

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

THE PORTRAYAL AND TRANSLATION OF LESBIAN AND
LESBIAN-LIKE DESIRE IN THE TENTH CENTURY
JAWĀMI'AL-LADHDHA

by
RIWA JAMIL ROUKOZ

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: The Portrayal and Translation of Lesbian and Lesbian-like Desire in the Tenth Century *Jawāmi‘ al-Ladhdha*

Encompassing physiognomic, philosophical and poetic anecdotes, *adab* literature is characterized by its informative and entertaining appeal on sexual pleasures and sexual health matters, with ample Arabo-Islamic anthologies compiled from Arabic, Greek, Persian and Sanskrit sources. One of the most prominent and earliest surviving Arabic erotic anthologies from the late tenth century is *Jawāmi‘ al-Ladhdha* by ‘Ali Ibn Naṣr al-Kātib, where the author dedicates a chapter concerned with lesbian and lesbian-like desire. In this thesis, I study the portrayal of lesbianism in the twenty-first century Arabic edition by Dr. ‘Abdallah ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-Sudāni, alongside the only extant English translation *The Encyclopedia of Pleasure* by ‘Adnān Jarkas and Ṣalāḥ addin Khawwam published in the late twentieth century.

This thesis examines the depictions of lesbian and lesbian-like women across the anthology and in the chapter dedicated to lesbianism, focusing on *mujūn* verses associated with lesbian speakers, some unknown and others named lesbian figures, to bring out the rhetoric of the humor and obscene figurative language and imagery within the author’s teasing style. Alongside the play of the verses, I approach the depicted lesbian and lesbian-like women as a literary emotional community to outline the affective experiences accompanying the representation of lesbian pleasure. Such portrayal is set in contrast with the English translation where the lesbian women’s pleasures are minimized by concise prose narration lacking in humor or rhetorical features, and including an overarching emotion that flattens the nuances of lesbian-like affective possibilities. These motivated translation choices contribute in the sustenance of ignorance around premodern Arabo-Islamic lesbianisms, and in response, I provide my own translation of certain verses, maintaining repetitions and rhetorical elements.

Standing at the juxtaposition of multiple fields namely as queer studies, Middle Eastern studies and translation studies, the intersectional reading of the two versions tackles the gaps of scholarship which replicates essentialist, universalizing or Orientalist discourses of lesbianism. Looking at the fluidity of lesbian-like desires in their literary representation in *Jawāmi‘*, the research expands on the discourse of premodern Arabo-Islamic queer desires among woman towards enriching the history of sexuality.

KEYWORDS: lesbian desire; erotic literature; premodern Arabo-Islamic world; translation; queer studies

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	1
ABSTRACT.....	2
INTRODUCTION	5
A. Encountering <i>Jawāmi‘ al-Ladhdha</i>	6
B. The Literature on Arabo-Islamic Sexualities.....	10
C. The Significance of Terminology	15
D. Absences, Exclusions and the Production of Ignorance	22
1. The Scholarly Gap in Writing Premodern Desires	25
2. The Trouble with Violence in Archival Writing and Translation	29
3. On (Not) Knowing and the Limits of Knowledge	34
E. Chapter Overview	37
THE FRAMING OF LESBIANISM IN TRANSLATION AND ACROSS THE EDITION	41
A. Untranslatability as a Methodological Tool.....	42
1. Reflecting on the Translator’s Note.....	46
2. The Intrusions of the Translators	50
3. My Translation Approach.....	53
B. The Importance of Sex and Lesbian-Like Pleasure Across <i>Jawāmi‘</i>	55
1. The Significance of Sex and Kinds of Lovers	56
2. References to Lesbian and Lesbian-like Sex in the Arabic Chapters	62
3. The ‘Willful Ignorance’ of Translation	65
C. Conclusion	68

