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Islamicate Sexualities

*Translations across Temporal
Geographies of Desire*

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Preface

Kathryn Babayan and Afsaneh Najmabadi¹

DISCIPLINARY DESIRES

This anthology emerges from a seminar sponsored by the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study in May 2003. We organized the seminar under the title of “Crossing Paths of Middle Eastern and Sexuality Studies: Challenges of Theory, History, and Comparative Methods.” The metaphor of travel across two fields reflected our unsatisfied and perhaps unattainable desire to counter the insularity of Middle Eastern Studies by “queering” Islamic historiography. To explore different genealogies of sexuality, we began to question some of the theoretical emphases and epistemic assumptions affecting our knowledge of the history of sexuality. The methods of queering and traveling were not wholly satisfying for reducing this traditional insularity (for reasons explained in the anthology), but we remain confident that the initiatory dialogues across cultural deployments of sexuality inscribed in the following pages are an important contribution to the broadening of gender and sexualities studies.

To make that crossing of paths possible, we invited discussants (Dina Al-Kassim, Brad Epps, Carla Petievich, and Valerie Traub) from outside Middle Eastern studies and within the fields of comparative literary studies and queer theory. We formulated our invitation as a gesture to complicate the Foucauldian model that too often is translated into a binary that juxtaposes a West-

for that), but she does present Cervantes and the *Quixote* as if messages of nondogmatic noncertainty were certain and as if those messages and lessons could *not* be used for less ethically laudable ends—say, the symbolic self-fashioning of Spain as an *exceptionally* pluralistic country that is perfectly suited to a mode of hegemony in which culturalism masks commercialism and in which racial, ethnic, and sexual differences are recast as so many signs that sell.

52. Barbara Fuchs, *Passing for Spain: Cervantes and the Fictions of Identity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).
53. I use the quotation marks to indicate that the marriage is not here openly sanctified and indeed must remain shielded in secrecy.
54. Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992).
55. *Ibid.*, 11.
56. *Thousand Nights and One Night*, 13.
57. *Ibid.*, 57.
58. *Ibid.*, 60.
59. *Ibid.*, 61, 64, 63.
60. *Ibid.*, 62.
61. *Ibid.*
62. *Ibid.*, 64.
63. *Ibid.*, 64, 65.
64. *Ibid.*
65. Sherry Velasco, *The Lieutenant Nun: Transgenderism, Lesbian Desire and Catalina de Erauso* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 6.

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*The Obscenity of the Vizier*¹

Frédéric Lagrange

No, in the end all I could conclude was that the fault lay with categorization itself, that crude and elementary tool the inadequacy of which becomes more evident the deeper one probes. For homosexuality is a discipline the advanced study of which necessitates, as it were, its own transcendence, which is why all its serious students finally dispense with terminology altogether, and focus their attentions solely on the particulars of human lives.

—David Leavitt, Martin Bauman²

SITUATING THE INSULT

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, advocating the construction of queer significations, has it that “sexual desire is a powerful and unpredictable solvent of stable identities.”³ What if certain modes of speech, such as the insult, also revealed the limitations of our feeble taxonomies? What if, in those premodern and non-Western cultures in which the irrelevance of the concept of homosexuality is now universally agreed on, insult could *fortuitously* construct an identity for which those cultures had no formal terminology—an identity that would imply preference of gender over role and that would associate attitudes or appearances that are usually situated on different sides of constructed gender roles, such as effeminacy and the dominant role in male-male sexuality?

This chapter explores the following hypothesis: could insult,

as a mode of speech, reveal conceptions about same-gender sexuality that are left unexplored or unthought of in other types of discourse? My interest in this topic developed as I started translating, from Arabic into French, a tenth-century libel written by one of the most prominent prose writers in medieval Islamic culture, Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi (d. circa 1010). In this text, a historical character, the vizier Ibn 'Abbad, is described in terms that constitute a portrait of what a contemporary academic would call a paradigmatic homosexual. This was a surprise because although medieval Arabic literature frequently includes homoerotic narratives and mentions of homosexual intercourse, this literature does not conceive of homosexuality and homosexual characters in the modern sense of the term. Instead, the contemporary Western reader who has never perhaps questioned his holistic conception of homosexuality finds it "sliced up" into a multitude of role specializations, since medieval authors usually sees no "community of desire" between, for instance, the active and the passive partners of homosexual intercourse.

Much recently published research in Arabic literature has been undertaken from a "gender studies" or "gay and lesbian studies" angle⁴ and analyzes poetry or literary prose (*adab*) to explore issues of social acceptability (as opposed to religious proscription) in classic and premodern Arab Islamic culture and questions of sexual and emotional relations between persons of the same sex. These studies show that the *majin* (the rake) who functions as a "ritual clown" (to use the expression coined by A. Hamori)⁵—whether as an *adib* (a cultivated upper-class man) or a poet or as a producer or an object of this discourse—is a figure tolerated within the limits of the "space of transgression" assumed within Arab Islamic culture, from the Abbasid period until the dawn of the colonial era. The studies even demonstrate that chaste homoeroticism does not constitute a transgression *per se*. A number of texts of *adab* (high literature) legitimize the *reference* to an attraction for the same sex at the emotional, spiritual, or physical level through the various but distinct figures of

the *mukhannath* (effeminate, sometimes transvestite male), the *luti* (active sodomite), the *ma'bun* or *halaqi*⁶ (passive sodomite), the *mu'ajar* (male prostitute playing the passive role), and the *amrad* (young beardless page courted by the *luti* or simply an admirer of beauty). However, if mere attraction goes uncondemned, sexual lust cannot be formally legitimized, at least outside *hazl* (banter), which establishes itself as a parody of the normative discourse of the *jidd* (serious).⁷

Within the highly ritualized framework of the *mujun* (libertine discourse), medieval texts sometimes flaunt a disrespect for sacred law. The right to transgress the natural order and the divine order is here asserted when the discourse, whether direct or reported speech, is that of a *majin* (libertine). In general, this transgression is narrated or collected with neutrality—or at the worst with an affected frown. For form's sake, the authors of anecdotic compilations express feigned outrage, this being essentially a way of expressing within their discourse illicit lust under the pretext of condemning it. The underlying principle is that a denunciation always remains an enunciation. One could then speak of a mode of transgression that could be termed "paralytic."⁸ Given the ritual nature of this transgression, it is not entirely possible to determine whether this literary acceptability of same-sex attraction refers to a true social acceptability (about which the limits remain to be defined) or whether it refers to simple poetic posturing or even provocation.⁹ I would argue that *adab* prose literature and the poetry it contains is certainly not a reflection of that society but that it allows for the perception of concepts that the Arab Islamic elite formed about human complexity:

The *adab*, by the very nature of its normative function and its search for uniqueness, and poetry, by its extreme codification, can, I believe, shed light on the practices and occurrences of a society or mentality such as have been perceived and represented by a specific social group, that called the *Khassa* by the sources—i.e., the milieu of the production and reception of this literature.¹⁰

The discourse expressing tolerance of transgression has on the whole been studied in greater depth by Arabists than scholars whose mother tongue is Arabic. This is due to obvious though perhaps subconscious ideological reasons: the “rehabilitation” of the damned figure of the homosexual in (former) Arab Islamic societies can be achieved only through the creation of an anthology of its recurring presence in love poetry and in the sexology of the Arabs.¹¹ Such an apparent appraisal, in pre-modern texts of anecdotal form, constitutes a “cultural legitimization through which homosexuality might have a right of entry to the order of discourse” (*légitimation culturelle à travers laquelle l’homosexualité pou[rrait] accéder à l’ordre du discours*).¹² In a move similar to the search by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century authors for a legitimization of homosexual desire in Spartan, Doric, or Athenian models (in the no doubt mythic foundations of Western culture),¹³ scholars studying classical Arabic literature in Western universities react to the moralist tensions in modern Arab societies (and especially of their governments) by bringing up past permissiveness, long gone and presently out of reach. The vast majority of research on same-gender sexual practice in Arab Muslim societies is conducted and published outside the Arab world, regardless of the authors’ origins, and it is rarely written in the Arabic language. In this respect, Ibrahim Mahmud’s recent work *Al-Mut’a al-Mahzura* (The pleasure of the forbidden), despite its methodological limits, constitutes an exception as the author abstains from making any moral judgments.¹⁴

But if the image of “homoerotic” relationships seems to be (at least partially) a legitimate representation in the literature of the Abbasid, Ayyubid, and Mamluk periods, it would perhaps be wrong to limit our knowledge of the place of same-sex attraction in classical society¹⁵ to simply positive or pseudo-pejorative descriptions. Outside religious discourse (a discourse of condemnation that should not be too rigorously distinguished from that of the *adab*, which itself aims at the establishment of behavioral norms through a reversal in parody’s discourse) and the

law, there is another negative discourse that is concerned with the attraction and relations between partners of the same sex. This other discourse is to be found in prose as well as in poetry. It is the discourse of satire, insult, libel, and epigram, in which sexuality plays a central role, particularly beginning with the Abbasid period.

The present chapter examines a particular example of this satiric discourse—the strategy of discredit adopted by the tenth-century writer Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi in his famous libelous satire targeting the Buyid viziers al-Sahib b. ‘Abbad (938–995) and Abu al-Fadl b. al-‘Amid (d. 970)—the *Kitab Akhlaq al-Wazirayn* (The blame of the two viziers).¹⁶ I show how Tawhidi constructs his argument against one of his two targets, Ibn ‘Abbad, by encircling him with anecdotes that evoke *khinath* (effeminateness), *ubna* (passive sodomy), and *liwat* (active sodomy)—first concerning other characters and in a second sequence directly attacking him.

