

Invective Poetry

Physical Images

Invective poetry is often organised round static physical images of the *mahju*. Although very much the minority, some images are actually realistic in approach:

A stench comes from your mouth,
you're old and have lost your hair.⁷⁵ *Tayyân*

In general, however, we find caricatured descriptions that tend to mock faults or defects:

You are a paralytic frog, a wilted lettuce leaf,
yet you would like to soar up like a swallow.⁷⁶ *Labibi*

Such chastened restraint in this kind of composition is the exception rather than the rule. Realistic pictures and caricatures are often characterised by outrageous and obscene elements, such as scandalous descriptions of a scatological or sexual nature, thus amplifying the offensive effect:

You have a dried-up arse, you are decrepit and gangling,
you are like a ripped-up sack completely covered in shit.⁷⁷ *Monjik*

Hey you, that yellow face on your scraggy neck
is a lank thing stuck onto another lank thing.

When your mother held you in her belly,
she kept crashing to the ground from pain:

nine months of terrible pain on your account, but it was all in vain,
since she didn't push you out of her cunt but spat you from her arse.⁷⁸
Sanâ'i

The tendency to outrageous caricature is what distinguishes most of the physical descriptions in the invective texts. The focus is on the sexually significant parts of the male body, frequently at the centre of comic comparisons:

How can I describe your arse? Come on tell me, O you
who are better than Bayâni and Bu 'l-Horr at writing poetry!⁷⁹

And although it is difficult even for someone like you,
you might think of a bloated camel yawning in Spring.⁸⁰ *Labibi*

Your balls have become like a mortar,
they are coloured like a pan's underbelly.⁸¹ *Tayyân*

The role of the genitalia dominates this kind of poetry to such an extent that grotesque descriptions of them, in the second half of the comparison, may irreverently cast light on serious and even symbolic elements associated with the *mahju*, as in the following line:

That red turban he wears on his head
is like a nasty wart on the tip of a cock.⁸² *Morâdi*

A minor role is given to other parts of the body, usually described in more restrained language, as in the next two poems, in which we find direct references to the degradation of hygienic standards (we will describe them in more detail below):

You're like a dirty toad and, just like a toad,
your eyes bulge as if you were being strangled.

How much longer will you continue to hang round me?
You are filthier and more contemptible than a toad!⁸³ *Labibi*

Look at the thousand signs of impurity that are on Mo'in,
the poor wretch is so unlucky, with his pox-blistered face.

His ugly face is also filthy: it's like a skimmer
in Nimrod's kitchen, but used only for ashes.⁸⁴ *Âgahi*

The beard is of special interest. In general, its symbolic value is degraded through various forms of caricature. There are few descriptions that could be defined as respectable:

His beard is much longer by far than his stature,
a hundred grim spiders have made their webs in it.⁸⁵ *Ma'rufi*

The beard is often linked with obscene elements and contexts. It may, for example, be associated with the hairs on the male pubes:

Your face can't be seen under that puny beard,
just as a pansy's cock is lost in his pubic hair.⁸⁶ *Monjik*

The beard is also mentioned with the female organ, and the situation is even more outrageous if the organ in question belongs to an animal, as in these lines in which the degradation of the grotesquely described beard is part of a larger joke:

The beard round the mouth of our malevolent guide
is a web that has been woven on the cunt of a cow.

His bald head with those few straggly hairs
looks like a dried-out gourd with fly shit on it.

