose, a torrential river

With ears like woven fronds of palm

3 Or a myrtle which rose atop a branch,

And a tail like a poured-out cloud,

4 Or a cypress with moist soil,

*And a hoof leaping up like the foot of one stung.*⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴² Contrary to the observation of G. Rex Smith (Smith 1990, 174), these poems are not exclusive, or even nearly exclusive, to the *tarad* genre, though given the preference of *tarad* poems for *rajaz* conventions, it is not surprising that many of them should be concentrated there.

⁴⁴³ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 381-383, #901) 'in description of the falcon and the horse'

⁴⁴⁴ i.e. the way a foot that has been stung by a scorpion lifts quickly off the ground

- 5 *Black like the poured-out cup,*
Outstripping the utmost limit of the wide view
- 6 *Faster than water to pour down,*
Than the penetration of thoughts into hearts
- 7 *Than the aversion of the glance of the suspect—*
A blazing fire with a burning flame.
- 8 *And [I also go out in the morning] with a hawk, trained to discipline*
Affectionate to the hand of everyone who summons it.
- 9 *A whip of torment, descending, reeled in,*
Faster than the glance of the suspicious one .
- 10 *He sees distant things like close ones*
He swoops like the swooping of water in the well
- 11 *With a mute, rolled-back eye*
Like the gaze of a squinter, possessed of a frown
- 12 *He saw a goose on moist soil*
And flew like one frightened, terrified
- 13 *Tracking a close coveted thing*
Even when the pastures of the prey are distant.
- 14 *A whip of torment, descending, reeled in*
Penetrating in the north and the south.

This poem divides naturally into two parts, which share the introduction of the first line.

Lines 2-7 describe the horse who accompanies the poet hunting, while lines 8-14 describe

the falcon. Part 2 lends itself to a variety of comments on structure, including repetitions of words from the first part and the repetition of an entire hemistich from line 9 to line 14; unfortunately, the textual uncertainty in this part of the poem is sufficiently systemic that it seems unsafe to say anything about its structure. Part 1, however, is beset by fewer textual problems (as identified by the editor); therefore a few comments on its structure are in order.

Poem 172 part 1 deviates unabashedly from generalizations that have been made about the function of similes. While we know from the earlier chapters that similes tend by and large to congregate at the ends of short poems, and we have seen in this chapter that these generalizations may have some applicability to sections of longer poems as well, in this poem the simile serves as an opener rather than a closer. We cannot say for certain whether or not the native reader of this poetry might have found that surprising; we can say only that whatever patterns might appear over a corpus at large can never and should never drown out the unique testimony of any given poem. Part 1 divides into two sections: section 1 (lines 2-4) describes the physical features of the horse in sequence, whereas section 2 (lines 5-7) describes the horse's traits, notably his speed. Both sections have a simile in their first line, and line 1 (which is not part of part 1 only in the sense that it is equally part of part 2) has two similes, one in each hemistich. Line 2 introduces the horse in the first hemistich; in the second, he introduces the horse's ears along with a simile. As in Poem 164, this first step out of alignment is not in and of itself unusual. Line 3 continues the description of the horse's ears with a second simile which is, however, conjoined to the first with "or" and without its own "like". This device, while

introducing 2 different images, locates the simile in line 2 hemistich 2 and treats the second simile as a sort of continuation. Line 3 hemistich 2 (3.2) goes on to introduce a new physical trait of the horse: the tail. In so doing, the disjunction of hemistich pairs with the poetic line goes into full effect. As with the description of the ears, the description of the tails runs for two hemistichs—from line 3.2 to line 4.1. As with the ears, the poet produces a compound simile to describe the tail. The simile particle occurs immediately after the body part is first introduced, in line 3.2, and it is followed by a second simile marked out by “or” in line 4.1. Line 4.2 introduces a new body part, the hooves, again with a simile. However, though we will not be aware of it until line 5, the description of the hooves takes only a single hemistich and thus realigns the poem into its linear framework as the section comes to an end.

Line 5, the opening of section 2, begins with another simile. The new simile follows the tradition of the previous section in demarcating the beginning of a description. Section 2 culminates with the repetition of a different parallel structure: the comparative. The 3 parallel comparatives (faster than water...than the penetration...than the aversion) build up momentum as section 2 builds towards its conclusion: the concise, one-hemistich comparison of the horse—the sum of all the various parts—with a blazing fire.

Poem 173⁴⁴⁵

I Oh my lord, I have no endurance

And my night has no dawn

⁴⁴⁵ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 300, #187)

2 *And the stuffing of my heart is embers*

*It has flown, but it does not cool*⁴⁴⁶

3 *A full moon has spoiled my faith—*

In a glance of his there is enchantment

4 *And his heart is stone.*

It's as though his mouth were wine

5 *In which pearls grow*⁴⁴⁷

And his promise deceives,

6 *Sweet, and breach of promise is bitter.*⁴⁴⁸

Oh night; rather, Oh fate

7 *You are long, and the dawn is long in coming.*

In Poem 172, as in Poem 164, the disjunction of hemistich pairings with the formal line serves to provide dramatic interest to the middle of a poetic section, and the realignment coincides with the end of the section, enhancing the sense of its resolution. As we saw in Poem 170, however, anticipation is not always resolved and expectations are not always fulfilled. This poem provides an example of an unresolved disjunction.

It is traditional to begin a poem with a description of the quality of the light in its sky—whether it be morning light, starlight, or the flash of lightning. This poem states only that

⁴⁴⁶ That is, the embers of his heart are flying like sparks

⁴⁴⁷ The beloved's teeth are being compared with the bubbles in wine.