**THE PLAY AND HUMOR OF *MUJŪN* VERSES IN THE
CHAPTER ON LESBIANISM..... 70**

A. The First Teasing Act 72

 1. The Opening Paragraph 73

 2. The Prestige and Desires of Layla the Lesbian-like Woman..... 77

B. Obscene Humor and its Rhetoric 82

 1. The Trope of Phallic Revulsion 83

 2. Boasting About Phallic Pleasure..... 88

C. The Utmost Pleasures of Lesbian Sex 91

 1. The Poetics of Movement and Sound in *Jawāmi‘* 92

 2. Unclimactic Climaxing in the English Translation..... 97

D. Conclusion 99

**THE LITERARY EMOTIONAL COMMUNITY OF LESBIAN
AND LESBIAN-LIKE WOMEN 102**

A. The Ambivalent Witty Lesbians of the Arabic Edition 108

 1. Contempt for the Undesirable..... 109

 2. Anxieties of Fornication 114

 3. Yearning Vulvas 118

B. The Fearful Emotional Community of the English Translation 121

 1. Lesbianism as a Logical Alternative..... 122

 2. The Modesty of Lesbian Pleasure..... 124

C. Conclusion 127

CONCLUSION 129

BIBLIOGRAPHY 133

INTRODUCTION

قال بو العنيس: وقال السحاقات: نحن معشرُ السحاقاتِ تجتمع الواحدة منّا مع الناعمة الشَّكْلة، البيضاء الغنجة الشَّطبية الرطّبة، البضة الغضة التي كأنها الجانّ أو قضيب الخيزران بثغر كالأقحوان وذوائب كالأرسان وخدّ كشقائق النُعمان أو تفّاح لبنان وثدي كالرّمان وبطنٍ بأربعة أعكان، وحر كأنه بيتُ النّار [...] (Ibn Naṣr 185)

Abū al-‘Anbas said: And the lesbian women said: We, lesbians, when one woman joins another, the soft-faced, the white and the coquettish, the tall and gracious, the supple and plump, who resembles a serpent or the rod of a bamboo, with a mouth like a chrysanthemum, with forelocks like halters, a cheek like a poppy or an apple of Lebanon, with breasts like pomegranates, with a belly of four folds, and a vulva as though it were a house of fire [...]¹

This dissertation looks at the representation of lesbianism in the tenth century erotic anthology *Jawāmi‘ al-Ladhdha* by ‘Ali Ibn Naṣr al-Kātib; comparatively studying an Arabic edition by Dr. ‘Abdallah ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-Sudāni published in 2019 and the only extant English translation *The Encyclopedia of Pleasure* by ‘Adnān Jarkas and Ṣalāḥ addīn Khawwam published in 1977. I examine the role of poetry and humor in the portrayal of lesbian and lesbian-like women and the emotions that comprised lesbian pleasure, in parallel with depictions of the view of lesbianism in the translation, the attitude and emotions of lesbian women both in the anecdotes of the chapter on lesbianism and across the anthology’s chapters. The research analyzes the erotic anthologies of the *adab* literature as to what they can offer from views and representations of premodern Arabo-Islamic sex and sexuality, making visible a literary corpus that enriches the history and discourses of sexuality, in feminist and queer studies today. The close reading of *Jawāmi‘ al-Ladhdha*’s style invites for a study of

¹ Throughout the thesis, I provide my own translations directly beneath the quoted Arabic verse or Arabic scholarly excerpt. All English quotations, unless annotated by a footnote or followed by an in-text citation of the relevant source, are translations I have authored.

humor as a rhetorical element of obscene poetry, and highlights *mujūn* poetry as a valuable site for understanding the fluidity of sexual pleasures and the range of possibilities for sexual arrangements. As a means of approaching the literary presentation of intimacies, reading emotions historically is a way to comprehend sex and pleasure as part of larger affective experiences. Translation approaches and certain kinds of scholarly writing can limit the understanding of lesbian and lesbian-like desires, obscure their complexities and efface nuances, lacking in critical depiction of pleasure, which produces and sustains ignorance on the complexities of premodern Arabo-Islamic lesbian desires.

The following introductory chapter breaks down the early encounter with the book, its history and the process in which the versions were acquired for this research. I provide a relevant survey of the English-language scholarship on Arabo-Islamic sexualities to situate my study of lesbianism, before propounding a discussion of the terminology of sex and sexuality, delineating the terms I will use in the course of the work. Then, I elaborate on the question of exclusions, erasures, gaps and absences produced and sustained in particular forms of scholarship and translation, highlighting the importance of knowledge and the coming-to-terms with its limitations, and ending with the overview of the chapters to come.