At birth, they severed his head instead of his umbilical cord,
now they should cut that cord by bursting up through his arse.⁸⁷

Anvari

The posterior, with its unpleasant hairiness and embarrassing flatus, may also be worked into a startling play with the beard:

A single hair taken from a poor wretch's arse
is more precious than a ton of hairs in his beard:

if a horse blanket were woven from that beard,
a yard of its cloth would not be worth a single fart.⁸⁸

Khâju

The image of the beard is also used as the main reference in violating the taboo of uncleanness, both as regards excrement and by combining excrement with other bodily fluids:

That beard is like a brush well hardened with starch,
you would think shit had been rubbed on it all night.⁸⁹ *‘Ammâre*

That face and beard soaked in shit, phlegm and slaver
remind me of dung beetles squashed under one’s feet.⁹⁰ *Labibi*

Excrement and bodily fluids are often part of the violation of hygienic mores. Together with the caricaturing of the human body (with which it is often inextricably linked), this violation is another topos characterising physical descriptions in invective poetry. There are many specific references to bodily fluids, such as eye rheum:

That filthy eye is so heavily clogged with rheum,
you would think two owls have nested there.⁹¹ *‘Ammâre*

or nasal mucus:

Your nose is exactly like a Kurdish house,
always stuffed with curd and sour milk.⁹² *‘Ammâre*

There are also descriptions combining more than one of these fluids:

He has two streams of snot constantly running down
into his mouth, and two crops of rheum in his eyes.⁹³ *Shahid*

Anyone seeing you will immediately begin to retch
at the snot and slaver dribbling on your face and chest.⁹⁴ *Shahid*

But in terms of anti-hygiene, excrement and the related context play a leading role:

Those who called you ‘turf face’ were quite right,
that name is no exaggeration for a bastard like you.

You should know, however, that, of all the turf in the world,
your face reminds us of that where an arse has been wiped.⁹⁵ *Monjik*

Obviously the stench of excrement is also mentioned, being the archetypal example of the worst of smells, as in these lines in which sexual insult and the scatological aspect are strictly linked:

The stench coming from your mouth is so powerful,
in that gruesome body, that when my cock fucks you,
making a huge shit drop out, one never knows
whether it'll be from your arse or your mouth.⁹⁶

Qomri

In addition to these typical miasmas, there are other equally noxious effluvia associated with the sexually significant parts of the body:

Your mouth infects the wine and the cup,
you stink like a cesspool from head to foot.
You may well have an arse of high-quality camphor,
but your cock is like an ape's rank-smelling carcass.⁹⁷

Qomri

Some mention is also made of odours coming from other zones of the body:

Not even if you decided to sew a musk pouch⁹⁸
to your armpit would that stench in there diminish.⁹⁹

'Ammâre

Actions Involving the Victims of Satire

In various cases, rather than emphasising static physical imagery, the poet describes actions undertaken by the *mahju*, or actions to his detriment. These more narrative contexts encourage, within the context of invective poetry, features we described as satirical, confirming the inextricable links between our genres. Deeds attributed to the *mahju* are repeatedly associated with uncleanness:

He's a filthy wretch, dirtying the whole city,
a cow fouling other cows with her dung.¹⁰⁰

Rudaki

That dog and bigot gives me the services
I usually receive from my snots and slavers.¹⁰¹

'Asjadi

The *mahju*'s actions also reveal his sexual depravity. There are many references to 'passive' attitudes:

My lord hankers after cocks so much
that his table is only laid with sausages.¹⁰²

Ma'rufi

True lords bestow their goods on pilgrims and beggars,
your money goes to the cobbler to make you a leather cock.¹⁰³

Abu 'Âsem

There is also no lack of 'active' vices:

Rabid, he sank his teeth into his sister's cunt,
like a dervish pulling up his threadbare cloak.¹⁰⁴

Labibi

O my king, if you wish to know absolutely everything
about this Bu 'l-Hakam, remember he fucks jackasses.

And when he's at home, and finds nothing else,
I'm convinced he also fucks walls and doors.

Don't call that impudent oaf by the name of son,
he even fucks his wretched ninety-year-old father.¹⁰⁵

Asir od-Din-e Akhsikati

In most cases the addressees are males, but at times reference to females is also explicit:

O you who shaved each last hair grown on your cunt,¹⁰⁶
and, wearing your veil, gave it away with fake moans,

throw your cunt to the dogs! This poet's cock
is really horrified by depraved women's cunts.¹⁰⁷

Kesâ'i

There are also examples of sexual aberrations of both males and females being mentioned together. In the following example, the affront is extended to a whole family:

For a very long time during his youth, that pansy Najib
blithely gave his arse as his six sons have done after him.