However, the interest in insult is not limited to establishing the obvious—the existence at the heart of *adab* of a pejorative discourse that disavows homoeroticism and counterbalances the fragile legitimization of sexual transgression in the *hazl* (jest) discourse or the tolerance of chaste homoeroticism in poetry. In the course of this study, I suggest that the problem of the insult indirectly questions the pertinence or inappropriateness of the modern concept of homosexuality for the study of a premodern society. The classic debate within the field of gender studies between constructionist or essentialist approaches is once again relevant. Does classic Arab Islamic culture consider only sexual acts, no matter what the propensity of the subject for the sex of his or her partner, and does it socially condemn only the man who takes on a role of voluntary sexual submission (passive penetration), as is in fact the case in a large number of premodern cultures?¹⁷ Or rather does there exist within the interstices of discourse, beyond this division between roles, a link between *ubna* (passive sodomy) and *liwat* (active sodomy) that would place these two practices on the same side of a divide?

Are effeminateness and passivity the only attitudes or acts that are condemned by satire, or might one detect within this discourse the first crystallization of a line of demarcation between the partners' sex (in opposition to the distinction between roles)?

Al-Tawhidi's tenth-century text invites us to explore the importance of the insult in the construction of heteronormalization. The insult, in its colloquial usage, stigmatizes the passive partner by its very vocabulary. Insult seems to be, in our contemporary cultures, a vestige of older definitions of sexual normalcy.¹⁸ But the question that should then be asked is how new norms of normalcy could be so quickly adopted. Could they have been in gestation? These observations lead to an investigation into the role of the insult in the "preconstruction" of a homosexual "character" (to avoid mentioning identity), following earlier work by Didier Eribon.¹⁹

IBN 'ABBAD: VIZIER OR DEGENERATE?

A SETTling OF SCORES

The *Kitab Akhlaq al-Wazirayn* is presented by Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi as a work commissioned by the Baghdadi vizier Ibn Sa'dan, servant to Samsam al-Dawla, son of 'Adud al-Dawla.²⁰ It is the portrait of two viziers under Buyid emirs, two former secretaries who had reached the highest post to which a man of letters could aspire. These two people knew Tawhidi personally, and Tawhidi, who considers himself wronged, is out to settle the score. Of the 550 pages of the Tanji edition, the first 79 are a theoretical introduction to the reasons that led Tawhidi to compose a work of "denunciation of shortcomings" (*mathalib*) of such uncommon scale. The portrait of Sahib b. 'Abbad then takes up pages 80 to 320, and the rest are theoretically dedicated to Ibn al-'Amid, though the author actually frequently returns to the case of Ibn 'Abbad, his principle object of resentment. The imbalance is patent, and the author paints a fascinating portrait of vizier Ibn 'Abbad as a degenerate, half-crazy, ridiculous, and

arrogant prince, through which the characteristics of the ideal leader may be read "in negative."

A whole book of insult is unprecedented in the field of medieval Arabic prose. Insult in Arabic belles-lettres, although common, is to be found mainly in poetry as the main topic of a *qasida* (ode). It can be aimed at a tribe, an ethnic group, or an individual. It can be put in measured words or in the coarsest language, but it generally revolves around the exact opposite of the qualities appraised in the laudatory ode: miserliness (instead of generosity), lack of virility (instead of courage), unethical behavior. Other literary expressions of insult (such as the short rhymed epigram or the prosaic libel epistle) are to be found in this extraordinary book, which incidentally offers a short anthology of insult literature in its avant-propos. Extreme vulgarity of language seems to be common in this highly codified genre, in which one often suspects that the attack is not sincere and simply fits in the wider genre of *mujun* (ribaldry) literature, as *exercices de style* that were undoubtedly appreciated as forbidden pleasures in the caliphal or vizieral courts of the ninth and tenth centuries. The pervasiveness of insults related to sexual matters helps establish the boundaries of normality in this field. But Tawhidi's work goes far beyond those limited genres.

In classic Arab Islamic civilization, certain forms of behavior break with divine law and the domain of good morality (*husn al-akhlaq*). Nevertheless, if one is to believe *adab* literature, these forms of behavior were common, accepted customs of the princely courts, though without being recognized as legitimate. The consumption of intoxicating beverages and sexual relations with young (beardless) prepubescent or barely pubescent page boys are examples of such behavior. The cardinal sin lies not as much in the transgression of a religious norm as in the affirmation—indeed, the assertion—of the right to this transgression or even worse in the negation of the sinful nature of this action. To announce and to brag about an offense limits the range, denies the very nature, and denies the generosity of God, who covers the offense with his protective veil (*sitr*). Poets were

the first to affirm transgression in literature, and the poetry of the Abbasid *muhdathin* (modernists) is filled with “rights advocates.” Abu Nuwas (d. circa 815) is the most flagrant example of those who were to transgress and subvert these codes to take pleasure in their transgression or to ridicule the codes.

This avowed transgression has room for expression within the framework of the classic *adab*. Sure of its values, this dominant society has nothing to fear from maintaining a margin of tolerance at its heart. But if the prince’s fools can take advantage of this margin, the prince cannot do the same, since it is his duty to be a model Muslim, worthy of imitation. It is necessary to keep this in mind in the charges brought by Tawhidi against Ibn ‘Abbad. It is a question not of condemning the *mujun* (ribaldry) or the *sukhf* (obscenity) in all of their manifestations but only of when they emanate from the one whose responsibility it is to censure them, although he might possibly and secretly be a consumer but not producer or advocate of those transgressions. Ibn ‘Abbad is depicted as ceaselessly humoring *sukhf*, *khala‘a*, and *mujun*.²¹ Because the boundary is overstepped, the author considers it his duty to denounce his personal enemy. The text²² includes a revealing question. While Ibn ‘Abbad delights in recounting inappropriate anecdotes and making misplaced remarks, such as the sacrilegious comparison between the flatulence of a table guest and the second caliph ‘Umar b. al-Khattab’s pledge of allegiance to the first successor of Muhammad Abu Bakr, which would both have “escaped” them, Tawhidi asks, “*‘a fa-hadha min al-mujun al-mustatab*” (is that the level of effrontery that is appreciated?), a formulation that implies therefore that, on the contrary, there does exist a fully permissible type of effrontery and obscenity.

The accusations against Ibn ‘Abbad by Tawhidi, who it seems was wronged by ‘Abbad, cannot be taken at face value, even if Tawhidi were to dispense with a long introduction that tries to convince us of the contrary (all the while recognizing the right to exaggeration).²³ Nevertheless, the reproaches formulated against Ibn ‘Abbad and Ibn al-‘Amid are slightly different. The

former is reproached for his inconsistency, megalomania, avarice, inappropriate behavior, love of obscenity, mixing with the populace at the expense of the literati (*udaba’*), incompetence in debate, and ridiculously bombastic speech. The latter is under fire for his arrogance, lies, misery, and cruelty. As for the evocation of sexual habits, this concerns only Ibn ‘Abbad and, in a particularly recurrent way, concentrates on two aspects that are generally understood as distinct in classic Arabic culture—his avowed love for boys as an active partner and the secret reality of his character, which is passively effeminate and obsessed by obscenity.

IBN ‘ABBAD ACCORDING TO HISTORY VERSUS IBN ‘ABBAD ACCORDING TO TAWHIDI

The historic truth about Tawhidi’s accusation is of no importance. One should simply note that the portrait of Ibn ‘Abbad as vizier is contrary to the hyperbolic praise that one finds in the notice dedicated to the Sahib by al-Tha‘alibi in his *Tatimmat al-Yatima*, the most famous anthology of tenth-century authors:

No words are strong enough that come to my mind to express the height of his rank in matters of knowledge and of education, the splendor of his munificence and of his generosity, his unique position at the peak of all virtues and of all glories . . . I will therefore content myself to say that he is the Summit of the Orient, the Memory of Glories, the Star of Times, Source of Justice and Benevolence, he whom one can praise more than any of God’s creatures, he without whom virtue in our times could only be forsaken merchandise[.]²⁴

No source other than al-Tawhidi denounces either the *luti* or the *ma‘bun* sides of Ibn ‘Abbad. It is nonetheless clear that the Sahib composed, within the framework of his verse collection,²⁵ numerous works of *ghazal* (love poetry) or poems containing *ghazal* verses evoking the charms of beautiful young men²⁶ and that no clearly feminine figure is present in this collection. But this *qawl fi l-murdan* (poetry on adolescent boys), which found

its place in the literary canon between the end of the eighth and the ninth centuries, had become a literary cliché by the tenth century. It should also be stressed that the canons of adolescent beauty in the classical imaginary were not clearly gendered. The terms used to describe young, fifteen-year-old heroes in *The Thousand and One Nights* and the standards of beauty that are applied to them are identical for boys and girls. However, one particular trait, the appearance of a beard, transforms the boy into an adult male. A *ghazal* poem describes the charms of a very young man who does not yet have a beard or whose first beard (*ʿidhar*) has just appeared, marking a black line on his rosy cheek. It can be seen as an exercise in style or mere appreciation of beauty, not necessarily a revelation of the author's actual sexuality. On the other hand, the recurrence of this theme reveals the literary legitimacy of an adult man's expression of desire for a young man who has barely reached manhood and therefore reveals at least an aesthetic formula. One can grasp from this the degree to which the aesthetic formulas of homosexuality in the modern sense and the adulation of the beautiful adolescent boy in classic Arabic literature diverge. What is turned into an object of desire is not extreme virility but rather its timid blossoming under an androgynous surface. The Sahib is hardly different from his contemporaries. One should notice principally the loaded meaning of the topos of the first beard (*ʿidhar*), an allusion to that of the *ʿaqarib* (kiss curl). The following verses dedicated to a lisping effeminate young man seem to me exemplary:

