

Love & Courtship in the Poetry of Ahmad Shawqi

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SHAWQI, EGYPT'S SHAKESPEARE

Muhammad Mahdi Allam, born in 1900, was an Egyptian man of letters who studied in England and graduated from the University of London from which he was awarded certificates in Hebrew and Persian languages. In 1934, he wrote in an introductory essay: 'Yet I say it uncomplicatedly and outspokenly, Shawqi is Egypt's Shakespeare'[1].

Ahmad Shawqi (1868–1932), the undisputed prince of poets (Ameer Al-shu'araa), was the greatest Arab poet in modern times. He was also the leader of the school of renovators based on preamble ancient Arabic poetry. He reflected the status and politics of the scepter of the royal palace in which he was brought up. Thus, his poetic tongue was radical in its origin, but his character belonged to the extreme right and within the traditions of the conservative aristocracy in Egypt. Shawqi, the poet of the twentieth century, found beauty in everything, including the past, the present, nature, and women. He had a pure tongue in mentioning women even in his courting that flew with rich emotions, delicate sensations, and glowing feelings transcending above profligacy and dissipation.

'God granted Shawqi an eloquent tongue, and an inspired spirit, thus he lived with a beating heart, dreaming eyes, and a chest filled with poetry by which he existed in the realm of imagination, amid the quarters of beauty, there from where love and description come out' [2].

Shawqi showed qualities of a religious man who directs himself to what he holds true of the characteristics of Islam. He intended to clarify and increase Islam's lofty truths and was one of those who reinforced a high edifice of the love of Islam and respect to the Prophet in the hearts of the Eastern masses, peace be upon him, through the poems that he composed in praise of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him.

The owner of Al-Ma'refa magazine used to present Shawqi's poems with the title 'Poet of the East and Islam' so when Shawqi later met him he smiled at his face and said to him: 'Calling me the Poet of Islam is dearer to me than this resonant title given to me by the journalists, because I really hope to be The Poet of Islam' [3].

The writer Muhammad Al-Taftazani said: 'Shawqi preferred to be nicknamed The Poet of Islam, and he was pleased by this title more than he was pleased by the title of Prince of poets'. He added:

'I remember on the occasion of talking about Shawqi's Islamic spirit that he granted Al-Ma'refa magazine at the beginning of its second year and some of the rare jewels that he had collected in his book (Gold Markets) before it was printed. I presented this book to the readers under the title The Poet of the East and Islam rather than the Prince of Poets. When I met him later on, he had a halo of happiness covering his bright laughing face while he said to me: "as if you mister uttered through the tongue of the unseen, the title of Poet of Islam is dearer to me than this resonant title which the journalists call me by. I hope to be the Poet of Islam really" '[4].

It might be that this penetration of religious sentiment prevented Shawqi from degrading his poetry with shameless and nonsense subjects as many other poets did in the Eastern and Western worlds. As for Shawqi, he had a chaste tongue since he never in his life wrote a line that he would be ashamed to read.

Muhammad Hussein Haykal, (1888–1956), the famous Egyptian writer, journalist, politician, and Minister of Education in Egypt, wrote in the introduction of the first edition of Shawqi's poetry collection (Al-Shawqiyat):

'Shawqi studied in Egypt, then completed his studies in Europe where he was significantly influenced by the European medium, the European lifestyle and the European poetry. The influence of both environments remained apparent in his life and in his poetry. You almost feel when your review parts of his poetry collection like you were in front of two different men with no connection between one and the other, yet both of them is a naturally disposed poet reaching the top heavens of poetry, both of them being an Egyptian who loves Egypt to the extent of sanctification and worship'.

Apart from this, each one of the two men is different from the other: one is a believer filled with faith, while the other man is a worldly man who sees life's hopes and goals in the world's pleasures. In his poetry, there are two independent images of life as if written by two persons; although alcohol is banned in Islam, you can read from the poetry of his youth as if he is describing a glass of wine:

حف كأسها الحبب فهي فضة ذهب

Its cup is bordered by beads, of silver and gold.

When you read the words:

رمضان وألى، هاتها يا ساقى
مشتاقه تسعى إلى مشتاق

Ramadan has gone, bring it, oh waiter,
A craver seeking a craver.

Hence you find yourself in the presence of a poet who is fond of life, its pleasures, and delights, a poet whose spirit is very different from the author of the prophetic praising poem (Hamziyah) in which you read a description of prophet Muhammad's holy birth:

وُلِدَ الهدى، فالكائناتُ ضياءُ
وقم الزمان تبسمُ وثناءُ

Guidance was born, all living beings are lighted,
the mouth of time is smiling and praising.

How did duality exist? How did Shawqi combine within himself these two poets? One was the poet of Arab life, its Islamic civilization, ancientness and faith, and the other was the poet of the Western way of life ruled by modern science and its daily new inventions [5]?

Shawqi's love poems are marked by excessive emotional tenderness. They express a lover's courting routine and could never be a tradition of hereditary debris even if they seemed to be. They are in fact the love songs of a man who knew the meaning of the suffering caused by loving a woman and then described this experience with a poet's sentiment [6].

SHAWQI'S WIFE:

Hussein Shawqi (in his book: *Abi Shawqi* [My father Shawqi]) described his mother with total reverence and brevity. He described her with the utmost tenderness, and according to his father, she resembled an Ankaran cat spoken in reference to her Turkish origin and the fact that cats were very soft but also disdained!! The son attributes a great deal of the success of his father to his mother and her gentle nature: 'If my father was led to success in his literary life, the greatest favor was due to my mother's nature, and her infinite kindness, she never blamed him in his whole life, although he was sometimes to be blamed' [7].

One of the shortest streets in Egypt does not extend more than a few steps and is located in the suburb of Giza, but we constructed it to commemorate the greatest poet in the history of Egypt. It is Ahmad Shawqi Street. The poet died on October 14, 1932 as the sun set.