⁴⁴⁸ This seems to be the clear sense of the hemistich; the case of "breach of promise" (*khulfa*) is problematic as printed, particularly because it doesn't lend itself to any plausible alternate reading. This translation therefore elects to read *khulfa* as *khulfun*, which is permitted by the *rajaz* meter.

the night has no dawn. The poet's beloved is unwilling to fulfill the promise of a liaison, and so the poet (we imagine) is left sitting up at night, unable to sleep as he contemplates an impossibly distant morning. The closest thing to starlight is the light of the embers from the poet's own heart, and the persistence of their burning is a source of torment rather than solace. The moon is the beloved himself, but he is invoked in absentia. Though the beloved has not kept his liaison, the poet imagines him vividly enough to describe him feature by feature: his glance, his heart, his mouth, and the painful inconsistency between what he promises and what he delivers. In describing the beloved, the hemistich pairings separate from the matrix of the lines. As usual, the disjunction is not immediately apparent. In fact, the first disjoint pairing (the enchanting glance with the stony heart in lines 3.2 and 4.1) is itself somewhat ambiguous. It is thus not until the end of the 2nd disjunct pairing and the beginning of the 3rd, in line 5, that the disjunction becomes obvious. It is perhaps not entirely a coincidence that this realization comes alongside the statement that the deceptive promise is sweet, whereas the breach of promise is bitter.

Prior experience would lead us to expect a resolution to the misalignment; instead, the poet hearkens back to the beginning of the poem to call upon the night and the fate behind it, bemoaning its length and the far-distant dawn. The poem ends with the reader's expectations, like those of the poet persona, unsatisfied.

Poem 174⁴⁴⁹

I Oh my soul, alas for you! Often

⁴⁴⁹ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. III, pg. 192-193, #1333)

Have you seen warnings, and it has not
 2 *Helped you, so be afraid and cease*
And piety is encumbent upon you, just as
 3 *The one who makes haste is safe, so beware*
Oh my soul, of "I will...", so long as
 4 *The miserable one is deceived by such words*
Oh beware of it, whenever
 5 *Its trap-setter whispers to your heart*
"It's only...". It's only
 6 *That the one who has met his death hasn't lived*
So Oh wonder! Is it not the case that
 7 *Death takes the place of all wishes if*
It comes? And it is as though
 8 *The one who has met his death has never lived*
So Oh wonder! Is there not
 9 *In that a warning? And there is no*
Healer who can reduce blindness
 10 *Oh possessor of wishes, oh possessor of wishes*
Live as long as you wish, but then what--?

This poem is one-of-a-kind in the lyric corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz: a poem which deliberately adopts enjambment—generally subject to strong critical disapproval—into its very rhyme scheme. With the exception of the penultimate line, every single line ends

with a blatant segue into the line that follows it. Irrespective of execution, the existence of a poem like this stands in clear witness to the fact that Ibn al-Mu‘tazz was willing on occasion to deliberately subvert the strongest expectations of his poetic tradition.

The execution of the poetic concept is itself a *tour de force*. The poem’s subject is humanity’s self-delusion and consequent poor planning for the afterlife. From the very beginning, the poet’s departure from the traditional assumptions of the line creates an effect of disorientation. The word *mā*, translated in line 1 as “it has not”, is one of the most overburdened particles in the Arabic language—stripped of the context provided by the sentence following it, *mā* could mean any number of different things. Confounded not only by departure from poetic expectation but by the language itself, the reader reaches the end of the first line confused and unsure. In line 3, we are instructed to beware of “I will...”, the cavalier attitude towards the future that leads one to put off necessary preparations. In light of this message, the abrupt ending to the line gives the impression of someone who failed to plan ahead running abruptly out of breath with his sentence unfinished.

The strategy of calling out temporizing statements of self-justification (as with “I will”) is repeated again in line 5. When the trap-setter (Iblis, perhaps) whispers “it’s only...”, the poet picks up the phrase himself in ironic rebuttal of the trap-setter’s argumentative claim—and in so doing creates the first of several phrase repetitions in the poem.

Whereas the trap-setter wishes the soul to believe that preparation for the world to come is a trivial thing, the poet reminds the soul that the current world is much more trivial:

when we die, we cease to exist and our aspirations for this world are superseded. Line 8 is an exact repetition of line 6—the only differences being the preliminary to the line (which came from lines 7 and 5, and were different) and the following lines (which retroactively make the closing phrases of the two lines point in different directions). The central idea, however, remains the same, seeming to be repeated because it bears repetition: after you die, it's as though you had never lived. Shouldn't that statement qualify as a warning, the poet demands?

The last line begins with direct repetition of an address “Oh possessor of wishes!” The poem as a whole has contained a large number of such statements—thus the repetition serves not only to draw attention in and of itself (as we recall, repetitions of this sort tend to congregate at the beginnings and ends of poems) but also to accelerate a pattern of direct address that has continued up to this point from the first words of the poem. The last words of the poem, “then what?” are a rhetorical punch to the gut—the words which singlehandedly, and retroactively, explain and justify the rhyme scheme. “Then what?” is the ultimate challenge to those who pursue the pleasures of this world without thought to the next—the expression of the quintessential unknown that awaits every human at the end of the line.

This poem turns out a sophisticated array of formal tools, including repetition, quotation, and the ultimate subversion of the poetic line, in service to the rhetorical task of humbling the reader, reminding him of the fragility of the human intellect in facing the inevitable cosmic void, let alone preparing for it. The Muslim answer to this question makes an

appearance in line 2, but the poem seems less interested in pushing this answer than in framing the universal questions, and tearing down the flimsy edifices (such as the ones that begin with “it’s only...”) that people construct in order to avoid them. In that sense, this poem not only engages in a sophisticated formal subversion of Arabic poetics, it also conveys a universal message that resonates beyond the boundaries of its own tradition.

4.3 Narrative Play

The play of expectation and resolution may encompass the thematic tropes of poetry as well as its forms. This section translates and studies two examples of this: in both cases, well-established narratives of the literature are manipulated in order to produce a comic effect.

Poem 175⁴⁵⁰

1 I don't weep for a residence in the desert, or remnants

Or for youth, whose time has come to ride away,

2 Or for a beloved who cut short the liaison and grew bored,

But for the enormity of a catastrophe that has descended upon me.