I asked a young fawn: What is your name?
 He answered simpering: 'Abbath [for Abbas, a common name].
 I started to lisp myself,
 I asked him: where are the cupth and the plateth?²⁷

The modern reader is, however, struck by the recurring presence of homoerotic *ghazal* sections used as introduction of the *nasib* type²⁸ in the works praising the family of the Prophet (*Ahl al-Bayt*), in which the Sahib underscores his Shiite faith. This astonishing freedom culminates in four works where the Sahib

praises the beauty of a young 'Ali whose name alone evokes charms, bringing together the image of an ephebe-type with that of 'Ali b. Abi Talib, mentioned indirectly yet nevertheless obviously present.²⁹ Is this simple literary convention or rather amusing provocation? The second hypothesis cannot be ignored, especially since the Sahib is said to have linked, in the same way, his Mu'tazilite faith to the love of boys. Yaqut's *Mu'jam al-Udaba'* thus shows the Sahib confronted by his master Fakhr al-Dawla with his provocations:

I heard Ibn 'Abbad tell the following facts: "I never asked permission to be let into the court of Fakhr al-Dawla, when he was in pleasant company (*fi majlis al-uns*), without him regaining his most prudish demeanor (*illa wa-ntaqala ila majlis al-hishma*) before allowing me to enter. I don't recall that he ever fell into vulgarity or that he ever joked with me, except for one particular occasion when he asked me, "They tell me that you recited this verse:

My ideological school is that of the Mu'tazilites
 And my way of fucking is that of a sodomite."

I pretended to be shocked by his frankness of tone and responded: "Between us, there is enough serious business to deal with for us to avoid trifles (*hazl*)."³⁰ I then stood up, feigning anger. And he then had sent to me so many apology letters that I again took up his company. Afterward he never again told jokes or made off-hand remarks.³⁰

With respect to this verse, it is necessary to make the distinction between a provocation by a vizier who is assured of his master's protection and who knows himself to be indispensable and a veritable affirmation of his sexual tastes. This affirmation, if it is one, is primarily literary: it would be an affirmation of the right of a prince to grapple with the domain of the *mujun*. Ibn 'Abbad's angry reaction to Fakhr al-Dawla's ribbing on this subject (does he tease him about his habits or about the public display of his indecency?) is moreover eloquent: he gets carried away and demands an apology.

Beyond the complaints that Tawhidi brings against Ibn ‘Abbad, it can be discerned that the underlying reason for this hostility and resentment is the competition that is brought about by power against knowledge on its own turf. Even though the intellectual should have a privileged position next to the prince, here is the prince who prides himself on his knowledge of *adab* and who compares himself to poets, letter writers, and savants, placing himself as judge and participant in all of these domains. Ibn ‘Abbad is perhaps the most prolific of these enlightened princes of the tenth century. However, according to the notices dedicated to certain princes and viziers in al-Tha‘alibi’s *Yatimat al-Dahr*, every great leader of the Islamic world in the tenth century had to be a man of great sophistication. It would not have been possible to represent the Buyid princes as brutish. They all knew at the very least how to write verse of delicate composition. Romantic, including homoerotic, subject matter is thus widespread in works by princes of this period.

Earlier I remarked that it would be risky (and perhaps of little relevance) to speculate on whether the historical Ibn ‘Abbad really pursued boys for love interest or whether he was an active or a passive sodomite. But Tawhidi’s accusations need to be examined with texts other than Ibn ‘Abbad’s collection of poems (for example, with the written works of contemporaries in high office). Is the evocation of the androgynous beauty of young pages reserved for court poets, or is it common only among the rulers of this tenth-century Muslim Empire? The *Yatima* is yet again the best guide for answering this question. If no verse on boys is attributed to the celebrated master of Aleppo, Sayf al-Dawla, other Hamdanite princes take up this theme. Thus, Abu al-‘Asha‘ir al-Hamdani, who himself writes about the *‘idhar* (first beard) of a young man, and whose anthology features a short story with clearly homoerotic content:

An informer told us the following story: “Having just paid a visit to Abu al-‘Asha‘ir, who had fallen ill, I asked him: how is our Emir

doing? He pointed to a young man standing in front of him, named Nastas, who was so handsome that one could have said that Ridwan, in a moment of carelessness, let him escape from paradise. Then he recited these lines to me:

This young man made my body languid
By the languor of his gaze.

There is so much coquetry in the torpor of his eyes
That the torpor has been transmitted to my bones.

My soul mixes with his
As water mixes with wine.³¹

While this is a rather banal story expressed in common verse, it proves that the allusion to the three slightly transgressive topoi (a languor attributable to the sight of a young ephebe (*al-nazar*), a gaze charged with erotic torpor, and the habitual mixing of wine and water) can be expressed by the prince. The Buyids themselves are not to be outdone: ‘Adud al-Dawla writes about *‘idhar*:

Your beauty spot in your first beard in the night
Is blackness upon blackness upon blackness.³²

Similarly, a story taken by al-Tha‘alibi from Abu Ishaq al-Sabi’s *Kitab al-Taji* shows Mu‘izz al-Dawla at the mercy of a young Turk, to the point of provoking the mockery of vizier al-Muhallabi, apparently himself somewhat aroused by the young man:

Mu‘izz al-Dawla Abu al-Husayn had a young Turkish page by the name of Takin al-Jamidar, beardless, with a striking face, who drank continuously without ever sobering up and would always give into pleasure. But Mu‘izz al-Dawla became so infatuated with him and liked him so much that he placed him at the head of a cavalry regiment destined to fight the Hamdanites. Al-Muhallabi [the vizier] found him charming and of great beauty but saw in him a person made for love and not for war. And so he declaimed this verse about him:

A fawn of striking features and gracious figure
So like young virgins that one could almost see his breasts
pointing out.

A sword and a belt were hung from his waist that weighed
heavy upon him.
For having placed him at the head of the army, the troop was
lost and the general with it.

It was not long before the [new] general was beaten in combat,
and so it happened just as
the al-Muhallabi's verse had foreseen.³³

The tone of this epigram, between *ghazal* and *hija'*, suggests that neither the prince nor his minister was immune to the charms of a young man whose seduction lied demonstrably in his androgynous appearance. While the Egyptian and Andalusian poetry attributed to leaders cited in al-Tha'alibi's anthology does not feature homoerotic themes and motifs, the preceding discussion shows that Ibn 'Abbad, in his exaltation of male adolescent charms, is no exception among the princes of the tenth-century Arab Orient. And if Ibn 'Abbad is not an exception, al-Tawhidi will also demonstrate that he too, in his condemnation of the vizier, follows and respects a double literary and moral canon.

OBSCENITY AND SEXUALITY IN SATIRE AND INSULT

Justifications in Favor of Satire in Prose and Poetry

Throughout his introduction, al-Tawhidi develops a discourse arguing the legitimacy of his composition of a *kitab* that is entirely dedicated to a satire on two people. What the author attempts to justify is not simply the denunciation of the vices of a prince whose true nature no one dares expose. Abu Hayyan's justification is in fact threefold. First, he sets out to define his

project in relation to the classical poetic genre of the *hija'* (libel). Second, he seeks to elaborate a moral justification for writing a work based on insult. Finally, he wants to situate himself in a certain literary continuity, even though his work could be seen as the founding of a new genre. Every creation at the heart of the *adab* has to be camouflaged through its location in a preexisting literary movement, a tradition through which one could award oneself predecessors, thereby guaranteeing for oneself a sort of generic *isnad*. Abu Hayyan knows that his enterprise is risqué and reprehensible. Certainly, the rhetorical excesses of invective are tolerated for the same reason that the positive presentation of transgression is tolerated in poetry: in both cases, the excess is ritual. But the author ceaselessly tries to protect himself against the moral condemnation of his project (from which, however, he will not escape), on the one hand, by references to precedents in the field of *adab* prose and, on the other, by a religious defense making the denunciation of the crimes of the unjust prince appear to be a religious duty.

As used by Tawhidi in the *Akhlaq al-Wazirayn*, this line of approach—passing off satire as a pious act on the basis that covering up the Sahib's misdeeds would represent major wrongdoing—must be made convincing to his readers. The stakes are high, since the accusations of *ubna* (passive sodomy) scattered throughout his text are part of those morally dubious themes in the treatment of poetic *hija'* that tarnish the accuser's reputation as much as that of the accused. In no way does Tawhidi hold back from citing anecdotes and writings (which he may have forged) of unexpected obscenity. Certainly, citation and production are not of the same order. Nevertheless, the argumentation formerly developed by al-Jahiz and taken up again by Tawhidi in the *Imta'* to justify the presence of *hazl* (jest) and in addition *sukhf* (obscenity) in the domain of the *adab* no longer holds. It is not a question here of creating a breathing space within scholarly discourse but rather the central element of his textual pillo-rying of Ibn 'Abbad.

Sexual Insults, Passive Sodomy, Active Sodomy

G. J. Van Gelder notes that “Homosexuality is an extremely common topic of *hija*’ since Abbasid times; but in some contexts being the active partner is a reason for boastful poetry.”³⁴ This remark confuses different modes of discourse. Affirming the right to be a *luti* (active sodomite) is unthinkable in the framework of the serious (*jidd*) boastful poetry (*fakhr*). This affirmation finds its place only in the various parodies of the *fakhr* authorized by the *mujun* mode, such as *ghazal majin*, *khamriyya*, where the assertion of transgressions becomes possible, or even in another mode, that of diatribe, that can easily be linked to the *mujun* and to the *sukhf*. The association of virility and the values that it disseminates (*muru’a*) with the penetrator’s sexual role, no matter what the object of his penetration, is probably a universal image in patriarchal cultures. But the articulation of this conception does not have its place in the discourse of *ilm* (science), which on the contrary limits natural desire’s field of action to the religiously licit. Nor does this articulation have its place in the *adab* in the strictest sense, inasmuch as it is the avowed word of its author. It can break through only in the interstices of discourse. This association can be seen particularly in the insult, which stigmatizes the supposed loss of the manly role. One technique in *hija*’, recurrent since pre-Islamic times, consists in calling a man a woman, a predictable insult in a culture where a free man is at the top of the social pyramid. The representation through synecdoche of this comparison by the evocation of women’s sexual roles is also quite predictable.