There, on the top of the road, lies Shawqi's house, *Karmat Ibn Hani* (Ibn Hani's Vine), as he had named it. It was in Al-Matariya and then moved to Al-Giza, with its garden, windows and balconies overlooking the banks of the Eternal Nile River as if asking for its late Lord.

من أي عهد في الوري تتدفق ؟
وبأي كف في المدائن تغدق ؟
ومن السماء نزلت ؟ أم فجرت من
عليها الجنان جداولاً تترقرق ؟

From which era do you flow into the villages?
And by which hand do you inundate into the cities?
Did you come down from the sky? Or did you gust,
rippling streams from highest heavens?

This is *Karmat Ibn Hani*, Shawqi's house, the location of poetry by the Prince of Poets. His eternal spirit remains within the house, his presence is still in every room, and there is still a cherished part of his spirit in every corner. The dearest one to him belonging to the rest of the family there is his dignified widow, who secluded herself most of her days in a corner of the garden, praying in the niche of her memories.

This honorable lady, Shawqi's wife, is a descendant of a house with a long tradition of ancient Turkey, the East, and Islam. Her mission in this worldly life was as a wife, a mother, and a housewife. She had nothing to do with poetry, except for her relationship to Shawqi as her husband.

The limits of her connection to this worldly life are the door of this house in which she lives. Today, this Karma (vine) is sponsored by Shawqi's youngest son Hussein, the gentle poet to whom the famous singer Abdel-Wahab sang from his poetry:
The nights stayed up for him,
what has love got to do with me

He is also the elegant author, who wrote *My friend Renan* and *My father Shawqi*. Shawqi's two other children, Ali and Amina, have long since left the house to build other houses, taking in the grandsons of the Prince of Poets.

Is there a person who has not known love in this life?
So what about a poet? Or even the Prince of Poets?

However, when you read what the others wrote about Shawqi, you will not recognize a particular woman who played a role in his emotional life. When you read Shawqi's poetry you find love poems, yet they are not abundant or burning but rather smooth and elegant. What is baffling is that Shawqi's love poetry does not paint a well-defined image of a woman in his heart. Thus, I asked his son Hussein: 'Don't you know of your father's love story? It is a loss to deprive history from such a story?'

Hussein unequivocally assured me: 'Regretfully, he did not tell us throughout his life anything about that, despite being unpretentious with us in everything.'

Thus, I went to seek the truth from his companions, who lived with him, yet none of them gave me a clear answer. His friend Rami told me: 'I asked him once; O Shawqi, had you ever fallen in love, and he said to me: "Why do you do this to yourself, Rami? Shift from one love to another, take from each beauty its meaning, and be like a bird who does not rest on one branch. Women are meanings, do not limit yourself to one meaning".'

Rami adds that Shawqi preferred brunettes with Egyptian features, slim without sickness, and pale without weakness [8].

Courting represents a part of Shawqi's poetry that cannot be neglected. There are 58 poems of varying lengths, some of them consisting of only two lines, while the longest one consists of 27 lines. It is difficult to accurately determine the history of most of these poems as they belong to the first half of the life of the poet and represent part of the poetry of the palace, which was brilliant and graceful but was not shameless. It seems that Shawqi wanted in particular to show off his talent in courting more than to express his own emotions.

Since ancient times, Arabic poets used to place courtship as the theme of the opening lines of their poems. That method had its advantages as it paved the way for the poet to delve into the subject, and it mimics the music that precedes singing. Thus, it awakens the heart of the singer and sharpens his sense for chanting and warbling. Shawqi followed this course; thus, the courtship chapter in his poetry collection was mostly taken from the opening lines of his old praising poems. By using this method, he joined the majority of Arabic language poets who took courtship as a form of ornament for their poems [9].

NAHJ AL-BURDA

Nahj Al-Burda is one of Shawqi's longest poems. It is also one of the wonderful masterpieces woven by the Prince of Poets in praise of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, in imitation to the famous Burda poem by Al-Busiri. Nahj al-Burda, written in 1909, consists of 190 lines in five parts or themes, the first of which is about courting following the old style of traditional Arabic poems. Shawqi, as shown in the introduction of its first edition (1910), dedicated this poem to his royal patron, the Khedive 'Abbas Hilmi II, upon his return from his Hajj pilgrimage to Makkah to commemorate the Hajj of the year 1909/1327.

As for the language of courting in Nahj Al-Burda, its vocabulary shows us to what extent Shawqi borrowed from the stock of ancient poets to depict the ideal woman with all her decorations. Thus, we find the old words in the approach of Nahj Al-Burda, for example, his description of antelopes straying in wilderness, rather than depicting young girls who used to wander at his time in Cairo's palaces, on the beaches of Alexandria and Port Sa'eed, or on the banks of the Bosphorus.

Following the traditional approach of the Arabic poems, Nahj Al-Burda starts with a gorgeous flirtatious introduction in which Shawqi depicts his beloved, who kills him with yearning and infatuation, wandering as a beautiful and graceful doe.

رَبِّمَّ عَلَى الْفَاعِ بَيْنَ الْبَانِ وَالْعَلَمِ *** أَحَلَّ سَفَكَ دَمِي فِي الْأَشْهُرِ الْحُرْمِ
لَمَّا رَنَا حَدَّتَنِي النَّفْسُ قَائِلَةً *** يَا وَيْحَ جَنِيكَ بِالسَّهْمِ الْمُصِيبِ رُمِي
يَا لَأَنَّمِي فِي هَوَاهُ وَالْهَوَى قَدْرٌ *** لَوْ شَفَقَكَ الْوَجْدُ لَمْ تَعْدِلْ وَلَمْ تَلْمِ
لَقَدْ أَنْتَلْتُكَ أَدْنَا غَيْرَ وَاعِيَةً *** وَرُبَّ مُنْتَصِيتٍ وَالْقَلْبُ فِي صَمَمِ
يَا نَاعِسَ الطَّرْفِ لَا ذُقْتَ الْهَوَى أَبَدًا *** أَسَهَرْتَ مُضْنَاكَ فِي جَفْظِ الْهَوَى فَتَمِ
أَفْدِيكَ الْفَا وَلَا أَلُو الْخِيَالِ فِدَى *** أَغْرَاكَ بِالْبُخْلِ مَنْ أَغْرَاهُ بِالْكَرَمِ

A white Antelope on the plain between the Moringa trees and the mountain,
Allowed the shedding of my blood in the holy months.