3 I was a man, retired from among men.

A veil had been lowered between me and any blame,

4 Trusting in Him who owns my sustenance

Not hoping for a glorious reversal of fortune,

⁴⁵⁰ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 574-577, #1111)

5 Nor fearing death for the sake of a particular aspiration;

My business, whenever the people were busy

6 Was a manual of fiqh or hadith or love poetry

Which doesn't reproach me or perceive errors in me,

7 And if I tire of the manual's closeness to me, it retires,

Speckled, with color like the white in the hair of a man in his prime,

8 You'd imagine it bekohled, (though it didn't put on kohl)

Riding on a hand; wherever the hand wishes, it rides,

9 And it doesn't settle down in a place until the hand settles

And it's a guide to speech or action.

10 It straightens out the meter of reason until it's even,

And reminds the forgetter what had slipped his mind.

11 It's as though it were folded open to reveal variegated cloth⁴⁵¹

Addressing a glance with phrases that don't grow tired,

12 And he doesn't get bored of a friend until he gets bored.

. *But a worm crept into them, who had eaten*

13 The staff of Solomon], so that he was thrown down⁴⁵²,

Building conduits which served as paths for him

14 With water and clay and whatever had moisture in it

Like the roots in which you see no crack.

15 He eats the fruits of discernment—may it not eat!—

*Until you see the learned man whose residence has been deserted.*⁴⁵³

⁴⁵¹ The writing on the page is being compared with embroidery on cloth

⁴⁵² (Qur'ān n.d., 34:14)

16 He becomes a deserter, though he had been a hero

From whom ancient knowledge fled and was abridged.

17 So the worm set down burning cares in the heart

And he made the books worn out and frayed.

Poem 175, which recounts the tale of how a worm crept into his library and began damaging his books, derives its energy and charm from a humorous play on poetic expectations pertaining to theme.

The poem signals its interest in playing with the canon's poetic themes from the very beginning. In the introduction (lines 1-2), the poet invokes three great tragic themes of Arabic poetry, and dismisses each in turn as insufficiently tragic to his present purpose. The poet is weeping, but *not* because this is the *nasīb* of a *qaṣīda*, in which the poet weeps over the remnants of the campsite where a woman he once loved once dwelt. He is weeping *not* because this is a *zuhd* poem, in which the poet bemoans the inevitable departure of youth and onset of old age and death; and *not* because this is a *ghazal* poem, in which the poet weeps his eyes sore for love of a beloved who spurns him. He weeps instead, we are told, for some new calamity, more calamitous than any of these more usual causes of a poet weeping. Such a new tragedy would have to be momentous indeed, but the reader has already two reasons to be suspicious of the poet's sincerity. First, there exists a tradition in wine poetry of invoking the archetype of the *nasīb* in

⁴⁵³ Presumably he has been deserted by the knowledge contained in uncontaminated books

order to mock it, and the negation of the “weeping over the ruins” theme suggests the possibility that this poem may be similar.⁴⁵⁴ Secondly, the invocation of the three tragic tropes occurs in an anticlimactic order. According to rhetorical intuition, when one lists three examples of something, the third should be made the most powerful⁴⁵⁵. In this case, however, of the three tragic tropes the *ghazal* reference is significantly the weakest, while the *qaṣīda nasīb*, drawing as it does upon the most sacrosanct poetic conventions in the canon, is probably the strongest. The rhetorical force of the example order is therefore from strongest example to weakest, and as such strikes the reader as bizarrely unsatisfying. The reader is alerted that something fishy might be going on.

The woeful tale that follows is, of course, a story dramatically less tragic than any of the great tragic themes (the legitimate frustration piqued by corrupted texts notwithstanding). Nevertheless, having set up this unrealistic expectation, the poet proceeds to fail to meet it with a straight face. Lines 5-12 are devoted to a loving description and praise of the merits of his books, which are presented as the perfect companions: they are non-judgmental, obedient, wise, illuminating, and undemanding—as good as a falcon on the hunt or a camel in the desert, and better than a human friend any day. And then—oh the tragedy! From lines 12-17, the worm is introduced and portrayed as an infamous villain—the betrayer of Suleiman, who has connived ever since to lay the noblest of scholars low by depriving them of the secret (textual) sources of their strength. Given the

⁴⁵⁴ The tradition of wine poetry mocking the *nasīb* is discussed in (P. F. Kennedy 1996, 40). A particularly excellent example of this tradition in the corpus of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz can be found in (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 182-186, #773).

⁴⁵⁵ The order of the first and second is perhaps open to dispute—arguments could be made either for producing a straight escalation in example potency, or for providing a strong opening example and then following with a weaker second example before crescendoing to the climactic third example.

disjunction of the introduction and the subject matter, these invocations of heroic themes read as ironic.

The poet uses hemistich dislocation (as discussed above) in order to inject a measure of humor into the poem on the level of form⁴⁵⁶. As we have seen it in other cases, the dislocation of hemistich pairings from the line has occurred within a poetic section and serves to heighten its tension; at the end of the section, the hemistichs either become reoriented, or make a splash by failing to resolve. Poem 175, in contrast, employs hemistich dislocation in the service of formal anticlimax. The dislocations occur on section breaks, such that the section on the virtues of the book begins on line 5.2, while the section on the evils of the worm begins on line 12.2. In both cases, the new section begins with a jolt—on the wrong foot, as it were—and then recovers relatively quickly (realignment has been completed by the beginnings of lines 7 and 15, respectively). The endings of the previous sections are gracefully executed in both instances. In the first case:

4 Trusting in Him who owns my sustenance

Not hoping for a glorious reversal of fortune,

5 Nor fearing death for the sake of a particular aspiration;

My business, whenever the people were busy

Line 4 appears to be normally aligned, and the first hemistich of line 5 doesn't raise any alarm bells. However, after line 5.2 changes the subject entirely, we can return to line 5.1 and see that in retrospect it forms a neat couplet with line 4.2 (neither hoping....nor

⁴⁵⁶ As in the other cases of hemistich dislocation noted, Poem 175 is a *rajaz* poem with hemistich rhyme.

fearing...). This allows hemistich 4.2 to read both as the natural partner of hemistich 4.1 (reading forwards) and as the natural parallel of hemistich 5.1 (when attempting to revise backwards from the hemistich disjunction).