But while it makes sense in the literature of invectives, in poetry as well as in prose, to belittle the insulted’s virility by mentioning his role as an invert, two remarks may be added. First, no one could seriously affirm the right to be a *ma’bun* (passive sodomite), even within the literary framework of *mujun*. If provocative remarks can be credited to certain characters who belong to the *mukhannathun* (effeminate caste, verses of the pseudo-*fakhr* genre that assert the practice of passive sodomy

are few and are not taken seriously by anthologists, who prefer to see in them the pinnacle of *sukhf* rather than the expression of reality. One might counter that there exists at least one exception to the anonymity of the *adib-ma’bun*—the poet Jahshawayh (ninth century). Though an *adib*, a recognized poet, he flaunted his status as a catamite. Strikingly, however, the anthologists refuse to listen to his discourse. They deny the reality of his transgression and prefer to see in it a game. Take for example Ibn al-Mu’tazz:

Jahshawayh was the most active sodomite that there could be [*min alwat al-nas*] and the furthest from what he accused himself of [*wa-ab’adhim mimma rama bihi nafsahu*]. He would say that he was passive [*yansibu nafsahu ila l-bigha*] and would compose verse about this facetious topic that does not represent the truth.³⁵

Note the terms used by Ibn al-Mu’tazz: to *qualify* oneself as a passive sodomite is expressed in terms of an *accusation* (*rama bihi nafsahu*).

Second, with respect to attacks on virility, in the *hija*’ genre the word *luti* is not used as a term of abuse, as if the role of active sodomite were blameworthy only in the framework of religious rather than social norms. (This works in support of the constructionist argument.) From these remarks, the ambiguity of al-Tawhidi’s charges can be seen clearly. The literature for which Sahib b. ‘Abbad is reproached and his public excesses of *mujun* serve only to categorize him as a *luti*, blameworthy with respect to divine law and to the prince’s duty to set an example but not with respect to the literary norms of *hija*’ or perhaps to society’s norms. Since this accusation alone does not make enough sense within the literature of diatribe, so clearly codified, it is therefore coupled by Tawhidi with that of effeminateness and passive sodomy. Are these the requirements of an accusatory rhetoric that would remain otherwise unsupported, or rather do they signify the perception of a natural link between *liwat* (active sodomy) and *ubna* (passive sodomy)? I return to this.

TAWHIDI'S STRATEGY

An Obscenity Disowned

The modern reader, probably just as the medieval one, is led to wonder what makes the difference between the overwhelming presence of *sukhf* in the *Akhlaq al-Wazirayn* and between the collections of anecdotes that sometimes contain entire sections of obscene material. See, for example, al-Abi's *Nathr al-Durr*, al-Shabushti's *Kitab al-Diyarat*, and al-Raghib al-Isfahani's *Muhadarat al-Udaba'*, among others. In the intentions of the author, the nuance is clear. The theme of *sukhf* is rendered here not as a collection of risqué anecdotes focusing on Ibn 'Abbad, as one would focus on ninth-century buffoons such as 'Abbada or Jahshawayh or other *ma'bun* amusers, but rather either as jokes or poetry or as epistles of libel.

Jokes or outrageous poetry, supposedly recited in public by an Ibn 'Abbad taking endless pleasure in *sukhf*, would not be appropriate to his rank of vizier. Ibn 'Abbad would have declaimed them to rail against courtesans or illustrious predecessors in control of the Vizierate and, according to witnesses solicited by Tawhidi, to avoid suspicions against himself. The connection established by Abu Hayyan between Ibn 'Abbad's enunciation of scabrous anecdotes stigmatizing homosexuals and his own corruption is reaffirmed in a later passage in the text.

Ibn 'Abbad exhibited no shame in the presence of filthy remarks: it was this very fact that led him to be suspected and allowed him to be slandered. By mentioning his faults, no one feared committing a sin or exposing himself to blame. At any rate, his faults were innumerable, and no one could have gone through them all.³⁶

Abu Hayyan is careful to cite (or to put in the Sahib's mouth) jokes that spread doubt and confusion. But they probably form a part of a stock of humorous replies known to the author, who decides in this case to adjust their meaning to make his case.

Supposedly famous epistles of libel, written by predecessors

or contemporaneous litterati, by their very (alleged) existence are justifications that bring the project to a successful conclusion by virtue of the presence of a precedent. In general, any obscene citation in the *Akhlaq al-Wazirayn* is surrounded by a "safety device" distinguishing it and protecting it from the words *avowed* by Tawhidi, which takes its distance from any *sukhf* (condemnable obscenity). However, this denunciation-enunciation is an occasion to spice up the work with an ensemble of stories and of texts of utter and comic crudeness. The author cannot be unaware that these texts constitute for the reader the principle worth and incitement to read his work. Are the theoretical elaborations and all the reflections on the relations between the prince and the intellectual only a smokescreen to justify, under the dressing of a hypocritical posturing, a pleasure taken in scabrous enunciation?³⁷ This may be all the more the case since the author's duplicity is extraordinary. Collectors of anecdotes can always argue that their enunciation is denunciation, but Tawhidi carries this out in two stages. It is precisely enunciation under the cover of denunciation itself that he condemns—in the person of Ibn 'Abbad—but he ironically appears in the role of the denunciator-enunciator.

The inclusion of the *sukhf* in the form of citation, without ever assuming authorship, not only responds to a moral precaution but also allows for the denunciation of Ibn 'Abbad as being indirectly responsible for the moral transgression in his opponents' discourse.

The Three Phases of the Attack

Whatever the authenticity of his sources, Tawhidi's accusation consists of three successive stages. The author encircles Ibn 'Abbad with the two connected themes of effeminacy and passive sodomy,³⁸ adds them to those of *sukhf* (obscenity) and of *mujun* (profligacy), and therefore implicitly or explicitly to that of *liwat* (active sodomy).

First, the theoretical introduction is the opportunity to estab-

lish an oblique strategy. One of the stakes of the introduction is the justification for the writing of a *kitab* entirely dedicated to reproach, a work of *mathalib* consisting of a succession of discrediting anecdotes. Abu Hayyan summons up (besides al-Jahiz (d. 869), his model in the composition of epistles) all the eighth- and ninth-century masters of *adab*: Ibn al-Muqaffa', a reference in chancery writing; Abu al-'Ayna', the sharp-tongued poet-courtier; the secretary Sahl b. Harun; al-Suli. All these authors have one characteristic in common: they were either secretaries of the chancellery, *kuttab*, or councilors (even if indirectly) to the prince. The people of his own caste are the ones called on to justify his enterprise. But the texts he cites are extracts (or the whole) of a collection of letters, which by their lesser length and ambitious scope are not on the same scale as his own *Kitab Akhlaq al-Wazirayn*. However, Tawhidi defines these fragments as forming a genre (*hadha l-fann*),³⁹ taking care nonetheless to distinguish it from that of poets, who are known to dally in a different genre. He thus allows himself, not without some bad faith, to denounce the unjustified satires of poets and to authorize others only if they follow three conditions—*sidq* (sincerity), *haqq* (truth), and *sawab* (accuracy). Tawhidi judges, moreover, allusion to be more efficient than direct accusation, all the while pretending to deplore its use by poets:

They only earn their living in this fashion and live only by this choice. Their satire is blameworthy, their remarks shameful, they attack [the adversary] with filthy words and wounding words and allusions [*ta'rid*] that surpass even direct reference[.]⁴⁰

This, however, is a practice that Tawhidi himself will use in the choice of excerpts from letters that he has selected for the reader and that all aim to distinguish his observations from those of his predecessors and to cast doubt on the Sahib. In fact, the verse excerpts of *hija*' and the letters brought up to attest the legitimacy of the project have in common, for the most part, attacks on the supposed passive homosexuality of the recipient. In

the four instances that he quotes, the recipient is accused of being not a *luti*, which would be a trifle and hardly a subject for libel, but rather a *ma'bun*. This is the case for the excerpts to be read in the annex.

If these various epigrams mention a supposed practice of passive sodomy on the part of the accused, it is not by chance. These texts prepare the reader to listen to a similar discourse about Ibn 'Abbad, one quite beyond a simple moralist libel against the inadequacies of a degenerate vizierate.