When it stared at me, I said to myself,
Oh, woe unto your side, it was thrown by the right-aimed arrow.

O you who blame me in her love, whereas it is a fate,
If you were touched by passion, you would not reprove and would not blame.

I lent you an unconscious ear,
how many a listener whose heart lies in deafness.

O sleepy eyes, may you never taste love,
you kept your worn-out lover awake, so have sleep.

A thousand times would I be your ransom, would not desist imagination for redemption,
You were tempted to be mean, when I tempted you with generosity.

In another poem, Shawqi also addresses his beloved:

قُولُوا لَهُ رُوحِي فِدَاهُ ... هَذَا التَّجَنِّي مَا مَدَاهُ ؟
أَنَا لَمْ أَقُمْ بِصُدُودِهِ ... حَتَّى يُحَمَّلَنِي نَوَاهُ
تَجْرِي الْأُمُورُ لِعَايَةِ ... إِلَّا عَذَابِي فِي هَوَاهُ
سَمِّيئُهُ ” بَدْرَ الدَّجَى “ ... وَمِنْ الْعَجَائِبِ لَا أَرَاهُ
وَدَعَوْتُهُ ” : عُصْنُ الرِّيَا ... ض “ فَلَمْ أَجِدْ رَوْضًا حَوَاهُ
وَأَقُولُ عَنْهُ ” أَخُو الْعَزَا ... ل “ وَلَا أَرَى إِلَّا أَخَاهُ
قَالَ الْعَوَاذِلُ : قَدْ جَفَا ... مَا بَالُ قَلْبِكَ مَا جَفَاهُ ؟
أَنَا لَوْ أَطَعْتُ الْقَلْبَ فِيهِ ... هَلْ لَمْ أَرُدَّهُ عَلَى جَوَاهُ
وَالنُّصْحُ مَتَّهَمٌ وَإِنْ ... نَتَرْتُهُ كَالدَّرِّ الشَّفَاهُ
أَذُنُ الْفَتَى فِي قَلْبِهِ ... حِينًا وَحِينًا فِي نُهَاهُ

Tell her my soul is her redemption,
to what extent is this false accusation?
I didn't turn her away,
so that she would burden me with her farawayness.
Things go to an aim,
except my anguish in her love.
I named her "darkness's moon",
yet it's a wonder that I don't see her.
And I called her, "The branch of gardens",
yet found no garden containing her.
And I say she's the "Gazelle's brother"
yet I only see her brother.
The blamer said: She had shun you,

So why doesn't your heart do the same?
If I obeyed my heart in her,
this wouldn't increase its pain.
Advice is accused even if,
it were thrown like pearls through the lips.
A boy's ear is sometimes in his heart,
and others, in his mind.

WORN OUT AND CANNOT MOVE:

In 1890, when Shawqi was in his twenties, he wrote the words:

مضنى وليس به حراك ، لكن يخف إذا رآك
ويميل من طرب إذا ، ما ملت يا غصن الأراك
إن الجمال كساك من ، ورق المحاسن ما كساك
فنبت بين جوانحي ، والقلب من دمه سقاك
ليت اعتدالك كان لي ، منه نصيب في هواك
يا ليت شعري ما أمالك عن هواي وما ثناك
ما همت في روض الحمى ، إلا وأسكرني شذاك
والقلب مخفوض الجناح يهيم فيه على جناك

Worn out and cannot move,
yet he hastens upon seeing you.

And tends joyfully whenever,
you tend like a mustard tree branch.

Beauty has covered you with,
whatever leaves it wished.

Thus you grew between my ribs,
watered by my heart's blood.

I wish that, from your straightening up,
I had a share in your love.
I wish I could know what had inclined,
and alienated you, away from my love.
I never wandered in love's garden
without getting drunk by your fragrance.
While my lower-wing heart
wanders in your harvest.

It is no secret that Shawqi was capable of writing the language of love; actually, he had mastered it and spoke it as a lover [10].

In Shawqi's poetry, there are many who are witness to his ability to control the vocal elements of the language and broadcast a special sense through them, that was fitting to the situation or the moment [10].

In love poetry, Shawqi preferred the gentle to the eloquent, thus, his poetry was full of sweetness and softness. In 1910, he wrote the words:

رَدَّتِ الرُّوحُ عَلَيَّ الْمُضْنَى مَعَكَ
أَحْسَنُ الْأَيَّامِ يَوْمٌ أَرَجَعَكَ
كَمْ شَكُوتُ النَّبِينِ بِاللَّيْلِ إِلَى
مَطْلَعِ الْفَجْرِ عَسَى أَنْ يُطْلِعَكَ

وَبَعَثْتُ الشَّقَّ فِي رِيحِ الصَّبَا
 فَشَكَ الحُرْقَةَ مِمَّا اسْتَوَدَعَكَ
 يَا نَعِيمِي وَعَذَابِي فِي الهَوَى
 بِعَذُولِي فِي الهَوَى مَا جَمَعَكَ
 أَنْتَ رُوحِي ظَلَمَ الوَاشِي الَّذِي
 زَعَمَ القَلْبَ سَلَا أَوْ ضَيَّعَكَ
 مَوْعِي عِنْدَكَ لَا أَعْلَمُهُ
 أَهْ لَوْ تَعَلَّمُ عِنْدِي مَوْعَكَ
 أَرْجَفُوا أَنْكَ شَاكَ مَوْجَعُ
 أَلَيْتَ لِي فَوْقَ الضَّنَا مَا أَوْجَعَكَ
 نَامَتِ الأَعْيُنُ إِلَّا مُقْلَةً
 تَسْكُبُ الدَّمْعَ وَتُرْعَى مَضْجَعَكَ

The soul came back to the worn out through you.
 The best of days is that which has brought you back.
 How many nights did I complain separation till daybreak, hoping that it would arise you.
 And sent my longing yearning with the wind;
 thus, it complained the heat of the deposit.
 O you, my bliss and my suffering in love
 what gathered you in love with my carper?
 You are my soul the informer who claimed that
 my heart forgot or wasted you, was unjust.
 I know not what I mean to you
 Oh, if only you knew what you mean to me.
 They spread rumors that you are in sore and pain,
 I wish, besides my pain, that what ails you ailed me.
 All eyes slept, except an eye
 that sheds tears and guards your bed.