Likewise, later on:

*11 It's as though it were folded open to reveal variegated cloth*⁴⁵⁷

Addressing a glance with phrases that don't grow tired,

12 And he doesn't get bored of a friend until he gets bored.

Line 11 and 12.1 appear to be normally aligned as you read forwards, but after the subject change in line 12.2, it's possible to revise backwards and find a sort of thematic parallelism between 11.2 and 12.1 (the book's phrases don't get tiresome to the reader, nor does the book get tired of him).

With the section endings thus elegantly disposed of, the main effect of the hemistich disorientation, therefore, occurs at the beginning of the new sections. The suddenness and awkwardness of these beginnings, followed by quick recoveries that make them seem even more accidental, serves to undermine the grandiosity of the thematic weight that the poet is pretending to impart to them, thus reinforcing the poem's humor.

Poem 176⁴⁵⁸

1 I have a friend who rebuked me and was excessive

Regarding my abstaining from the morning draught, and he was repetitive.

⁴⁵⁷ The writing on the page is being compared with embroidery on cloth

⁴⁵⁸ (Ibn al-Mu'tazz 1997, v. II, pg. 487-506, #996) 'In criticism of the morning draught', i.e. the tradition of holding a drinking party in the morning

- 2 He said, "do you not drink during the day,
And in the light of dawn and the break of day?
- 3 When the morning exposes the night and the night is disgraced
And the bird remembers grief and sings?
- 4 And the stars are going down to the water basin of their setting
And dawn is chasing after the footsteps of the dark,
- 5 And the night has shaken the dew upon the garden
And the east wind has made its branches tremble,
- 6 And the moon's sphere has appeared over its crescent
Like a black head whose beard is white.
- 7 And it has caressed the house with the white of its light
And the night has raised some of its veils,
- 8 And the galaxy has rent apart the darkness;
You'd think it at night, when
- 9 The morning brightens⁴⁵⁹, and when it catches fire
Among the stars, to be like the part in the hair of a man in his prime.⁴⁶⁰”
- 10 And he said, "drinking at night has damaged us
For it wipes out reason and intellect,
- 11 And the djinn have complained to Iblis
That they are in the narrowest of prisons.
- 12 We will urinate and defecate in their faces
And we kill the flies among them when they are in our power.⁴⁶¹

⁴⁵⁹ see (Qur'ān n.d., 81:18)

⁴⁶⁰ i.e. with black hair

- 13 *Do you not see the garden, how it has blossomed*
And the gillyflower has spread out a yellow cloak,
- 14 *And the rose has laughed with the red anemones*
And embraced the dew droplets with the embrace of a lover
- 15 *In a garden like the clothing of a bride*
And herbage like the head of a peacock,
- 16 *And the jasmine on the top of the branches*
Is organized like pieces of gold,
- 17 *And the cypress, like reeds of crysolite⁴⁶²*
Have drawn up the water from the moist earth
- 18 *Overlooking gardens, and moist earth*
And streams like a polished file.⁴⁶³
- 19 *And the poppy has made openings in shirt-fronts, and tears*
As though it were books with white pages
- 20 *Until when its leaves were spread out*
And it was almost the case that its stem was oozing moisture
- 21 *They became like glasses of crystal*
As though they were light embodied
- 22 *Some of them are naked of their petals*
Wretched, embarrassed before their fellows.
- 23 *You see the naked poppies after the blossoming of the rose*

⁴⁶¹ The significance of lines 11 and 12 is unclear.

⁴⁶² Crysolite is a bright green gem.

⁴⁶³ The ripples in the streams are being compared to the ripples in a metal file

- Like maces in the hands of an army,*⁴⁶⁴
- 24 *And the white lily*⁴⁶⁵ *with a spread-out mantle*
- Like cotton which some moisture had touched.*
- 25 *It blossomed in the two sides of its orchard*
- And the plaza entered into its realm of protection,*⁴⁶⁶
- 26 *And acanthus dates appeared in it*
- As though they were skulls of ambergris,*
- 27 *And the ox-eye flower circled around over the myrtle*
- With a head like the head of a restive horse,*
- 28 *Across from a wormwood like the white hair of a middle-aged woman*
- And a jewel*⁴⁶⁷ *made from various flowers*
- 29 *And pomegranites like the blush of cheeks,*
- Or like the crest of an Indian turkey*
- 30 *And chamomile like shining teeth*
- Whose blossoms have been polished by rain.*
- 31 *Say to me, is this good at night?*
- Alas for what you desire, and woe to it!"*
- 32 *And he went on with hyperbole and descriptions,*
- So I said, "I avoid disagreement with you.*
- 33 *Spend the night with us, until when the morning breaks*

⁴⁶⁴ When the petals of a poppy fall off, its seed pod looks somewhat reminiscent of a mace.

⁴⁶⁵ See (Dozy 2007, 19)

⁴⁶⁶ i.e. the lily was planted in the orchard but spilled over into the neighboring plaza and took it over. *Bustān* and *maydān* (rendered here as "orchard" and "plaza" respectively) would have represented familiar subsections of a formal garden for the 'Abbāsīd audience.

⁴⁶⁷ i.e. a hair ornament

As though it were a stream of water overflowing,
 34 *We get up and approach some provisions prepared for us*
And wine that throws a strong man down
 35 *As though its diffused bubbles*
Were the stars upon a rotating firmament,
 36 *And we arise to the performer who plays with the strings*
Making music more delicate than the mourning of the doves.
 37 *So don't say to me 'I have preferred to stay in my dwelling place'*
For you will be spoiling the speech with a weak excuse."
 38 *So he said "this is the beginning of madness!*
When did the lizard alight on the river-bank of the whale?"⁴⁶⁸
 39 *I have called you to the morning draught;*
When you accept, am I not the first one there?
 40 *I have an obligation that I must fulfill*
To set my soul at ease from worry
 41 *But then I will come, reined in along with the morning⁴⁶⁹*
Before the call to prayers has been uttered."
 42 *Then he left, promising a morning draught*
And he shook a head of joyous pleasure.
 43 *I got up from talking with him, fearing and frightened*

⁴⁶⁸ This statement should be taken as an aphorism (though the only references to it I've found have been references to this poem), meaning "when did the little animal (i.e. the poet) start acting like the big one (i.e. the friend)?" i.e. What gives you the idea that *you* have to bully *me* into attending this party, when I've been its most vocal advocate?