The second phase of the strategy emerges as the actual portrait of Ibn 'Abbad begins, starting with the astonishing scene of the *hadith al-istiqlal* (the speeches of welcoming).⁴¹ From this episode on, Abu Hayyan pays particular attention to noting the obscenities recounted by the Sahib (many of which are of a specifically sexual character, consisting in accusing others of being either active or passive sodomites) and to stigmatizing the Sahib's physique, his gestures, his way of expressing himself and of reacting in conversation, all of which lie within the classic Arabic representation of *takhannuth* (effeminateness)—flexibility of the body, curves instead of straight lines, and softness instead of hardness. The first instance of this strategy in the *hadith al-istiqlal* (see excerpts in appendix 5D at the end of this chapter) culminates in the Sahib's last three dialogues illustrating, one by one, his "stupidity" (*raqa'a*). In the first dialogue, he jokingly blames his *muhtasib* (chief of police) for isolating himself with his darlings though he is in charge of the police. In the second, he takes pleasure in accusing a courtier of stealing the verse of others, which amounts to supporting himself on others' penises instead of his own, since poetic productivity is here linked to manly vigor. In the third, he reproaches one of his most charming servants for having attempted to seek him out, even though the boy is as delicate as a girl, hinting at the commerce that exists between them. Tawhidi, the narrator present during this scene, describes the vizier's gestures in detail, all the better to reveal his effeminacy. The same procedure is repeated subse-

quently. Thus, Abu Hayyan starts by “citing” the first person who is responsible for Ibn ‘Abbad’s fortune:

When Abu al-Fadl saw him—that is, Ibn al-‘Amid—he exclaimed: “You would think that his eyes were made of quick-silver and that his neck were mounted on a spring!” He spoke the truth, since Ibn ‘Abbad was comical to the point of making one want to wiggle and dance, always upsetting and dislocating, rippling and undulating—like the worst kind of whore or an aging invert.⁴²

Al-Tawhidi takes it on himself to drive the point home, using the cruel image of the *mukhannath ashmat* (the “old queen”) who has lost all the possible charm that sexual ambiguity contains, for its enthusiasts, in the prime of youth. The repeated allusion to the ridiculous movements of the Sahib reflect in negative the sovereign’s necessary *hilm*—his self-control.

The third and final move in this strategy consists in letting intervening parties, explicitly solicited by Tawhidi, to elaborate themselves on the vizier’s habits. I cite only a few instances, though they are constant throughout the work. For example, take al-Khawarizmi:

He preaches “Justice and Unity,” feigns to profess “the divine Promise and Eternity” then goes away by himself to put many a penis in his ass, and practices the entire range of abominations and wickedness, goes to sleep every morning without his face having been touched by the light of the Creator.⁴³

The contradiction should be noticed between the Zaidite, Shi’ite, and Mu’tazilite *madhab* proclaimed by Ibn ‘Abbad and his actions, a contradiction ceaselessly put forward, the author taking care not to condemn *madhab* as such but rather to condemn the Sahib as being the worst kind of example and a subject of shame. And then there is Abu Tayyib al-Nasrani, a Christian secretary, who is called to testify:

He knew about the shameful secrets of Ibn ‘Abbad the most prodigious facts, and I heard him say: “If I were to reveal everything

that I know about this invert, the mountains would crumble and the rocks would burst.”⁴⁴

This remains a good example of paralipsis. But one of the most powerful illustrations in the text of this strategy of “delegation” adopted by Tawhidi is to be found in the very long denunciation of Ibn ‘Abbad that is attributed to al-Khath‘ami.⁴⁵ Al-Khath‘ami’s long testimonial deals one by one with the whole spectrum of sexual themes developed in the work. Led astray by his talents, his luck, and his arrogance, the Sahib, we learn, is a bad Mu’tazilite who goes off and preaches to the populace in Persian while at the same time exciting some beardless darling boy.⁴⁶ Next, his scatological penchants are brought up through the mention of various stories about flatulence that Ibn ‘Abbad enjoyed telling. The mention of bottoms naturally leads the obscene prince to the evocation of a *ma’bun*, named Tays al-Jinn (Djinns’ Goat), who would be better nicknamed Na’jat al-Ins (Men’s Ewe). Ibn ‘Abbad then cites some outrageous satirical verse by the crude poet al-Hajjaj, which he judges superior to that of Imru’ al-Qays, pre-Islamic founder of Arabic poetry. He then brings up another anecdote of the type that “princes do not lower themselves to repeat” and that evokes a scene of voyeurism in which a Bedouin is offered a young girl by one of the al-Muhallab aristocrats if he would agree to deflower her in front of him.⁴⁷ The Sahib mentions in the course of the crude anecdote that the Bedouin’s “equipment” (*mata’ahu*) is as impressive as the “column of a house,” hardly an original comparison since this is precisely one of the recurring images used by adorers of the phallus in anecdotes or *sukhf* poetry attributed to them. Abu Hayyan is thus able to include Ibn ‘Abbad in their camp by his mere choice of simile. The vizier finally quotes verses by the famous Abu Hukayma, the poet of the (in)famous *ayriyyat* in which he always complains about the loss of vigor in his member,⁴⁸ the mention of which implicitly comes back at Ibn ‘Abbad, stigmatizing such a loss of virility. The groundwork being laid, the Sahib boldly cites ‘Abbada and Jahshawayh, famous ninth-

century court effeminates, while in Tawhidi's writing strategy, the joke-trap is set. The passage closes with a last sexual allusion, a display of bragging by one of the prince's darlings:

As for the other Ibn al-Munajjim, Abu Muhammad, he was a miserable being, an ignorant person and an idiot. He used to say: "When I introduced myself to our master the Sahib, I was as handsome as the rising of the full moon. He immediately adored me, he went crazy over my budding beard, he fell hopelessly in love with me, and in this way I made a fortune. I earned a place in his heart and in his favor, and what he loved about me is not appropriate to talk about."⁴⁹

Abu Hayyan is quick to confirm that his informer al-Khath'ami is telling the truth, especially since this final allusive line (even though it leaves no doubt about the Vizier's intimate relationship with his darling) leaves in doubt the roles played by each of them. What the young poet cannot reveal could just as easily be his talents as a passive prostitute as much as his abilities as an active sodomite.

This long digression attributed to al-Khath'ami exposes the "mirror" or autoreferential dimension of the work. Throughout his texts, al-Tawhidi scatters motifs that he takes up again later on, drawing attention to the first reference. Thus, vulgar war metaphors used by Abu al-'Ayna' in his letter against Ibn al-Mukarram⁵⁰ at the beginning of the work echo later on some verse in which Ibn 'Abbad is compared to a "spear" that became a "shield" (a former *luti* who moved to the passive camp):

I asked al-Natif, the theologian, one day: "I see that Ibn 'Abbad seems to spend a lot of time with those young devils who have passed the age of adolescence. Isn't this a sign of some sort of unspeakable turpitude and of inversion [*fahsha' wa-tuhma*]?" He then answered: "Aren't you familiar with these lines by the poet:

Oh, how many spears quiver and line up their points
Let's not speak about it! There would be so much to say

When a noble lord showers favor on him whose beard begins
to bristle
And shows his heart, the worst is to be feared!⁵¹

Two remarks should be made about this verse. The comparison of Ibn 'Abbad to an invert is this time clearly sought by Abu Hayyan himself, who proceeds almost unmasked but only because he has almost reached the end of his work. In addition, it is interesting that the formulation of the pernicious question asked by al-Tawhidi recognizes the normalcy in the extensive frequenting of young men who have not passed this *hadd al-ghulumiyya* (the age when one becomes a bearded man), just like the poems cited, which make fun of those who fall in love with young men whose beard has grown. Yet again, the boundary between normalcy and vice, between *liwat* and *ubna*, is implicitly affirmed, just as it is stressed that the boundary is not to be crossed.

Similarly, the scene of voyeurism enjoyed by the Muhallabid aristocrat, supposedly brought up by Ibn 'Abbad, anticipates its own reflection in an analogous scene where Ibn 'Abbad himself is the voyeur. Al-Aqta', the man with one hand, a thug among Ibn 'Abbad's protégés, copulates with his wife in the vizier's own palace:

[Ibn 'Abbad] did not authorize al-Aqta' to go home, with the result that he complained about being tormented with desire. . . . One day, when al-Aqta' found his antechamber empty, the torrid afternoon heat hardly motivated him to move. He told his wife of his desire, he lay her down right there, on the floor, mounted her, and started his business. He was then observed by one of the chamberlains, who ran to report the event to Ibn 'Abbad, describing the whole portrait in detail. Ibn 'Abbad got up at once from his nap in a cool and shady place, left the soft bed on which he rested, and went off hatless and barefoot, a scrap of shirt wrapped around his head, without any pants on. His feet not touching the ground, he arrived in front of al-Aqta' in the middle of coitus, putting in and taking out his device and moving like a madman.

Ibn ‘Abbad derided him: “Criminal! Damn you son of an adulterer! What’s going on in my own home?” “Oh Sahib,” answered the other. “Go away. This isn’t a spectacle! This is my legitimate wife, married with witnesses, notarized, with a contract and a duplicate. Go away, go away!” And he raved on and hurled abuse until he finished, while our master, in front of him, laughed, applauded, and even danced. Then he took his hand, as the other was still tightening the cord of his breeches, helped him to get dressed, and invited him to follow him back to where he was napping, all the while reproaching him and asking him questions: “How did all this happen? How did he feel? Did he feel any pleasure? How did he ever get so excited?” Then he offered him a fancy robe and some money and offered clothes and perfume to the man’s wife.⁵²

The voyeur is implicitly linked to an impotent (and impotence is a common theme of *hija’*), since he can copulate only by proxy. By mentioning al-Aqta’s wife (very few legitimate wives are mentioned in *adab*), Abu Hayyan pretends to oppose Ibn ‘Abbad’s peculiarity (a bachelor who is taking a siesta alone) (the historical Sahib, of course, had wife(s), children, and grandchildren)⁵³ to al-Aqta’s normalcy (a married man who, during siesta time, has relations with his legitimate wife). The thug is then much more of an honest man than the usurper prince.

By his three-step course of action, Tawhidi succeeds in preparing his reader for the centrality of the homosexual theme, tying the public practice of a discourse on the form of the *mujun* and of the *sukhf* to the will to hide an immoral secret and establishing a connection between the frequenting of effeminate young men and the effeminateness and passivity of a client. Is this purely circumstantial evidence? Not necessarily so.