THEY DECEIVED HER:

When Shawqi composed this poem, he invited all poets to divide up and complete its opening line. He even allotted an award for the best completion. It was published in the newspapers of Egypt and the Levant, and opposed by many poets who took part in completing it [11].

خَدَعُوا بِقَوْلِهِمْ حَسَنَاءُ * وَالْعَوَانِي يُغْرُهُنَّ الثَّنَاءُ

They deceived her by telling her you're a beauty,
 as beauties are enticed by praise.

It is a beautiful poem by the Prince of Arab Poets, Ahmad Shawqi, and people became fond of it and passed it on. The poet speaks in these verses about his beloved, who abandoned him, and pretended she forgot him because of the many fans and lovers around her. In the poem, he describes how she was flattered upon hearing the words of praise for her beauty.

Shawqi's way of completing his own opening line was expressed in several phrases:

خَدَعُوا بِقَوْلِهِمْ حَسَنَاءُ * وَالْعَوَانِي يُغْرُهُنَّ الثَّنَاءُ
 أَنْرَاهَا تَنَاسَتْ إِسْمِي لَمَّا * كَثُرَتْ فِي عَرَامِهَا الأَسْمَاءُ
 إِنْ رَأْتَنِي تَمِيلُ عَنِّي كَأَنْ لَمْ * تَكْ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَهَا أَشْيَاءُ

They deceived her by telling her you're a beauty,
 as beauties are enticed by praise.

I wonder whether she pretended to have forgotten my name,
 When there became many names in her love?

When she sees me, she turns away, as if,
There weren't things between us.

In the fourth and fifth lines, Shawqi summarized the love tale in all its chapters.

نَظْرَةٌ فَابْتِسَامَةٌ فَسَلَامٌ * فَكَلَامٌ فَمَوْعِدٌ فَلِقَاءُ
فَفِرَاقٌ يَكُونُ فِيهِ دَوَاءٌ * * أَوْ فِرَاقٌ يَكُونُ مِنْهُ الدَّاءُ

A look, then a smile, then a greeting,
then a talk, then a date, then a meeting.

Then a separation in which there is remedy,
Or a separation from which there is an ailment.

جَادَبْتَنِي ثُوبِي الْعَصِيَّ وَقَالَتْ * * أَنْتُمْ النَّاسُ أَيُّهَا الشُّعْرَاءُ
فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ فِي قُلُوبِ الْعَدَارِي * * فَالْعَدَارِي قُلُوبُهُنَّ هَوَاءٌ

She pulled my disobedient robe, saying:
Oh poets! You are the real people!

So fear God (have mercy) in the virgins' hearts,
Since their hearts are as light as air.

A PARTY AT SHAWQI'S HOUSE:

At Shawqi's house, the poem's location and the poets' destination at Al-Matariya, between the shimmering lights and the opening of the flowers with the sounds of the lute and the zither and the tones of the vocalists and singers under the beautiful thickets and grandiose pavilions, a group of dignitaries and writers met last Thursday evening to welcome the return of His Highness the Egyptian Prince of Poetry to his capital.

Thus turned the rings around a dignified minister, or a poet, a man of letters, or a creative singer, while the generous host moved between these seminars. It was a uniquely amusing audition soiree, sparingly provided by time.

In the luxuriant garden, tables of many kinds of food and drinks were offered. It was a period of time, attended by the prime minister, during which one of the vocalists chanted Shawqi's love poem (Your lover's bed rejected him). It was previously published by our magazine, and opposed (imitated) by our major poets. Shawqi later on added many lines to it [6, 12]:

* وبكاه ورحم عودته مضافاً جفاؤه مرقداه
* مقروح الجفن مسهده حيران القلب معدبه
أودى حرفاً إلا رمفاً * يبقيه عليك وتنفده
يستهووي الورق تاؤه * ويذيب الصخر تنهده
ويناجي النجم ويتعبه * ويقيم الليل ويقعده
ويعلم كل مطوقة * شجناً في الدوح تردده
كم مد لطيفك من شرك * وتأذب لا يتصيده
فعساك بغمض مسعفه * ولعل خيالك مسعده
الحسن حلفت بيوسفه * والسورة إنك مفرده
قد ود جمالك أو قبساً * حوراء الخلد وأمرده
* يدها لو تبعث تشهده وتمنت كل مقطعة
بيني في الحب وبينك ما * لا يقدر واش يفسده
ويقول: تكاد تجن به * فأقول: وأوشك أعنده
مولاي وروحي في يده * قد ضيعها سلمت يده
ناقوس القلب يدق له * وحنايا الأضلع معبده
ما بال العاذل يفتح لي * باب السلوان وأوصده
ما خنت هواك ، ولا خطرت * سلوى بالقلب تبرده

Your worn-out lover was rejected by his bed,
His visitors wept over him and asked God to have mercy upon.

His heart, confused and tormented
His eyelids sleeplessly ulcerated.

He is at the point of death, in the last spark of life,
Which keeps him alive, while you waste it.

His moaning appeals to the pigeons,
His sighing melts the rocks.

He talks to the star, tiring it
Raising the night up and down.

He teaches every ringdove a pitiful melody,
That she would repeat on the lofty tree.

I swear by the beauty of Joseph, (the prophet,
And the holy verse, that you are beauty's single. *

Every woman who cut her hand witnessing his beauty,
Wished that she would be resurrected to witness yours.