Now that he is an old man in a different state,
he has opened a shop selling household cunts.¹⁰⁸

Shatranji

Even marital love provides interesting material for degrading and offensive interpretations:

That son shat out by Mo'jezi's wife
is a miracle worked by Mo'jezi himself:

spineless, dirty and lecherous,
really a dull, stuttering beanpole.

Mo'jezi has a genius for everything,
thanks to his quite extraordinary skills.

Otherwise whoever would know how
to stick a donkey's cock up a cow's cunt?¹⁰⁹

Sanâ'i

Even in those cases when the actions attributed to the *mahju* do not violate taboos concerning hygiene or sex, his honour is still sullied:

When he raises his voice, he's like a bawling camel,
he eats only roots and leeks, and does nothing but burp.¹¹⁰

Labibi

At times poets find ways of sullyng the honour of the *mahju* even when he has positive traits, which are mentioned in these contexts not so much to give rise to effective praise as to create a humorous and ironical sketch:

You are crabbed and sourly but that phrase of yours is wonderful,
you have certainly given us a phrase that is worthy of great praise.

A precious saying came out of your mouth:
a pearl dropped from a donkey's arsehole.¹¹¹

Homâm

Actions perpetrated to the detriment of the *mahju* may be classified in a similar way. At times they violate hygienic norms, as in these lines which also deal with the topos of insults concerning the beard:

O Kamâl-e Sab'i, if I made *hajv* on you,
I would end up injuring my own tongue.

If I said you were as ugly as a bear,
I would give offence to the poor bear.

And if I expressed the wish that your beard rest
on my arse, it would be a terrible fate for my arse.

All that I can do is shit on your beard,
but only after taking a strong purgative.¹¹² *Anvari*

On other occasions the insults and aggression are aimed at the sexual sphere of the victim:

That unhappy donkey should not be reproached,
if the further I put it up him the more he kicks out:

I know very well what part of his body is ticklish,
when I touch him down there, he bursts out laughing.¹¹³ *Labibi*

At times the themes of violation of hygienic norms and sexual depravity occur together, with the beard and pubes always playing leading roles:

When I went to Guzgânân I found there¹¹⁴
a bearded prince and a catamite minister.

I also saw two things that were wasted atop of another two things:
a fart on the beard of the first and a cock in the arse of the second.¹¹⁵
Sanâ'i

Imprecatory Poetry

As far as imprecatory poetry is concerned, the ill-wishing and cursing are also associated with violations of the taboos concerning hygiene and sex:

May I always see you hanging with your head down like a cock,
may I always see you with your mouth full of shit like an arse,
may I always see you outside every entrance like a pair of balls,
may I always see you drowning in blood like a menstruating cunt.¹¹⁶
'Obeyd

Maledictions concerning relatives of the victim are particularly common and usually have sexual implications:

O lord, how cold and cruel you are! May what has the length
and thickness of a massive rope be stuck up your son's arse!¹¹⁷ 'Abbâsi¹¹⁸

I won't make *hejâ* on your mother,
because your mother is too virtuous:

a cock up to the balls and a foot up to the knee
deep inside the cunt of your brother's mother!¹¹⁹ Adib Sâber

This use of paraphrasing to insult and curse the mother of the *mahju* is no isolated example. Here is another case, preceded by a malediction against the *mahju*, again concerning the uncleanliness of his beard:

Hey Se Buses, I will make *hejâ* on you,
and it will be nice, I swear it on your head:
may your beard be in the cunt of a menstruating woman,
and a donkey's cock in the cunt of your father's wife!¹²⁰ Sanâ'i