CONCLUSION: ON THE AMBIGUITIES OF INSULT

Tawhidi’s accusation exploits the Sahib’s presumptuousness, which, by means of flaunting his love for prepubescent boys and

therefore what is called *liwat* ends up by laying himself open to the accusation of *ubna*, which is socially more damaging (even if the former is just as serious, according to the *fiqh*). One cannot be sure about what happens in secret under the covers: the Sahib is victim of his own intrigues.

Ibn ‘Abbad is moreover always walking the tightrope, playing with fire. He defends himself too much and too often and thereby spreads more doubt. This can be observed in the witticism cited by the Sahib that denies (all the better to assert it) that the epitome of *liwat* is *ubna*, a comment obviously exploited by Abu Hayyan to suggest that this description is based on some truth. The slippery slope down which the *fa’l* (active partner) slides to become *maf’ul bihi* (passive partner) is presented implicitly as inescapable for the man who places attraction for boys at the center of his discourse.⁵⁴ The author’s own discourse is of a vast ambiguity, and what is found in its interstices is paradoxical.

Such a feeling is reinforced all the more by the strategy adopted by al-Tawhidi, who is always present although hiding behind the more or less fictive speakers that he manipulates. Take, for example, the letter by Abu al-‘Ayna’ that denounces the al-Mukarram clan as men failing in their dominant role and who, “[are] probably relieved that [their] wives have gone to find [their] guests and that [their] servants play with [their] young men.” How can one not conclude from such a statement that playing with beautiful young men is of the utmost normalcy and that the real symptom of male degeneracy is to let the servants play with them instead?

I suggest we could resolve this contradiction between the “normalcy” in attraction for young men and the relationship of necessary complementarity established between two distinct types of homoerotic relations (distinct in law as well as in social standing) by proposing that mere appreciation of *young* and *fresh out of androgyny* male beauty is commonplace, that occasional and discrete affairs with young men fit into or indeed

reinforce masculinity, but that the affirmation of a right to this kind of relationship or even of its repeated evocation (implying a suspicious interest, a preference, or possibly even an exclusive preference) takes the author dangerously close to the limit. It should be remembered that Ibn al-Mu'tazz "defended" the catamite poet Jahshawayh by labeling him "*alwat al-nas*" (the most active sodomite among men). Was it the individual that he was defending, or was it *adab* itself that he was desperately attempting to rescue from such a shame? The result speaks for itself, for al-Tawhidi is no dupe and classifies Jahshawayh the *adib* in the same category as a king's dandy like 'Addaba. But Tawhidi's text points out that the revelation of the porosity of this boundary between the "pansexual" and the "homosexual" (understood here as preferring gender over role) happens, in classical Arabic culture, through insult.

What positive discourse cannot conceptualize or construct, denunciation provides. A man is characterized by his sexual acts as well as his desires, which are based on a preference for gender and not merely role. An effeminate in behavior is a man who seemingly combines at least three of the four premodern categories of homoerotic behaviors mentioned by David M. Halperin in his demonstration of the uniqueness of the modern category of the homosexual,⁵⁵ as if Tawhidi had accidentally happened on the concept without knowing it.

At least two objections can be raised here. The penchant for *amrads* can be recognized as same-sex desire only in the measure that *amrads* are constructed as male gendered. Let us answer that they are clearly so in the discourse of the law, the transgression of which plays no small part in the pleasure of their company. Their maleness could be described as just-attained, and it is clearly a source of attractiveness. If not, why the pervasive *topos* of the first beard, that utterly masculine first trace of body hair? The second objection is that this search for the "homosexual" in premodern literature might be read as the latest expression of an essentialist agenda to uncover hidden homosexuals in

a prehomosexual past and thus acknowledge homosexuality as the ultimate end-of-history concept.

I do not feel that there should be any second thoughts concerning the relevance of the constructionist hypothesis, which is entirely justified considering that all homoerotic relations mentioned in classical Arabic literature cannot be described accurately by the term *homosexuality*. But it should be slightly altered on one point: what is not articulated is not necessarily what is inconceivable, if only in the case where the unarticulated finds its expression in the realm of insult, a paradoxical caviling over trifles with respect to the extreme obscenity of the charges. The *Akhlaq al-Wazirayn* does not say that Ibn 'Abbad was a homosexual, for such a labeled identity does not exist, but it certainly *calls* him one. The author probably has some good reasons to insult Ibn 'Abbad and not Ibn al-'Amid in this fashion, but the question is pointless. The crucial thing is that insult may accidentally construct what it denounces, building this field of "homosexuality," which in theory remains unthought.

In the light of the present analysis of the insult in Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi's *Kitab Akhlaq al-Wazirayn*, it seems clear to me that men in a given premodern and non-Western society had perceived some sort of link between active and passive roles within male-male relationships, that they had perceived that perpetual boasting about acts had something to do with preferences of genre, and that effeminacy in manners sometimes could be associated with being the active partner of anal sex. Does it mean that they had perceived the uniqueness of a man who is drawn to individuals of his same constructed gender, whatever the nature of his practices within the framework of this relationship, and that there were idiosyncratic attitudes connected with this particular desire? The singular case of the insult may incline us to address this possibility. The study of other types of discourse, such as humor, might also reveal that our reading of the way that medieval cultures perceived same-sex relationships might need to be refined.

APPENDIX 5A. AN EXCHANGE OF INSULTS
BETWEEN IBN AL-MUKARRAM AND
ABU AL-‘AYNA⁵⁶

Abu al-‘Ayna’ answered [in those terms to a letter of insults he received from Ibn al-Mukarram]:

“In the name of God the Forgiving, the Merciful,

You lash out, as God mentions,
Insults that would better suit yourself.

“We acknowledge receipt of your missive, of its invectives, and of its calumnies What is most astonishing is that neither you nor your brother screws women. It would be wondered therefore why you try to lead astray noble ladies and demand to be offered women with large dowries, even though you “swallow up what they wave around” and “God only knows what inhabits you.”⁵⁷ Why therefore ask for the hand in marriage of these women, when your own [hand] is out for the taking? Why pay the elevated dowries when it’s men that you need? Why pretend to love women when their very character runs through your veins?⁵⁸ How dare you, on the day of combat, pretend to inflict deadly blows to the enemy when you bend all the way down to your chin every day, when at every battle it’s in your bed that the charge is sounded and where you are found chest to the ground, while spears plow your ass. . . . You are probably quite content that your wives have gone searching for your guests and the men of your clan are enjoying the company of your male servants. Should you call them adulterers, they would call you catamites. . . . On my life, you have your wedding nights announced, but you are later discovered as a female drum player! You stray in insults and derision, all the while pretending to exact revenge, but when your help is needed and you are asked to honor your engagements, *the company disperses and you turn your back*. . . .⁵⁹ And so scorn to you, clan of Mukarram—a persistent, permanent scorn and one that will remain stuck to your name:

Your wounds do not bleed from jousting,
But it is from your asses that the blood drips.

Poor young bride whose virginal veil was never deflowered and whose fork was not watered! Poor girl duped despite her bewitching gaze, who will go off to inquire her friends: Don’t the Mukarram have virile members? . . .

“You said that you know of no road more rough nor more harsh than one that one is forced to take to serve us or to offer us a favor or of no fields less fertile and less destined to bear fruit than ours even though some good is sewn there. If it were so, you would have no reason at all to deplore the ingratitude shown to you, nor would you have heard thanks for your supposed favors. You refuse to give away your riches, and you try your best not to give anything away. Worse—may God forgive me!—had you any scraps left over to throw away, you would have given them to those who strove to satisfy it. I mean your insatiable *derrière*, which will lead to your final end.⁶⁰ And how then could you prove your generosity toward us or the benefits of your favors? Alas! To receive some sort of goods from you would still be a lesser evil, but the torrent [of your stinginess] has very well destroyed the last traces of generosity in you. Oh, Abu Ja’far—and how could Ja’far be a son of yours?⁶¹—Fornication knows of no other easier road nor one simpler to cross than the one that leads to you and no other territory better to penetrate than your being. All this doesn’t even take into account the filth of your clothes, the repulsive dirtiness of your hands, or the stench you exhale.

“You maintain that the generosity shown to me is vainly offered to my vileness and to my impudence. Why don’t you—curse you!—think about the history of your own rise to power and all those whom you cheated, exceeding all limits? Is there then some more glorious origin above that of God’s Messenger—hail and prayer to Him? Can one wish for an affiliation that is more noble than that of the caliphs, vicars of God?⁶² Were it not for the leniency of our sovereign and for our

excessive indulgence (of course, the possession of power orders the gentleman to abstain from unnecessary triumphs), without even taking into consideration the fact that you are too unimportant to be bothered to be punished and are hardly worth quarreling with, I would have some firm resolutions to take on your account. . . . Be grateful, then, for your avarice and your paltriness (they save you) and for your adversary (since he will not lower himself and punish you). As for the impudence of my speech, I certainly don't have to look for excuses for having cursed a vile miser and exalted nobility!"

If I didn't sincerely praise generosity
And did not thrash the sordid miser,
How would I tell good from evil
And why would have God granted me hearing and speech?

APPENDIX 5B. A LETTER ATTRIBUTED TO AL-JAHIZ⁶³

As for al-Jahiz, he wrote in one of his letters:⁶⁴

"You questioned me—God grant you a long life—about *So-and-SO*. I answer by proving to you the sincerity of my information, in terms so clear that they will reveal the most obscure aspects of the person and will show in the light of day the shame of what is hidden. Consider this, May God accord you his mercy, and there is no power other than God's.