Your beauty, or even a part of it,
was wished by heaven's good-looking people.

Between you and me, there is in love,
What a talebearer cannot spoil.

He says: you are almost mad about her,
And I say: I almost worship her.

Why does the censurer open,
The door of consolation, while I close it?

Never did I betray your love
Nor did a distraction occur to my heart to cool it down [5].

SHAWQI'S SELF-ESTEEM IN LOVE;

In the Al-Muqtataf magazine, the editor commented on part two of Shawqi's poetry collection, the: 'Only in courtship, Shawqi's spirit becomes less distinguishable, perhaps this is due to the fact that Shawqi never forgets his position and his situation' [13].

Thus, Shawqi was always ready to return the issue of love to himself, as he said:

أَتَغْلِبُنِي ذَاتُ الدَّلَالِ عَلَيَّ صَدْرِي
إِذْ أَنَا أَوْلَى بِالْقِنَاعِ وَبِالْخَدْرِ
تَنْبِيهُهُ وَلِي جِلْمٌ إِذَا مَا رَكِبْتُهُ
رَدَدْتُ بِهِ أَمْرَ الْغَرَامِ إِلَى أَمْرِي
وَمَا دَفَعِي اللَّوَامَ فِيهَا سَامَةً
وَلَكِنَّ نَفْسَ الْحُرِّ أَرْجَرُ لِلْحُرِّ

وَأَلِيلٍ كَأَنَّ الْحَسْرَةَ مَطَّلَعُ فَجْرِهِ
تُرَاعَتْ دُمُوعِي فِيهِ سَابِقَةَ الْفَجْرِ

Would the coquette overcome my patience?
Hence, I am the worthier to be veiled and covered.
She becomes haughty, while I have a tolerance, which when ridden,
I return the issue of love to my myself.

I did not push away the blamers because of boredom,
except that a free man's soul is more qualified to scold itself.

In a night as if its daybreak was to be on doomsday,
in which my tears appeared preceding the dawn.

Among Shawqi's practice to withhold his emotions, it may be noticed that his poetry did not appeal very much to those who were lovesick because Shawqi used to look at life from a royal balcony. As he said:

'I would never submit my safety to those eyes,
or permit my gravity to the love incident.'

He wrote in a poem on the Bosphorus gulf bridge of Istanbul:

لك أن تلوم، ولي من الأعدار ،،، أن الهوى قدرٌ من الأقدار
ما كنت أسلمُ للعيون سلامتي ،،، وأبيحُ حادثةَ الغرامِ وقاري
وطرٌّ تعلَّقَه الفؤادُ وينقضي ،،، والنفسُ ماضيةٌ مع الأوطار
يا قلبُ، شأنك، لا أمْدُك في الهوى ،،، أبداً ولا أدعوك للإفصار
أمري وأمرك في الهوى بيد الهوى ،،، لو أنه بيدي فككْتُ إساري
جار الشبيبة ، وانتفع بجوارها ،،، قبل المشيب، فما له من جار
مثل الحياة تحبُّ في عهد الصبا ،،، مثل الرياض تحبُّ في آذار
أبدأ فروقُ من البلاد هي المنى ،،، ومنايَ منها ظبيةٌ بسوار
ممنوعةٌ إلا الجمالَ بأسره ،،، محجوبةٌ إلا عن الأنظار
خطواتها التقوى ، فلا مزهوةٌ ،،، تمشي الدلال، ولا بذات نفار
مرّت بنا فوق الخليج، فأسفرتُ ،،، عن جنة ، وتلفتت عن نار
في نسوةٍ يوردن من شئن الهوى ،،، نظراً ، ولا ينظرن في الإصدار
عارضتهن ، وبين قلبي والهوى ،،، أمرٌ أحول كتمه وأداري

You may blame me, while I have my excuses,
Love is but part of destiny.

I would never submit my safety to those eyes,
or permit my gravity to the love incident.

A desire to which my heart is clung, then it is past,
since the soul follows its desires.

O my heart, it is your business, I will not supply you,
nor ask you to refrain from it.

Our love affair is in love's hand,
If it were in mine, I would have broken up my captivity.

Go along with youth and benefit from its neighborhood,
Before grayness, as it has no neighbors.

Life is loved in boyhood time,
as gardens are loved in March

From among the countries, Istanbul is always my aspiration,
and from it I aspire an antelope wearing a bracelet.

She is forbidden except from whole beauty,
Concealed, except from the eyes.

Her steps are piety, she is not arrogant,
she does she not walk in coquetry, nor repulsion.

She passed by us over the gulf, uncovering a paradise,
Then turned around like a fire

Among women who get to fall in love,
And care not about getting out of it.

I opposed them, while stuck between my heart and passion,
was an affair that I tried to mute and hide.

I liked in, particular, the wonderful paradox between paradise and fire, in the previously translated poem.

RATIONALITY IS A BETTER REPUTATION,

Shawqi shone in the field of love and affection in which he wrote many expressive poems. His flirting was rich with flowing emotions and glowing feelings far above indecency due to his conservative origin. The next poem was most probably written when Shawqi had grown older.

الرُّشْدُ أَجْمَلُ سِيرَةٍ يَا أَحْمَدُ
وَدُّ الْعَوَانِي مِنْ شَبَابِكَ أَبْعَدُ
قَدْ كَانَ فِيكَ لُؤْدَهِنَّ بَوِيَّةُ
وَالْيَوْمَ أَوْشَكْتَ الْبَوِيَّةُ تَنْفَدُ
هَارُوتُ شِعْرَكَ بَعْدَ مَارُوتِ الصِّبَا
أَعْيَا وَفَارَقَهُ الْخَلِيلُ الْمُسْعِدُ
لَمَّا سَمِعْتِكَ قُلْنَ شِعْرُ أَمْرَدُ
يَا لَيْتَ قَائِلُهُ الطَّرِيرُ الْمُسْعِدُ
مَا لِلْوَاهِي النَّاعِمَاتِ وَشَاعِرِ
جَعَلَ النَّسِيبَ جِبَالَهُ يَنْتَصِيدُ
وَلَكُمْ جَمَعَتْ قُلُوبَهُنَّ عَلَى الْهَوَى
وَخَدَعَتْ مَنْ قَطَعَتْ وَمَنْ تَتَوَدَّدُ
وَسَخَّرَتْ مِنْ وَاشٍ وَكَدَّتْ لِعَاذِلِ
وَالْيَوْمَ تَنْشُدُ مَنْ يَنْشِي وَيُقَدِّدُ

O Ahmad, rationality is a better reputation,
the beauty's cordiality is further to you than your youth is.