⁴⁶⁹ i.e. he and the morning are reined in with the same reins, and thus have to travel together

And I said "Go to sleep, woe unto you, quickly
44 So that the eye may take a share of sleep
Before the summons to prayer."

45 So our sides rubbed the couches
When I was not previously submissive to sleep.

46 Then we got up when the darkness was bowing its head in silence
And the birds were in their nests, not speaking

47 And the stars had appeared in its blackness
Like the garment of a monk in his mourning garments.

48 And we were made our ears listen before the door
But we didn't find a sound from the liar

49 Until the blush of dawn appeared
And the lash of the wine pained the drinking companions

50 And the sun rose upon the heads
And drunkenness was made the owner over the souls.

51 He came, an unamusing smile on his face
Exposed because of what he had incurred, blamed,

52 Stumbling in the middle of the house from his shame
And plucking at the fringes of his cloak.

53 The group was clamoring at him until he was dazed
And he opened his speech with a stammer and speechlessness.

54 He said, "oh people, listen to my words,
Don't hasten unjustly to blaming me."

55 *And he brought us a deceitful story*

To which the heart didn't open its doors

56 *Like the excuse of an impotent man on the seventh day*

To a bride with a wasted hymen.

57 *He said, "drink!" and I said "we have drunk!"*

You have come to us when we had already become drunk!"

58 *He continued with his business alone,*

Lifting a hand with a cup to a mouth

59 *While the other people were either excusing themselves, intoxicated*

Or diving into sleep, drowsy.

60 *It was as though he were the last-place horse among the race-horses*

Who gets a thousand blows from the grooms

61 *Laboring as though he had been successful*

Following in their tracks, put to shame.

62 *So listen, for indeed I am a denouncer of the morning draught—*

I have astonishing reports of it.

63 *If you wish to drink at dawn*

When the stars are travelling in the abyss of night

64 *And it's cold, then the drinking companion is shivering*

And his saliva has frozen upon the teeth

65 *And the servant boy is hangdog and grumbling*

And abuse is stammering out onto his chest,

66 *Walking without a foot from drowsiness*

And pouring out the cup on the gathering

67 *And he curses the master whenever he calls him*

And if he comes, his face is in the back of his head

68 *And if he hears a voice from a drinking companion*

He calls in response "curses and death".

69 *And if there is a cupbearer who's beloved to the people*

His eyelids are stuck to his eyelids

70 *And his head is like pelts that have been rained on*

And his forelock is like a broken polo stick.

71 *He was hurried away from his tooth stick and his adornment*

And an outfit that beautifies the beauty of his appearance,

72 *And he goes to them with farting under the blanket*

Carried in clothes and sides of the body.

73 *And it's as though he had bitten down on a brain,*

Disquieting of breaths and of bodily crevices.

74 *And he serves them in a loosened girdle*

And carries the cup with no kerchief.

75 *And if you drive out the cold with drapes*

And you bring a portable fireplace and sable

76 *Then what merit for the morning draught is known*

Over the evening draught when the night is dusky?

77 *And were you to slip it into the backside of a feverish one*

It wouldn't escape the cold when he is penetrated.

78 *You'll feel sharp swords from the enveloping drafts*
Which sink into the joints.

79 *And I have forgotten the sparks of the fireplace*
As though they were sprinklings of jasmine.

80 *The embers cast it into the pupils*
And if it wanes, it strikes at the inner corners of the eyes.

81 *And the fireplace leaves the carpet after the fire went out*
Possessed of black spots like the hide of a lynx,

82 *And the meeting is cut short by dejection*
And the recollection of the fire singing clothes.

83 *And the fireplace has continued occupying the people*
And their outer-garments have become sieves

84 *Until when the sun of morning rises*
It is said, "so and so and so and so have come".

85 *And perhaps [the new guest] might be a bore, a stuffed-shirt*
For he talks at great length at times, and sticks around

86 *Even after the sweet basil has been taken away, and the date wine,*
And our pleasant life has ceased from us.

87 *And there is no safety all day long*
From a tragedy which was not extant before

88 *Or from news that is loathsome, or a letter*
Which cuts short the good of pleasure and drinking.

89 *So listen to the disgraces of the morning draught*

In the summer before the birds sing

90 *When sleep has been sweet and the bed has been good*

And the night is stripped away and the bedchamber has been pleasant

91 *And the bedbug has been routed, after they had pastured at pleasure*

On blood, going down to the well, lowering their heads to drink

92 *After they had eaten the bodies*

And driven men from sleep.

93 *Then the food is brought to the sleepers*

Whose tongues are heavy of speech

94 *After the ants crawled over it*

And a basilisk snake who flings poison

95 *And a scorpion, a dangerous killer*

And a dung beetle and a urinating rat.

96 *And the singer has an obstruction in his throat*

And a doze which has detracted from his skill.

97 *And if you want to drink after dawn*

When dawn has pulled out the swords of warmth,

98 *Well, there's an hour, and the headache comes to you⁴⁷⁰*

With its fire, and even a delicacy won't go down pleasantly

99 *And the drinks and the mixers get hot*

And division and yelling proliferate

100 *Among a community that had been made to swallow hot water*

⁴⁷⁰ i.e. from the sun's heat

*And they dined on a hot wind among their provisions.*⁴⁷¹

101 And their breaths clouded their cups

And their cups tormented their spirits

102 And they were enamored of scratching and rubbing

*And the armpits disobeyed the order of the litharge*⁴⁷²

103 And their sweet basil became like dry clover

And all of them hated each other

104 And some of them were walking without feet

And taking a cup without hands

105 And some of their eyes are red

From the hot wind, with flushed cheeks.