"It happened that I saw him among his guests as respected as a tossed-out rag dirtied by menses. Everyone reputed him to be a catamite.⁶⁵ He had at his service a very slim page, whose head was very handsome, his back straight, his thighs and hips of the nicest curves, ringlets resting on his temples, and hair falling down his neck. He was dressed in the finest fabrics, constantly perfumed, always attentive to go to the baths, adorned in jewels, and his nails were always filed.

However, despite appearances, he was the slave that took care of all business affairs, it was from him that all the beggars obtained intervention, and it was he who directed his master in all

things, making himself more important than the sons, the clan, and the servants. He was able to make his master change his mind and adopt his opinion, imposing his whims. No one participated more than he in his master's literary circles, nor was anyone alone with his master long in private conversation. *So-and-so* had to spend every night with him, and it happened that he became angry, his anger saddened him, and he begged for forgiveness. As long as *So-and-so* was in charge, no close or distant relative had the least advantage over the page, and noble lords and commoners alike were treated in the same manner. Were he to mount his horse, the page would be by his side like the head of the caliph's guard. Were he to sit, the page would become his dear child or his virtuous wife. If some courtier had some business to resolve or request to register, it was once again the page who was found behind the solution, which was easier for him than taking off his shoes. They slept every night under the same cover."

APPENDIX 5C. EXCERPTS FROM A LETTER ATTRIBUTED TO ABU HIFFAN⁶⁶

I have also found a letter by Abu Hiffan⁶⁷ addressed to Ibn al-Mukarram:

"Oh, Ibn al-Mukarram. This is a name that you do not deserve.⁶⁸ Product of the sin of your parents, you are only shameful insult on shameful insult and curse of Iblis on curse. I cannot imagine that you were conceived from a drop of semen or that your mother could ever have been a virgin. No doubt you came from some excrement fertilized by defecation. Your father and your mother joined themselves at the asshole for such a creation, and as the poet says:

May God damn their two stenches,,
Two pubic hairs which look to rub together.

"You were born in sin and have lived as a catamite! You are nothing but an accumulation of maledictions—lousy to the

point of smashing vermin in one's teeth, sniveling to the point of swallowing snot, masturbator who only lets his liquor flow through his ten fingers, and catamite who only lets other people's liquor flow through his bottom. Your slaves slap you, your servants lead you by the stick, your dogs lick your ass as if it were dripping menstrual blood, and your friends whip you. Open your mouth and one would think that you farted, and what flows from your nose is only shit. Moreover, your spit is like excrement, and the gaps in your teeth are full of refuse. You allow yourself to deride decent men and to calumny generous souls, envious as you are of refined men of letters. You insult the wise, speak ill of your literary friends, and denigrate your benefactors—thereby exposing your lack of rectitude⁶⁹ and going beyond the boundary of your condition and your attitude. Your soul is vile, and you are an embarrassment for your species. You swear and promise without rhyme or reason and lie scandalously about the slightest as well as the most serious affairs. You seem to complain that you are denounced and that you are called a bastard! The poets have, moreover, already pinned down your like, the lowness of your actions, and the sordidness of your lineage:

To deride you? Your honor is much too thin to be hit,
 And praise is a genre too noble for you. You know it well!
 Come on! Your lack of honor frees you of my derision!
 Were you proud of it? Now you are despised.

“Bastard, son of a jerk whose father prostituted his mother and who was nothing but a poor creature who was only slapped for pleasure.⁷⁰ You aren't even a slave whom one can free to please God but rather someone whom one gets rid of and wishes to the devil's ass. To rail at you is to be forced to put up with you away from your misdeeds, even though you derive all of your power from your miserliness. To know you is a dishonor. To break with you is a blessing. Your name is an insult, your execution an offering of worship. No one would be able to count all of your vices, and the angels at your side have given up remov-

ing your sins. You find equals to the only God, torment his creatures with a thousand evils, and force on others your faults, and all blame your irreligion. You are attributed every stain, and you are hated by all[.]”

APPENDIX 5D. EXCERPTS FROM THE HADITH AL-ISTIQBAL⁷¹

Then he said to Ibn Abi Khurasan, the Shafīite jurist:

“Oh Sheikh, you have banished from your tongue our name, as you were in such a hurry to be alone or to give yourself up to some sort of frivolousness with your young rascals, while obstinately ignoring us and forgetting your brothers and your companions. Were it not for a past that you left behind and that I still honor and without the benevolence that I grant you and that you refuse to me, we would have much to say to each other once words of pleasure, now the expression of my ire. I appointed you *muhtasib*.⁷² I found you now busy enriching yourself. You used to have as your mission to work for the good. Now here, you are taking on all the worst vices.⁷³ One can be wrong and let oneself be taken advantage of. Hopes are sometimes dashed. . . . And as the poet of old said:

How many good councilors do you hear that you take for cheats,
 And how many men worthy of confidence are proven of little
 faith”

He then turned toward al-Shadiyashi and inquired: “Abu ‘Ali! how are you doing, and how were you doing?” The other answered: “Sire,

May I not exist if I remembered what I said.
 And more still, may I not exist if I remember what I never was!”

The Sahib called to him then:

“Out of my sight, vile insolent, rake, who wipes his ass against the wall after he shits! These lines were not chiseled by

your hand and are not born from your mind. They are by Muhammad b. 'Abdallah b. Tahir. The beginning of it is

You wrote to me asking how I was doing,
 What snubs and what concerns I underwent after you.
 May I not exist if I remember what I was,
 And more still, may I not exist if I remember what I was not!

“He recited this verse all the while veering his neck, rolling his eyes, dislocating his shoulders, liquefying himself while undulating, illustrating this line from the book of God: “*as whom the devil hath prostrated by his touch.*”⁷⁴

Then he continued:

“Oh, Abu 'Ali. Don't trust then another penis than the one that lies in your breeches. Nothing is worth the one that runs along your thighs! Were you to rely on another, he would only cheat you and discredit you, dishonor your private home, and rip your conscience.”⁷⁵

He turned finally toward a young page whose face was covered by its first down and with whom the Sahib was suspected of the worst turpitude. Moving around in every direction and twisting himself, he murmured to him: “Come over here, my sweet! How are you? And why have you given yourself such trouble? Your handsome face could not bear the least alteration. The sun, between its rise and its fall, would risk leaving a burn. A boy like you is destined for seclusion in beautiful adornments under a canopy and a screen to heal our deleterious states, to make our little gargoyle rise, and to quench with your charms our insatiable thirst.”

NOTES

1. This article is a shorter and gender-studies-oriented version of my Arab-studies-oriented article in French, “L'obscénité du vizir,” *Arabica* 53 (2006): 54–107.
2. David Leavitt, *Martin Bauman; or, A Sure Thing*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.
3. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Construire des significations queer,” *Les*

Etudes gay et lesbiennes, ed. D. Eribon (Paris: Centre George Pompidou, supplémentaires, 1998), 112.

4. See principally the studies published in the collection *Homoeroticism in Classical Arabic Literature*, ed. J. W. Wright and Everett Rowson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), and Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500–1800* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005).
5. Andras Hamori, *On the Art of Medieval Arabic Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974). See chapter 2, “The Poet as Ritual Clown.”
6. The term *halaqi* is more common in the Umayyad period, replaced by *baghgha'* in later periods, while *ma'bun* remains the standard term for passive sodomist.
7. Certain fundamental concepts, such as *jidd* and *hazl*, will be translated according to context throughout this article, particularly in the rendering of literary texts, for stylistic reasons. Despite the variation in translation, the Arabic term will be indicated in parentheses if it presents a justified conceptual interest.
8. In the sense of the pragmatic procedure that rhetoricians call paralipsis: “*figure macrostructurale selon laquelle le locuteur prétend qu'il ne dit pas ce qu'il dit*” (macrostructural figure of speech according to which the speaker maintains that what he says is not what he says), J. Mazaleyrat and G. Molinié, *Vocabulaire de la stylistique* (Paris: PUF, 1989), 273.
9. In ancient Greece, a debate rages between those who, like B. Sergent, see in the homosexuality evoked by classical texts a real fact of the Indo-European world and those who, like John Boswell, speak of a “cultural myth” that has been mistaken as real practice by historians. On this subject, see Didier Eribon, *Réflexions sur la question gay* (Paris: Fayard, 1999), 234.
10. A. Cheikh-Moussa, “L'Historien et la littérature Arabe médiévale” *Arabica* 43 (1996): 155.
11. The term *Arabs* is used here to mean speakers of Arabic and does not presuppose any ethnic group or any specific identity whatsoever.
12. Eribon, *Réflexions sur la question gay*, 225.
13. K. O. Müller in Germany at the beginning of the nineteenth century and J. Seymonds and W. Pater in England. See Eribon, *Réflexions sur la question gay*.