A. Encountering *Jawāmi‘ al-Ladhdha*

Existing in many references, *Jawāmi‘ al-Ladhdha* is the oldest surviving erotic anthology, written in the tenth century with influences and citations from Greek, Persian and Sanskrit literary and medical sources as well as earlier Arabic works, a trait typical of *adab* literature. With the exception of this anthology that remains unmentioned in Ibn

al-Nadīm’s *Fihrist*, the author Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Ibn Naṣr al-Kātib is cited to have written several books (*Female Sexuality* 6) which take part of ‘ilm al-bāh or the “science of coitus” and pertain to *adab* literature. Similar to his precedents, *Jawāmi‘* explicitly addresses the *ẓarīf*² reader. The readership is articulated in the introduction to the anthology and is a point of conversation for scholars engaging with the book, and as such, the *ẓarīf* can be considered the primary or targeted reader, however with the turn of the tenth century and the expansion of literary production, the question of its readership may be contested to be more popular than intended. Kurzyniec suggests that “*kutub al-bāh* before *Jawāmi‘ al-ladhdha* are decidedly different from those after it”, a book he considers to be “the longest and most authoritative work on *bāh* in the tradition” (Kurzyniec 130), particularly observing the pre-tenth century erotic works as rather abstract and theoretical than centering pleasure and amusement. From his perspective, *Jawāmi‘* is a unity of sources and is at once invested in characterizing, listing and categorizing divisions, mixing literary with medical texts.

As for its context of writing, Myrne proposes that “there are good grounds for assuming that the work was composed in Baghdad under Būyid rule, that is from the middle of the fourth/ tenth century to the beginning of fifth/eleventh century, when other similarly voluminous and well-organized works were composed in Arabic.”

(*Organizing, Presenting, and Reading Sexual Knowledge* 184) The work is made up of

² According to Montgomery’s entry in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, the *ẓarīf* is “as a type of *adīb*, indeed *tazarruf* is viewed as an intensification of certain features, intellectual, literary, social, and personal, that are held to characterise the man of *adab*”, denoting the “literary life a person endowed with *Ẓarf* “elegance”, “refinement”, also translatable as “man of the world”, “dandy”, or, in the plural, “refined people”” (Montgomery). I use the term “refined man” in reference to *ẓarīf*, but mostly choose to maintain the word in transliteration as it includes attitudes and features strongly linked to the Arabic term, and even the term, although it tackles the class dimension, it doesn’t encompass the literary significations of the Arabic *Ẓarf*.

forty-three chapters, covering topics ranging from physiognomy, to the virtues of the penis and the vagina, sexual etiquette, drugs and other remedies, creating a wide-ranging and comprehensive approach to all matters of sex between men and women, two men and two women. Myrne attributes the particularity of *Jawāmi*'s content to the "relatively tolerant and cosmopolitan intellectual environment" referring to the Būyid's "sometime libertine outlook and eclectic attitude to religion." (*Female Sexuality* 4)

Adab literature inevitably responded to the environment of writing, and it would not include any subjects and approaches that did not fall in line with the accepted values of the time and the author-compiler who is cognizant of his audience (El-Cheikh). An anthology such *Jawāmi*' exhibits the social and cultural expectations of pleasure as well as the constructs and gender ideologies of the Abbāsīd period and for this reason, El-Cheikh identifies such literary works as "prescriptive".

My position as a graduate student limited my ability to acquire manuscripts and editions of the anthology or visit any of the libraries or archives where many copies are located, and the lockdown enforced by the COVID-19 pandemic was yet another impediment. Most of the information on the copies and translations of the anthology were only possible due to scholarly generosity. It is safe to say that the archival process took shape in conversations and virtual meeting spaces and the question of access was always in the backdrop of each discussion. The gathering of sources necessitated work that was network-based, situated in informal verbal exchanges, to inquire about individual scholars that have worked or have accessed any of the primary sources. This disorderly and frustrating process is often concealed in academic research, especially scholarship on premodern erotic works, as locating and accessing such texts is concisely presented as a reference at the end of an essay, while the reality often shows a cycle of

inheritance and informal exchanges and circulation. The ownership of these works may also be a result of specific institutional affiliation or research funding, all of which is not always possible for early career scholars or students. Before delving into the research, I found it essential to detail the process leading to the versions of the book, as the problem of accessibility frames the thesis, and the importance of anecdotes and storytelling that the project aims to bring about aligns with the many conversations that made up its very fabric.