The beard is also the key element in a more moderate kind of malediction, in which the unusual *mahju* is the beloved:

Take a look at his beauty and his charms,
his deceits, his tricks, his bullying of lovers,
and then his arrogant bragging: 'I do not have any beard!'
O Lord, strike him on the neck with that sword: the beard!¹²¹ Mahsati

Composite Poetry

Mainly because of its brevity, the invective and imprecatory poetry presented so far usually contains and illustrates straightforward subjects and is generally focused on a single theme. In longer poems, the motifs (physical images, actions, etc.) are more numerous and may also appear intertwined and mixed, giving rise to a composite picture. We find various levels of thematic complexity, with a potential, consequent increase in the satirical features.

At times there are only a few well-defined subjects, as in this *qet'e* in which the figurative description of the sexual abuses perpetrated on the *mahju* is accompanied by a final curse on him:

O you catamite Kamâl, to let my cock up into you,
your arse has become as wide as my palace courtyard.

The dance at our sovereign's feast grew more lively,
the more my flute blew and puffed up your bagpipe.

Frequently the cock that sits between my legs
slipped into that eye you have in your rear.

And how often I tied my balls to your neck,
like bells that are hung to embellish a camel!

You told me not to dishonour you with my *hejâ*:
may my *hejâ* moisten the arse of your honour!¹²²

Qomri

The following three compositions are based on a model similar to the previous poem, with a few variations. In the first example there is again a description of sexual abuses perpetrated on the *mahju*, but this time the final curse is extended to the wife:

O 'Ârefak, they stuck a wick in your arse: that's why your title is 'Lantern'!¹²³
And every night, until my death, I will pour all my yogurt into you like oil.

Here I deal with cocks: keep your wife away from me,
so that you won't be covered by the dirt of offence!

I had promised not to say it, but now I will: a donkey's cock!
How far up? To the balls! Where? In your wife's arse and cunt!¹²⁴

Shamsi 'l-A'raj

In the next case, the ill-wishing is at the beginning and this time is not sexual in nature, while the perversion concerns the *mahju*'s wife:

Sit down and listen to these three lines of *hajv* from me,
you'll be so angry your eyes will bulge from their sockets.

What you have often seen first-hand in your own wife,
has never been told in the world, not even of Shalfiyye.¹²⁵

It would seem she has no rivals,
in truth, that's the way it really is:

in being a great cuckold and husband of a whore,
you will only see your equal if you look in a mirror.¹²⁶

Nezâmi-ye 'Aruzi

In the third example the illicit sexual practices of both the *mahju* and his wife are described with a final curse on both:

Your wife, O Falak, is a great cock-eater,
she's a whore and bastard just like you!

A mule has never given birth: how come
your wife lusts so much after a donkey's cock?

Your arse is wrecked and you're a living offence to all donkeys,¹²⁷
how can it be that your wife's cunt and arse are so wrecked?

I have unstitched the buttonhole of her cunt so much,
that you'll never be able to sew it up with your needle.

I am not Suzani but, with my poems,¹²⁸
I can make cocks rain on your hole.

Just like you, may your wife be down
on all fours like a dog at every crossroad!¹²⁹

Qamar

The thematic structure can also be more complicated than the cases presented so far. In the next poem, for instance, the details of the *mahju*'s depravity, with the usual final curse, are heightened by a physical and moral caricature:

You really are a midget, you're so minute
that people think you're a weird chubby doll.

You get smaller by the second: how strange,
perhaps God makes you sink into the earth?

If they shaved off your beard and moustache,
you would easily be taken for a little baby.

You only offer bread to someone who gives you
his cock: you enjoy his cock and he your bread.

Let the teeth be sharp by day and the cock strong by night,
of him who eats all your bread and then bursts your arse.