You used to have a remainder for their cordiality,
Yet today this remainder is almost depleted.

The magic of your poetry, besides the magic of your youth,
Fatigued and parted with their pleasurable comrade.

When they (the females) heard you, they said: What a youthful poetry
would that a young beardless youth had said it.

What have playful soft ladies got to do with a poet,
Who uses flirting poetry as a hunting trap?

So many times you gathered their hearts on love,
and deceived whoever cut off or showed affection.

you ridiculed the talebearer and tricked the censorer,
while today you seek a talebearer and a censorer

SHAWQI AND UM KULTHUM:

Once a singing soiree assembled Shawqi, the undisputed Prince of Poets, with Um Kulthum, the most famous Arab singer. Shawqi felt the ecstasy flooding into his soul, so he rose from his seat to salute Um Kulthum after she sang and then gave her a cup of wine. Um Kulthum acted diplomatically and tactfully when she lifted the cup to touch her lips without sipping even a drop because she did not drink wine. Shawqi was impressed by her behaviour. He left the crowd and sat by himself and wrote a delicate poem that he was keen to deliver by himself the following morning in a sealed envelope to where Um Kulthum lived.

Mohammed Sabri said in his book 'The Unknown Shawqiyat, Part II': "Shawqi estimated Um Kulthum because she was a literary intellectual who understands what she sings" ' [14].

Um Kulthum was pleased by the present, and she kept it for herself. In 1936, four years after Shawqi's passing, Um Kulthum decided to shake off the dust from this poem by presenting it to the great composer Riyad al-Sombati, who wrote her an immortal melody to her in an Arab song.

سلوا كؤوس الطلا هل لامست فاهها ، واستخبروا الراح هل مست ثناياها
حديثها السحر إلا أنه نغم ، جرت على فم داود فغناها
يا جارة الأيك أيام الهوى ذهبت ، كالحلم أها لأيام الهوى أها

Ask the drizzled cups if they touched her mouth,
And inquire the wine whether it pet her front teeth.
Her talk is magic yet it is a melody
Which rolled on David's mouth, and he sang it.
O neighbor of the bosket, days of love had gone
like a dream, ow to days of love

THE VALLEY'S NEIGHBOR:

On one of his visits to Lebanon, the poet Ahmad Shawqi returned to the city of Zahle, to which he had visited as a youth. Upon his visit, he wrote his famous poem, 'The Valley's Neighbor'. This famous poem by Shawqi is well-known as *Jarat Al-Wady* (The Valley's Neighbor) although Shawqi named it 'Time's Story'. It is one of Shawqi's masterpieces sung by singing giants, such as the musician Mohammad Abdel Wahab (1928) and the famous, soft-voiced Lebanese singer Fayrouz (1954) and is considered as one of the best love poems in modern time.

Under the Headline *The Prince of Poets in Zahle*, the editor of the Lebanese magazine Al-Ma'rad, wrote:

The town of Zahle enthusiastically gave a beautiful welcome to Lebanon's guest, the Prince of Poets Shawqi (Bey). The large Qadiri hotel was overcrowded with the guests who were invited to the honoring ceremony held by the local Ahli literary club. Shawqi Bey was conveyed to the hotel by the car of the club's president, the notable Najib Shamoun Effendi, among the applause of the welcoming people along the roadsides.

Shawqi was seated surrounded by pillars of the Lebanese government represented by the Prime Minister, the Parliament Speaker, and the Ministers of the Interior, Finance, and Justice in addition to some sheikhs, MPs, managers, and a great number of dignified summer vacationists and notables who were warmly welcomed by everyone. The Parliament Speaker elegantly welcomed the Prince of Poets, and then the poet Halim Effendi Damous delivered a touching speech. The creative Egyptian writer and the national MP, Fikri Bey Abatha, then stood up to read Shawqi's poem; thus, the ears were sharpened, and the necks stretched out to hear Shawqi's poem on Zahla during which time each line was interrupted by continuous approving applause. Khalil Bey Mutran, the poet of the two countries and the prince of rhetoric, then arose to welcome Shawqi and all Egyptians on behalf of Zahle or rather on behalf of Lebanon as a whole and mentioned in his charming statement some of the close ties linking the two brotherly countries making them one country [15].

Zaki Mubarak, Shawqi's intimate friend who wrote over forty books and held three Ph.D.'s in literature from Cairo, Paris, and Sorbonne Universities wrote:

'I have reviewed what Shawqi had said in courting and found out that the most fascinating of them were his intimate talk to his heart, fare-welling his youth, as his ropes were cut off in valleys of beauty and youth' [9,16].