14. Ibrahim Mahmud, *Al-Mut'a al-Mahzura* (London: Riyad al-Rayyis, 2000). The principal methodological pitfall of the work lies in the naïveté of using a classical lexicon, which is never defined for the modern reader, thus leading to serious confusions. It should also be noted that the work was published in London. Riyad al-Rayyis, Dar al-Saqi (also London-based), and Manshurat al-Jamal/Al-Kamel Verlag (in Cologne) publish the majority of new works dealing with sexuality in the Arab Muslim domain. These publishers also bring out reprints of texts with patently homoerotic content. This is the extent of the parallel.
15. I do not imply that this society might be a monolithic object or that it is possible to talk about a sort of “monad” that would be typical of Arab Muslim society, unchanged in all places and in all times without any evolution in its representations. I refer the matter of the precautions and conclusions on the relevance of the constitution of these societies within the field of investigation of sexuality to Abdelwahab Boudhiba's introduction in *Sexuality in Islam*, trans. Alan Sherman (London: Routledge, 1985) (original work *La sexualité en Islam* published in Paris: PUF, 1975).
16. The original title of Muhammad b. Tawit al-Tanji's edition (1965, republished by Dar Sadir, Beirut, 1992), to which all citations in this article refer, is *Akhlaq al-Sahib wa-bn al-'Amid*. The title *Mathalib al-Wazirayn* is common and is the one used by the Ibrahim al-Kaylani, Damascus, edition.
17. This is hardly a phenomenon unique to Arab-Muslim societies. This is the case of ancient Greece (see K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* [London: Duckworth, 1978] and also of some less ancient or exotic cultures. G. Chauncey, in his *Gay New York* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), presents a study that “reconstructs the gay world that existed before the hetero-homosexual binarism was consolidated as an hegemonic sexual regime in American culture” (23): “Many men alternated between male and female partners without believing that interest in one precluded interest in the other, or that their occasional recourse to male sexual partners, in particular, indicated an abnormal, ‘homosexual’ or even ‘bisexual’ disposition, for they neither understood nor organized their sexual practices along a hetero-homosexual axis.” Of particular interest is chapter 3, which shows that the line of demarcation between normalcy and abnormality was drawn at the level of the roles and

- not of the sex of the partner. At most, the image of the Sicilian taken as “pansexual” in the New York of the 1930s might be reminiscent of a Mediterranean model. But the insult, as we will see, reveals an infinitely more common paradigm.
18. In French, one calls another *enculé* (literally, one who is sodomized) and not *enculeur* (one who sodomizes), just as in English one says *cocksucker* (though it would make no sense to say *cocksuckee*). The common insult *fuck you* actually means *I fuck you*. The humiliation of the one who is insulted can be passed onto the insulter without embarrassment by assuming a posture in which the insulter positions himself as the active sexual partner in a possibly homosexual intercourse. Even if the proposition remains purely rhetorical, it is not at all perceived as compromising. The threat or promise of penetration is understood solely as a bellicose metaphor when the receiver is of the same sex.
 19. Eribon, *Réflexions sur la question gay*. Eribon entitles the first part of his work “Un monde d'injures” (A world of insults), underlining the powerful contribution of the insult in the establishment of limits of normalcy that are internalized by the subject from the time of childhood and that force homosexuals to define themselves as the object of insult. This chapter speculates in what measure the nature of the *hija'* in poetry and of the *thalb* in prose similarly contributes to the internalization of a norm.
 20. The reign of Amir 'Adud al-Dawla (977–983) was followed by that of his son, Samsam al-Dawla, who reigned from 983 to 987, and it was under Samsam's reign that Ibn Sa'dan was vizier. The circumstances of this commission are related in the fourth night of the *al-Imta' wa-l-Mu'anasa* by Tawhidi.
 21. al-Tanji, *Akhlaq*, 150.
 22. *Ibid.*, 228.
 23. *Ibid.*, 74.
 24. al-Tha'alibi, *Tatimmat al-Yatima*, ed. Mufid Muhammad Qamiha (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1983), 3:225 (originally published in 1947).
 25. Edition Muhammad Hasan al Yasin (Bagdad: Maktabat al-Nahda, 1965). The works of the *diwan* are designated here by their number; those of the *mustadrak al-diwan* by their number preceded by *m*.
 26. *Ibid.*, works 10, 29, 51, 52, 53, m21, m22, m36, m42, m43, m65,

- m102, m103, m104, m110, m139, m140, m141, m159, m160, m182, m183, m242, m245.
27. Sahib, *Mustadrak al-diwan*, m36, 99.
 28. Traditional erotic section placed at the beginning of long praise odes.
 29. Sahib *Mustadrak al-diwan*, m180, m182, m183, m245.
 30. Ibid.
 31. al-Tha'alibi, *Yatima*, 1:116.
 32. Ibid., 2:260.
 33. Ibid., 2:267.
 34. G. J. Van Gelder, *The Bad and the Ugly: Attitudes towards Invective Poetry (Hija') in Classical Arabic Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 11.
 35. Ibn al-Mu'tazz, *Tabaqat al-shu'ara'*, ed. Abd al-Sattar Ahmed Farraj (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1968), 387. Ibn al-Mu'tazz also denies that Abu Nuwas was a *luti*, which does little for his credibility. But the main point is that the defense of Jahshawayh demands the transformation of *ubna* into *liwat*.
 36. Ibid., 374.
 37. G. J. Van Gelder poses this question when bringing up the *Akhlaq al-Wazirayn* in his chapter dedicated to "inconsistencies East and West": "His masterpiece of invective, *Mathalib* (or *Akhlaq al-Wazirayn*—a book so intensely virulent that the very possession of a copy was thought to attract misfortune—is an inextricable mixture of literary and 'metaliterary' or critical discourse; its introduction is a long justification and apology for *hija'*. In the course of it, the grossest obscenities in poetry or prose are quoted: yet among the things that the two viziers are blamed for is their love of obscenities and vilification." Van Gelder, *The Bad and the Ugly*, 80.
 38. Everett K. Rowson judges in "The Categorization of Gender and Sexual Irregularity in Medieval Arabic Vice Lists," in *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, ed. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (New York: Routledge, 1991), 71: "rarely is the term *ubna* applied to a *mukhannath* and it would appear that the gender inversion of the latter rationalized a sexual behavioral pattern that in conventionally gendered males (who were, we may be sure, usually married) was considered pathological." If this judgment can be defended for the seventh century, I am little convinced by its pertinence for the tenth century. If *ubna* (private attitude) does not imply *takhannuth* (public attitude), the opposite is, on the contrary, evident for our author and the speakers he brings up.
 39. Tawhidi, *Akhlaq*, 75.
 40. Ibid.
 41. This is the reception of Ibn 'Abbad, returning from a voyage, by the notables of Rayy. It is a chance for him to crucify one of them by way of a personalized diatribe of extreme arrogance. Tawhidi, *Akhlaq*, 94–104.
 42. Ibid.
 43. Ibid., 110.
 44. Ibid.
 45. Ibid., 142–72.
 46. Ibid., 144.
 47. Ibid., 148.
 48. m. 240/855. *Diwan*, ed. Muhammad Husayn al-A'raji (Köln: Manshurat al-Jamal, 1997).
 49. Tawhidi, *Akhlaq*, 161.
 50. Ibid., 58.
 51. Ibid., 373–4.
 52. Ibid.
 53. One grandson named 'Abbad is mentioned in a poem. See al-A'raji, *Diwan* m237, p. 294.
 54. Rowson acknowledges this ambiguity but refuses to draw the conclusion in "The Categorization of Gender": "And according to one anecdote, a man known for *liwat* 'got the disease' when he became older, and explained, "We used to play with spears, but when they broke, we started playing with shields" (yet again the same military metaphor). Such statements seem to be the closest the tradition comes to any suggestion that choice of a male partner on the basis of his sex might transcend considerations of behavior role, although this is probably an overreading" (65). The same military metaphor can be observed in the verse already cited from the *Akhlaq*.
 55. In David M. Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 104–37, particularly 134–5.
 56. Tawhidi, *Akhlaq*, 55–60.
 57. A double deformation of Quranic verse (7,117) and (84,23), the

- first alluding to Moses's stick "swallowing" and the *sticks* changed into magicians' *snakes* (see Tabari's *tafsir*).
58. There is a pun between *ʿirq al-nisa* (the vein of women) and *ʿirq al-nasa* (sciatic nerve). Ibn al-Mukarram is vilified as a catamite in the veins of whom female blood flows and who got sciatica out of his ill habit.
 59. Perversion with obscene references to the Quranic verse (54,45).
 60. The expression *umm al-fulk*, invented by Abu al-ʿAynaʿ, is not found in Arabic literature and doesn't seem to have been understood as a proper noun. We might choose to understand its obscene meaning—*fulk*, referring to any globular body, and the adjective *falk*, that of rounded buttocks.
 61. Pun: *Jaʿfar* is both a proper name and a common one, meaning "brook" or "rivulet" (of generosity).
 62. The grandfather of Abu al-ʿAynaʿ was a protégé, the Abbasid caliph Abu Jaʿfar al-Mansur, and the letter asserts this noble parentage.
 63. Tawhidi, *Akblaq*, 61–62.
 64. This fragment does not correspond to any other text published by al-Jahiz.
 65. The receiver of anal penetration is a catamite, while the active partner is a sodomite.
 66. Tawhidi, *Akblaq*, 63–65.
 67. Libertine poet (d. 869). It is quite probable that such outrageously insulting epistles are highly codified exercises in style.
 68. Ibn al-Mukarram means literally "son of the honorable."
 69. *Jawr* does not mean here "injustice" but "wandering off the straight path."
 70. The figure of the *safʿan* is recurrent in classical literature. This is a category of court jesters whose job it was to receive humiliating blows to the neck. Ibn al-Nadim's *Fibrist* even points out the existence of a *Kitab al-Safaʿina* by al-Katanji.
 71. Tawhidi, *Akblaq*, 102–04.
 72. Chief of police or provost of the Islamic city.
 73. Play on words on the "the order of the good and the prohibition of the evil," a stereotypical formula describing the function of the *muhtasib*.
 74. Quran (2,275), Pickthall translation. The verse designates the user who is thus treated on judgment day.

75. "*fadaha khanak wa-manak.*" *Khan* is a *tawriya* (pun), meaning "house" or "female sex organ." *Manak* can be used for *maʿnak* (noun) or *maʿanak* (verb)—"to wound the stomach around the navel." One also finds the verb *mana* (to dig a ditch). The meaning is the same. . . .