106 And at sunrise some of them

Are feeling hungry, aching in the soul

107 And even if they conceal what was in them, they are bewildered

And they aren't able, owing to their weakness, to breathe

108 And the headache wandered about in their temples

And there was no use for them

109 And their vehemence multiplied, and their exasperation

And they became like embers whose sparks are flying

110 And they were on the point of being obnoxious and quick-tempered

And turned away cups and greetings.

⁴⁷¹ The words translated as “hot water” and “hot wind” are found in (Qur’ān n.d., 15:42), describing the punishments of hell

⁴⁷² Lead oxide crystal, presumed in this case to function as a deodorant cosmetic

111 *And a beastliness⁴⁷³ appeared in their character*
 And every companion died from fear of them
 112 *And if a wretch called to be served*
 They sewed shut their eyelids upon slumber.
 113 *And whenever a required prayer came along*
 They farted upon it and it turned away, fleeing them.
 114 *And life is roiled in a motley day*
 Whose various parts cannot be joined to their satisfaction.
 115 *And whoever has continued doing this for the sake of misery*
 By his deeds, and takes pleasure in it
 116 *Is found to be nothing but squalid of clothes,*
 Dazed, with dazed friends,
 117 *Increasing negligence and feebleness and emaciation*
 And you never see him except as a clumsy fool
 118 *Who has a mustache and a long talon*
 Spoiling the provisions even for a glutton,
 119 *And an eye whose inner corner is whitened*
 And an ear like a pot of glue
 120 *And a body upon which is crust of filth*
 As though it were made to drink tar or bespattered with it.
 121 *And you imagine beneath his armpit when he sweats*
 The whiskers of a judge that was saved from drowning

⁴⁷³ The reference is to a beast of prey

122 *And his saliva is like a foul ooze* ⁴⁷⁴ *from the skin*

And he's not embarrassed to have avoided the toothbrush.

123 *On his chest is some of what trickles and pours*

Like a trace of bird droppings on a perch.

124 *This is how it is, and what I left out was more of the same*

So test out what I have said, and consider.

Before close-reading this poem, it is necessary to take note of some of its unusual properties. At 124 lines, this is by far the longest poem in the lyric corpus—the next longest, at 54 lines, is less than half the length. This additional length is principally enabled by its rhyme-scheme: it is rhymed in hemistich couplets rather than with monorhyme, as is the longest *qaṣīda* poem in the *dīwān* ⁴⁷⁵ (which dwarfs even Poem 176 at 419 lines). It is presumably for the combination of these two poems that Ibn al-Mu‘tazz should be recognized as a pioneer in the field of rhymed couplet poems. ⁴⁷⁶

There is reason to believe, moreover, that this particular poem was recognized as a major work by the contemporary critical tradition. This poem is listed by name as one of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s published works in several classical sources ⁴⁷⁷—alongside, for example, the *Kitāb al-Badī‘*. As referenced in the introduction, al-Sharīf al-‘Aqīlī wrote a lengthy

⁴⁷⁴ Literally (Lane 1968, 1893) “the foul matter that comes forth from the child after suckling”

⁴⁷⁵ (Ibn al-Mu‘tazz 1997, v. I, pg. 568-639, #443)

⁴⁷⁶ (Bencheneb 2011). The advent of rhymed hemistichs is enabled by the *rajaz* meter, which traditionally calls for rhyme at the end of each hemistich. The greater prosodic independence of hemistichs in *rajaz*, already noted in section 4.2.2 Subverting Line Expectations above, greatly facilitates the shift to a rhyme scheme in which pair of hemistichs in a line rhyme only with one another.

⁴⁷⁷ See (Yāqūt 1993), (Ibn Khallikān 1948-1950), (Kutubī 1973-1977)

poem of rebuttal to this one—praising the evening draught and condemning the morning draught.⁴⁷⁸ Given the length of this poem, its unusual structure, and the attention given it by the classical tradition, it seems important to translate and discuss it here.

It is further worth noting, by way of ongoing consideration of the question of genre assignment, that this poem is categorized as *wasf*—while there is undeniably a great deal of description in it, is extremely purposive overall, and *sharāb* seems like a more natural categorization in terms of artistic purpose. That said, given how different this poem is from the rest of the *dīwān*, there's probably no genre in which it would fit comfortably.

For all its length, Poem 176 is very coherent. It cannot be called polythematic like a *qaṣīda*, or even like Poem 166. The poem is devoted to disparagement of the custom of drinking parties in the morning, and at no point does it deviate from this purpose. The poem does divide neatly into two halves: the first half recounts a particular anecdote about how a friend once bullied him and his friends into participating in a morning drinking party, and what a bad idea it was. The second half is a generalized screed against the evils of the morning drinking party. The broadest motion of the poem can therefore be seen as a move from the specific to the general, from the personal to the communal. This bears some resemblance to the structural shape of the archetypal *qaṣīda*, which moves from the poet's personal struggles with love to an affirmation of the glory of his tribe; this poem diverges from the generalized *qaṣīda* shape principally in being more coherent, with the two parts more obviously related. This strategy of argumentation is by no means

⁴⁷⁸ See pg. 17

unique to classical Arabic rhetoric—the American reader should recognize it in his own public discourse. The archetypal structure of the advertisement is perhaps the best example: a personal story about the product’s impact upon a particular family, followed (without any necessary logical connection) to sweeping generalizations about the product’s virtues.

On the level of the whole poem, a formal feature worth noting is the poet’s explicitness in describing his argumentative aims. Few other poems in this chapter have spelled out their structure so clearly. The first line, the last line, and the transitional line between the first and second halves are all devoted to pure explication. In between, all the other lines of the poem fall, as it were, into line:

I I have a friend who rebuked me and was excessive

Regarding my abstaining from the morning draught, and he was repetitive

[an anecdote involving the poet and his friend disagreeing about the merits of the morning draught]

62 So listen, for indeed I am a denouncer of the morning draught—

I have astonishing reports of it.