Hereby is my own translation of Shawqi's marvelous poem, *Jarat Al-Wady* (Neighbor of the Valley), in which Shawqi said:

شَيَّعْتُ أَحْلَامِي بِقَلْبِ بَاكٍ
وَلَمَّمْتُ مِنْ طُرُقِ الْمِلَاحِ شِبَاكِي
وَرَجَعْتُ أَدْرَاجَ الشَّبَابِ وَوَرْدِهِ
أَمْشِي مَكَانَهُمَا عَلَى الْأَشْوَاكِ
وَبِجَانِبِي وَاهٍ كَأَنَّ خُفُوقَهُ
لَمَّا تَلَقَّتُ جَهَشَةَ الْمُنْبَاكِي
قَدْ رَاعَهُ أَنِّي طَوَيْتُ حَبَائِلِي
مِنْ بَعْدِ طَوْلِ تَنَاوُلِ وَفِكَاكِ
وَيَحِ ابْنَ جَنْبِي كُلَّ غَايَةِ لَذَّةٍ
بَعْدَ الشَّبَابِ عَزِيْرَةَ الْإِدْرَاكِ
لَمْ تُبْقِ مِنَّا يَا فُؤَادَ بَقِيَّةً
لِفُتُوَّةٍ أَوْ فَضْلَةٍ لِعِرَاكِ
كُنَّا إِذَا صَفَقْتَ نَسْتَبِقِي الْهَوَى
وَنَشُدُّ شِدَّةَ الْغُصْبَةِ الْفُتَاكِ
وَالْيَوْمَ تَبِعْتُ فِي حِينٍ تَهْرَنِي
مَا يَبِيعُ النَّاقُوسُ فِي النُّسَاكِ
يَا جَارَةَ الْوَادِي طَرِبْتُ وَعَاوَدَنِي
مَا يُشْبِهُ الْأَحْلَامَ مِنْ ذِكْرَاكِ
مَثَلْتُ فِي الذِّكْرِ هَوَاكَ وَفِي الْكُرَى
وَالذِّكْرِيَّاتِ صَدَى السِّنِينِ الْحَاكِي
وَلَقَدْ مَرَّرْتُ عَلَى الرِّيَاضِ بَرَبُوعَةً
غَنَاءَ كُنْتُ حِبَالَهَا أَلْفَاكِ
ضَحِكْتَ إِلَيَّ وَجُوهَهَا وَعَيْونَهَا
وَوَجَدْتُ فِي أَنْفَاسِهَا رِيَاكِ
فَدَهَبْتُ فِي الْأَيَّامِ أَذْكَرَ رَفْرَفًا
بَيْنَ الْجَدَاوِلِ وَالْعَيْونِ حَوَاكِ
أَذْكَرْتُ هَرَوْلَةَ الصَّبَابَةِ وَالْهَوَى
لَمَّا خَطَرْتُ بِقَبْلَانِ خُطَاكِ
لَمْ أَدْرِ مَا طَيْبُ الْعِنَاقِ عَلَى الْهَوَى
حَتَّى تَرَفَّقَ سَاعِدِي فُطُوكِ

وَتَأَوَّدْتُ أَعْطَافُ بَاتِكَ فِي يَدِي
وَإِحْمَرُّ مِنْ خَفْرِيهِمَا خَذَاكَ
وَدَخَلْتُ فِي لَيْلَيْنِ فَرَعِكَ وَالْدَجَى
وَلْتَمْتُ كَالصَّبْحِ الْمُنُورِ فَانِكَ
وَتَعَطَّلْتُ لُغَةَ الْكَلَامِ وَخَاطَبْتُ
عَيْنِي فِي لُغَةِ الْهَوَى عَيْنَاكَ
وَمَحَوْتُ كُلَّ بَيَانَةٍ مِنْ خَاطِرِي
وَنَسِيتُ كُلَّ تَعَائِبٍ وَتَشَاكِي
لَا أَمَسَ مِنْ عُمُرِ الزَّمَانِ وَلَا عَدَّ
جُمِعَ الزَّمَانُ فَكَانَ يَوْمَ رِضَاكَ

I buried my dreams with a weeping heart,
and collected my net, leaving the beauties' roads.

I turned back to the youth's runways and its flowers,
walking on thorns in their whereabouts.

Within my side was a weak fellow, whose beatings,
When it looked around, were the bursts into tears.

It scared him that I folded my traps,
After a lengthy tying and untying.

Woe to my side's son, the utmost of every pleasure,
After youth, is too dear to attain.

O my heart, no remainder was left of us,
For a chivalry, or a leftover for a fight.

When you applauded, we used to anticipate love,
And stretch tight like a devastating band.

Today, when you shake me, you trigger within me,
That which the bell triggers within the hermits.

O neighbor of the valley, I was enchanted and revisited,
By what looked like dreams upon your remembrance.

I recalled your love in memory and in sleep,
Since memories are the narrating echo of the years.

I have passed by the gardens upon a luxuriant hill,
nearby where I used to meet you.

Its faces and eyes smiled at me,
And I found your nice smell in its breaths.

I went through those days to remembering a flickering,
that embraced you between the streams and springs.

Did you remember our ardent love's trotting?
kissing your steps when you pranced?

I did not know what a good hug of passion is,
until my arm gently embraced you.

Your tender sides twisted within my hands,
and your cheeks blushed of shyness.

I entered two nights, its darkness and your hair
And kissed your mouth like the lightening morning

The language of speech disrupted, while my eyes,
Addressed your eyes in the language of love.

I erased every arousal out of my mind,
And forgot every admonition and complaint.

No yesterday exists in time, or tomorrow,
All time was collected to be the day of your gratification [5].

MAJNOUN LAILA (LAYLA'S MAD LOVER):

Majnoun Layla is the second poetic play that Shawqi presented to the audience after returning to writing for the theater during the last period of his life. It is the first of his plays that took its primary theme from Arab history. This play is a traditional and popular legend symbolizing the chaste virgin love for which some of the tribes of Najd and Hijaz in the Umayyad era were famous. Many myths abound about his love for Layla; thus, his real historical story was mixed with legends. Ahmad Shawqi wrote this play according to the story of Qays Al-Mullawah with his adored cousin Layla Al-Ameriya, yet he added some events. The play was mainly about virgin courtship and what people at his time and tradition consider of publicizing the beloved through love poems. Anyone who writes love poems about his beloved would never be allowed to marry her, and the end is always tragic as one died on the other one's grave.

'Majnoun Layla' is considered to be one of Shawqi's best plays and one of the best poetic plays in modern Arab literature in addition to its pioneering writing in the field of poetic theater literature.