You are such a cold scoundrel that if you shed a single tear
in the Tigris, the river would freeze even in mid-Summer.¹³⁰ *Lâme'î*

The next two compositions are even more elaborate. In the first, not only are the taboos of uncleanness and nudity violated but degrading physical defects, slanderous moral features and the *mahju's* sexual perversions are also highlighted:

You stink much worse than ten-day-old stew in Summer,
and you're blinder than a corpse after a year in the tomb.

That bun on your tablecloth resembles a child's shit,
the soup in your bowl looks like a drunk's vomit.

Only when it's not time to eat you promise your food,
your table has no bread, just like the beggar's board.

Your arse is like a bitch's cunt: when a cock gets up it,
a thousand tricks and efforts are required to pull it out.

Nonetheless, night and day you lust for a cock,
just like a suckling baby is always craving the tit.¹³¹ *Lâme'î*

In the following composition, thanks to its greater length, the list of themes is further extended. We find offensive descriptions of physical features (both realistic and caricatured), moral condemnation, sexual outrage, violations of the taboo of uncleanness, insults to relatives, curses and a finale which, alluding to the corresponding models in serious poetry, gives a certain burlesque feel to the whole poem:

Hey Oghol, you have a stinking beard and fetid armpits,
that mouth of yours chews dog shit all through the night.

Everybody else usually shits from their arse, but you
shit from your mouth, your arse and your armpits.

Before the sovereign, you are like the devil with Adam,
at banquets you are like a pagan idol in the Kaaba.

Thinking of you is thinking of death,
you are a paragon of the worst luck.

You are corpulent, disgusting and foul like poverty and penury,
lowly-bred and evil-natured, you're as despicable as mock gold.

In Ghur a crowd of people like you are worth a few handfuls of flour,
and in India a herd of people like you can be bought for half a seed.¹³²

For sure you are a great man! The dowry of your mother
was a thousand one-eyed cats and blotchy-legged dogs.

If you lined up the swarms of lice under your trouser belt,
all the moths in the world would not rival their ranks.

I pray you get paralysed, you bald trollop and husband of a whore!
Because of you, my joy's head is bald and my pleasure's hand is numbed.

Your mouth resembles a head, your head a beard and your beard an arse,
your heart is like hell and those two cheeks of yours are like hairy velvet.

It could be said that God, be He honoured and glorified,
created you from precious essences and delicate elements:

from the earth of suffering, the water of poverty, the fire of pain,
from a great shit, the roots of cock hairs, the stench of armpits.

Every night you drag your wife under the Antichrist's donkey,¹³³
so that he floods her with his sperm and drowns her in mud.

Hey two-legged dog, you are like the sun, which moves
from East to West, at times in Pisces, at times in Aries.

Not every baldy is a pansy like you,
many pansies at least are not bald.

Your wife is just like your mother: two great whores!
Your father is just like you: both with stinking armpits!

The hooks of a saddlebag, a donkey's cock and a camel's leg
would be lost in a corner of the crack in your mother's cunt.

You are like a drawing that death shaped on the features of misfortune
and was traced in shit by the devil on the face of ill-omened Saturn.

That beard of yours makes you look like a drowned bear,
the tip of your moustache looks like a bent thorn on a hilltop.

Your lips and teeth are really wretched:
pottery shards stuck into a dung-heap.

You are a bastard with a hunch on your back, you're grim like misbelief,
you have the strength of an ant, and resemble a snake or ill-omened Saturn.

You receive your daily bread by your arse and your wife's cunt,
I get gifts from the king for my poetry, be it serious, witty or amatory.

You're the colour of rotten roots and stink like an onion,
you're like bile in the body and like a spike in the eye.

Know that man reaches maturity thanks to distance:
journeying raises man from wretchedness to nobility.

People living far from home are even more worthy than martyrs,
thus spoke the Light of the Holy Law, our prophet Muhammad.

Journeying brings grace, happiness and honour,
journeying brings perfection, greatness and dignity.

If I had never felt the distance and separation from the homeland,
when would I have had the honour of serving the Pillar of Fortune?¹³⁴

ʿAmʿaq