[a sequence of denunciations of the morning draught]

124 This is how it is, and what I left out was more of the same

So test out what I have said, and consider.

It seems likely that this sort of explicitness becomes more attractive to a poet when the poem is very long. The longer and more involved the poem becomes, the easier it might be for a listener to become lost. Thus if one wants to retain the reader’s attention, it

behooves the poet to keep expectations clear⁴⁷⁹. It might be interesting to consider how this generalization would play out among *qaṣīdas* of various lengths—though in that case, readers’ expectations are rendered clearer by the existence of deep-laid expectations for the progression of the poem; in such an environment, conventional signals might easily substitute for explicit statements of intent.

We can break the poem down into its component parts and consider the progression of each in turn. The first half is composed of three parts: the lengthy praise given by the poet’s friend for the morning draught, the active debate between the poet and his friend in which they agree to attempt the morning draught together, and the description of the terrible scene which ensues.

Part 1 extends from line 1 through line 31—fully the first quarter of the poem. We’ve seen extended description segments in many other poems from this chapter. The 4 and 5 line description segments in Poem 164 serve to contribute to the delicate mood of the poem and to give shape to the sections in which they occur. The 18 line description of al-Mu’taḍid’s court in Poem 171 serves to stun and impress the reader with its persistent intensity. At 31 lines, this extremely elaborate description of the beauty attendant upon a morning draught serves another function: that of farce. The author tells us in the first line of the poem that his friend was excessive and repetitive in his advocacy for the morning draught. Throughout the rest of part 1, he draws upon his considerable descriptive powers, his imagistic imagination, and his pedantic expertise regarding the details of gardens to give us a descriptive passage that amuses with its self-indulgent detail. In fact,

⁴⁷⁹ A ready analogy might be found in academic papers, which, as they grow longer, find more need to explicitly label and differentiate large sub-sections

the descriptions of part 1 can be broken into two sections: The first, composed of lines 2-10, provide an essentially normal sort of lavish description, beginning with “he said” and culminating in a 2-line simile. However, rather than move to the next part of the poem, we are treated to more of the same. Again the section begins “he said”...and then it continues for more than 20 lines, delving into ever-more-elaborate descriptions of flowers.

Given the poet’s natural proclivities towards this sort of description, it is tempting to interpret this as a sort of stylistic self-parody.

In part 2 (lines 32-42), the poet and his friend engage in discussion about the morning draught. Overwhelmed (or perhaps merely subdued) by his friend’s protestation, the poet agrees to host a morning drinking party, on condition that the friend actually show up for it. The friend protests this condition—after having argued so strongly in favor of the morning draught, how could the poet suggest that he might *not* show up? The friends separate, having agreed on a plan for the morning draught.

In part 3 (lines 43-61), the poet outlines in scathing detail the result of so much planning. After he and his friends have made the effort to go to bed early, and awakened early to begin drinking, they wake up early to begin the party. There is no evidence that they are enjoying themselves: in marked contrast to the lavish natural descriptions offered by the friend in part 1, part 3 provides only 2 lines of bleak description of the surrounding natural world:

46 Then we got up when the darkness was bowing its head in silence

And the birds were in their nests, not speaking

47 And the stars had appeared in its blackness

Like the garment of a monk in his mourning garments

Meanwhile, the faithless friend shows up intolerably late, after the rest of the party has already drunk quite a bit. Whereas in part 1 the friend appears to be eloquent (if excessively so) here he is stammering and self-conscious, and his explanation of his tardiness goes over very badly:

56 Like the excuse of an impotent man on the seventh day

To a bride with a wasted hymen.

Finally, the friend starts drinking; however, since he has arrived so late, everyone else is either too drunk to continue or has fallen back asleep, and he is reduced to drinking alone.

The poet describes the scene:

60 It was as though he were the last-place horse among the race-horses

Who gets a thousand blows from the grooms

61 Laboring as though he had been successful

Following in their tracks, put to shame.

As a counterpoint to Part 1, which contains an abundant multitude of descriptive similes, Part 3 is rather sparing. It contains only the three cited above, each of which serve an explicitly satiric purpose.

The second half of the poem is also composed of three parts: an explication of the difficulties of the morning draught in the winter, an explication of the separate difficulties

of the morning draught in the summer, and a denunciation of the sort of person who seeks out morning draughts despite these difficulties.

After an introduction to the second half of the poem (line 62), in which the poet explicitly states that his intent for the remainder of the poem is to castigate the morning draught, part 4 begins (63-88). Part 4 takes advantage of the reader's expectations about wine parties, invoking each in turn and showing how horribly wrong it can go when everyone's cold and sleep-deprived. Wine poetry traditionally delights in celebrating the elegance and attractiveness of the cupbearer who serves the drinks; Part 4 section 1 (lines 63-74) gives us the image of a cupbearer who's tired and cross and unresponsive, who hasn't had a chance to bathe or put on his traditional outfit or apply cosmetics and is consequently malodorous and inelegant. The traditional features of the cupbearer's ensemble—forelock, girdle and his kerchief—are all mentioned in such a way as to emphasize their disarray. In part 4 section 2 (lines 75-88) The poet goes on to describe the sexual liaison with the cupbearer, and demonstrates a series of problems that can arise when it's cold and the only heat is coming from a portable fireplace which scatters sparks. Whereas the previous section draws upon and then subverts commonly-invoked images from wine-poetry to depict the disappointment in the cupbearer's appearance, section 2 generates shock value by casting an unusually explicit eye over mechanical details of the liaison that are generally implied rather than stated, the better to describe their mechanical failures.