The issue of expressing love appears to be problematic in Ahmad Shawqi's poetry. Stating this issue in the context of the his poetic play, 'Majnoun Layla' (Layla's Mad Lover), is essential when trying to identify the obstacles and barriers that made Shawqi look conservative or traditional when writing about love and women in general, and then how the play (Majnoun Layla) filled some of the gaps in his performance in regard to this subject and restored to his poetry a bit of emotional and artistic balance. It is also essential to note the nature of the social atmosphere and the sober personality within which Shawqi lived throughout his life and not overlook the status of the woman in Shawqi's era, the multiple aspects in which she appeared, and the fluctuation of cultural values around her. All of these factors caused the poet's anxiety and confusion when approaching this thorny subject [17].

Ahmad Shawqi's greatest dramatic work is without doubt his poetic play 'Majnoun Layla'. In the first scene Qays describes his love for Layla:

سَجَا اللَّيْلُ حَتَّى هَاجَ لِي الشَّعْرُ وَالْهَوَى
وَمَا الْبَيْدُ إِلَّا اللَّيْلُ وَالشَّعْرُ وَالْحُبُّ
مَلَأْتُ سَمَاءَ الْبَيْدِ عِشْقًا وَأَرْضَهَا
وَحَمَلْتُ وَحْدِي ذَلِكَ الْعِشْقَ يَا رَبُّ

أَلَمْ عَلَى أَنْبِيَاتِ لَيْلَى بَيْ هَوَى
وَمَا غَيْرَ أَشْوَاقِي دَلِيلٌ وَلَا كَسْبُ
وَبَاتَتْ خِيَامِي خُطْوَةً مِنْ خِيَامِهَا
فَلَمْ يَشْفِنِي مِنْهَا جُورٌ وَلَا قُرْبُ
إِذَا طَافَ قَلْبِي حَوْلَهَا جُنَّ شَوْفُهُ
كَذَلِكَ يَطْغَى الْعَلَّةُ الْمَنْهَلُ الْعَذْبُ

Notice that the following is Arbery's translation of the previous lines:

How still the night! It stirs within me yearning
And poetry. The desert is all night,
And love, and poetry.
God, thou hast filled
The heaven and earth with passion in this desert,
And I alone am laden with that passion.
Yearning has seized me for the tents of Layla ;
I have no guide, no convoy but my passion.
At night my tent was pitched but a step from hers,
Yet all that neighbouring wrought no cure in me.
When my heart goes about her, all its passion
Suddenly swells like an upleaping stream [18].

While the following is my own translation of the same lines:

Night became tranquil till poetry and passion agitated within me,
And what are the deserts, except night, poetry and love.
I filled its sky and land with passionate love
And alone, O Lord, carried that passion.
Love befell upon me at Layla's dwellings,
while I have no guide or choice except my longings.
My tents have become apart steps from hers,
yet this neighborhood and nearness did not heal me.
When my heart passes around her, its longing is covered,
As like the fresh fountain masters defeats the burning thirst.
I felt as if Shawq's poem is more beautiful than Qay's poem himself.

In a profound and extensive thematic study entitled 'Romantic Shawqi' written by Ahmad Abdel Mu'ty Hejazi and published in a special issue about Shawqi in the magazine, *Al-Hilal*, published in 1968, Hijazi explores the effects of romanticism on Shawqi and finds it in some of his poetic plays, especially the poem 'Mount Al-Towbad' written by Shawqi on the tongue of Qays in his play 'Majnoun Layla' in which he says [19]:

جبل التوباد حياك الحيا * وسقى الله صبانا ورعى
فيك ناغينا الهوى فى مهده * ورضعناه، فكنت المرضعا
وحدونا الشمس فى مغربها * وبكرنا فسبقنا المطلعا
وعلى سفحك عشنا زمنا * ورعينا غنم الأهل معا
هذه الربوه كانت ملعبا * لشبابينا وكانت مرتعا
كم بنينا من حصاها أربعا * وانثنينا فمحونا الأربعا
وخططنا فى نقا الرمل، فلم * تحفظ الريح، ولا الرمل وعى
لم تزل ليلي بعيني طفلة * لم تزد عن الامس إلا أصبعا
ما لأحجارك صمأ، كلما * هاج بي الشوق أبت أن تسمعا
كلما جئتك راجعت الصبا * فأبت أيامه أن ترجعا
قد يهون العمر إلا ساعة * وتهون الأرض إلا موضعا

Mount Al-Towbad, may you be greeted by rains,
May God water and guard our youth.

On you, we talked tenderly to love in its cradle,
And suckled it, while you were the suckling mother.

We walked beside the sun by singing in its sunset,
Then early preceded the sunrise.

At your foot we lived an age,
And shepherded our parents' sheep together.

This hill was a playground,
And a pasture for our youth.

How many a times we built four of its stones,
Then we bent and erased the four of them.

We drew in the pure sand, yet the wind,
Did not keep it, nor did the sand hold it.

Layla, in my eyes, is still a little girl,
She did not grow, from yesterday, but a finger.

Why are your stones deaf whenever,
my longings agitate, they wouldn't listen to me?

Whenever I came to you, I turned back to my boyhood,
Yet its days refused to return.

The whole life may become worthless, except one hour,
And the whole earth may become valueless, except one place.

Hijazi reviewed this poem and regarded it, similar to other poems, among the best of what Shawqi had ever written. He added that it reflected the romantic spirit of Shawqi, noting the gentle soul-stirring melody that was woven throughout the poem starting from its first line until its ingenious end. He finally remarked that this poem did not reflect the spirit of Qays as described in the books, yet rather discloses the spirit of a pondering old man; Shawqi, who shaken by love, was delighted by old memories that flowed from his shy tongue.

To conclude my research, I could not find words more expressive than these by which Arthur John Arberry (1905–1969) concluded his research entitled *Hafiz Ibrahim and Shawqi*:

'Shawqi died in the summer of 1932 at the height of his great poetic gifts. The fertility of his genius during the last few years of his life was truly amazing, and it is a melancholy reflection that his best may have remained unwritten. So great a genius, however, is never lost to literature, and the repercussions of his truly original mind and well-nigh inexhaustible energy will continue to be felt for many years to come' [20].

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