Part 5 provides a corresponding picture of the discomforts of the morning draught in summer. Section 1 (lines 89-97) describes in lavish detail the spectacle of vermin (who proliferate in the dark when it's warm) crawling all over the provisions provided for the party and befouling them. Section 2 (lines 98-114) describes the mood of revelers when it's too hot: sweaty, feverish, asthmatic, and fractious. Part 5 unfortunately lacks the same punch as part 4, in that it lacks a well-established poetic tradition to parody; however it accomplishes a similar argumentative effect of exposing the seamy underside of the idyllic scene imagined in part 1. Part 6 concludes the poem with a rain of invective against whatever fool is masochistic enough to impose this sort of torment upon himself and his friends, culminating in a series of imaginatively grotesque similes.

Poem 175 and Poem 176 show how an author deeply steeped in the tropes of Arabic poetry can exaggerate and invert those tropes in order to create humor. Poem 175 drew upon a cross-genre tradition of pathos in order to comically play up the tragedy of the worm in the books. Poem 176 part 1 draws upon the tradition of luxuriant descriptions (i.e. *wasf*) and exaggerates it to the point of absurdity; part 4 draws upon the tropes of the wine poem in order to demonstrate their comic failures under adverse circumstances. Play with thematic conventions, like play with formal conventions, suggests the means by which artistic conventions can become a tool in the hands of a self-conscious master, subdued to the service of his own artistic vision.

Conclusion

The Introduction to this dissertation posited that corpus studies serve to build up a basis of expectation regarding the corpus' contents—to sketch a picture of a paradigmatic poem within the corpus which a reader may then carry into subsequent encounters with those and other poems. Since art is fundamentally built out of expectation and surprise, it is hoped that building up this basis for expectation (especially in a literature to which one lacks native access and intuition) may enable a reader to engage with individual poems more sensitively and appreciate them more deeply.

The conclusion seems an apt place to look back and take stock of that goal. What sorts of expectations has this corpus developed? What is the paradigmatic image of a lyric poem that we've been building towards?

The paradigmatic lyric poem by Ibn al-Mu'tazz is probably a short poem—perhaps two or three or four lines long. It might open with a declarative statement that sets the scene, or perhaps it will use some quick attention-getting device to draw the reader in more decisively. Though the poem might appear to digress, each gesture will be carefully considered in its relation to what precedes and follows it. It will manipulate not only conventional expectations, but fine-grained syntactical expectations within the poem itself such as parallelism and bipartite structure. It will ultimately rise to a climactic conclusion in the last line, which will likely draw upon the energy afforded by an exciting syntactical structure that spans the last line.

It is likely that this paradigmatic poem will draw upon one of two modes, depending upon its rhetorical aims: either it will be directed towards building up an image, or towards building up an argument. Each mode has a vocabulary of syntactical devices associated with it, though sometimes the devices associated with one may be harnessed to serve the purposes of the other. These modes often have strong synergies with particular genres, but genres are diffuse and not always well-defined, and almost all genres accommodate poems in both modes.

The lyric poem might, of course, not be as short as we have been supposing. The longer it is, the more structurally complex and modally various it will become. But when you break it down into short subsections, those subsections will often be structurally reminiscent of the shorter poems.

Our paradigmatic poem exists in a rich literary tradition, and it will share many of its structural tendencies with the other poems in that tradition. A short lyric poem by Ibn al-Mu‘tazz will share much of its structure with selections from anthologies, even though those selections are often not themselves complete poems. Lyric poems also share some structure with *qaṣīdas*—the build-up from exposition to climax is not dissimilar, and some of the ways that build-up is executed are the same, though others are different. Since Ibn al-Mu‘tazz’s lyric poems are structurally similar to poems and sections of poems from other places, it follows that our paradigmatic poem might provide some helpful basis of expectation for someone reading other poetry too.

Whatever the poem may be, one should always remember that the flip side of expectation is surprise. If the paradigmatic poem exists to be incarnated, it also exists to be subverted. The real poem dances with the paradigm, sometimes following and sometimes pushing back against it. That is the interplay between the individual and the general that transmutes craft into art.

It is not without a certain relief, here at the end of all things, that I turn back to acknowledge the limitations of the work being completed. This has been in many ways an experiment, a first try. It represents an effort to harness modern technologies and modern tools to the analysis of large corpora—an analysis which has (in the field of Near Eastern Studies) traditionally relied upon painstaking examination and enormous erudition. Although I believe that these tools can greatly facilitate some of the traditional objectives of structural analysis, I readily acknowledge the limits of my own expertise concerning them. A scholar of Arabic literature who possessed real mastery in the statistical methodologies of social science, or the analytical tools of modern computer science, would be able to analyze corpus data in ways that I can hardly imagine. As it is, the methods employed here were highly constrained by my limited background,⁴⁸⁰ and the results are constrained accordingly.

⁴⁸⁰ I am grateful to Professors Susan Perry and Joseph Manson, who offered a social science perspective on the math in this dissertation. Further work with chi square tests, Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests, correlation tests using Pearson R, and cluster analyses would be helpful in strengthening the statistical support of the paper; such work would have the benefit of opening these findings and other similar ones to a more interdisciplinary academic discussion. The cost of such additions, needless to say, would be the decrease of accessibility to scholars within the field of Near Eastern Studies, given the present orientation of the field.

As a first try, this study makes a number of suggestions which may or not be ultimately validated. The next step in determining the extent to which the results found reflect general poetic trends would be to apply them to corpora by poets. Abū Nuwās, another celebrated lyric poet, would be an excellent place to start. Should his poetry exhibit similar structural features, one might then survey poets from a variety of different time periods and attempt to understand the ways poetic structure might have changed over time. Such context would greatly clarify the results of this study—to what extent they are idiosyncratic, and to what extent they fit into broader trends. The opportunity to replicate results might also help to shed more light upon the many places where we were forced by small data sets to describe results as “suggestive” only, and either disprove some of our conclusions or make them less tentative.

In taking a middle course between traditional Near Eastern scholarship and sophisticated quantitative methodology (I described my approach as “mildly quantitative” in the Introduction), I can hope only to start a discussion about the appropriate use of quantitative methods in Arabic literature.

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