My primary encounter with versions of the anthology was itself complex. When I grew interested in studying the book, I was able to obtain my primary sources from other scholars, passing down their own copies. Early on in the process, I received first and foremost a digitized manuscript copy of MS Aya Sofya 3836 and the English translation. From surveying the references to *Jawāmi* ‘ in other scholars’ work, namely Pernilla Myrne and Jeremy Kurzyniec, there are six extant manuscripts; MS Chester Beatty ar4635; MS Ṭibb ‘Arabi 556; MS UCLA 83, Los Angeles, MS Turhan V Sultan 259, Istanbul, MS Fatih 3729; MS Tebyan 1387, and three partial manuscripts; MS Aya Sofya 3836; MS Aya Sofya 3837; MS L ‘Arabī 9435.³ The majority of manuscripts remained inaccessible with my limited resources. As for the English translation called *The Encyclopedia of Pleasure* by ‘Adnān Jarkas and Ṣalāḥ addin Khawwam, it was published in 1977 by the Aleppo Publishing Press in Toronto, an anonymous publishing press that only appears to have published this work and no other evidence of it remains. The translators list three manuscripts located in Istanbul in their introduction, which were their sources for translation⁴. In her work, Myrne also hints at the translation as an

³ For the detailed list of manuscripts, see *Organizing 183*.

⁴ According to their preface, the translation’s three manuscript sources are: MS Aya Sofya 3836, MS Aya Sofya 3837 and MS Fatih 3729.

“unscholarly but useful translation of the whole compendium (although with omissions and abbreviations).” (*Organizing* 183) For many months, I only read the English translation, alongside secondary sources, until I heard of the edition that was available in a bookshop in Beirut. The Arabic edition was published by Dār al-Rāfidain in Beirut in September 2019, a printing and publishing press with branches in Beirut and Baghdad. There is little knowledge about the editor Dr. ‘Abdallah ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-Sudāni, except in the introduction, where al-Sudāni talks about encountering two copies in Shāri‘ al-Mutanabbi in Baghdad, specifically two printed copies that “fell into his hands”, leading him to work on an edition of the book⁵. For the purpose of the research, I chose to study this Arabic edition and the English translation, interpreting them as 20th and 21st century versions of the 10th century *Jawāmi‘*, while providing my own translations of the Arabic edition’s verses to support my translation observations.

B. The Literature on Arabo-Islamic Sexualities

While the thesis analyzes the portrayal of premodern Arabo-Islamic lesbian and lesbian-like desires, the discussions of sexualities are especially alive in contemporary scholarship of the last few decades. That sex and desires took up a wide interest in 10th century *adab* writing is a topic that enriches sexuality discourses today. My research is an extension of the scholarship that seeks to center female experiences of pleasure and desires among women, by drawing on the literary representation of premodern Arabo-Islamic sexualities as a way of imagining desires prior to the conceptualizations and preoccupations of contemporary societies and scholarship. My work builds on previous

⁵ The edition is based on a modern copy of MS Aya Sofya 3836 and MS Aya Sofya 3837 found in Baghdad, a second copy located in Paris of the first part of MS Chester Beatty 4635, and a third copy of MS Tibb ‘Arabi 556 in Cairo.

scholarship that has established sexuality as a non-exclusively Western and modern notion of desires, as well as the literature that has explored historical representations of desires as a means of providing alternative tools, readings and approaches to sexual pleasure and desire among women.

The scholarship on Arabo-Islamic sexualities has only been on the rise in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. More recently, the question of modernity has been at the center of sexuality discourses, the tensions with secularism and liberalism in the understanding of post-colonial states of the Arab region vis-à-vis the construction and negotiations of sexual rights and sexual identities, in, around and against the questions emerging from identity politics. Looking at earlier scholarship engaging with sexuality, predominantly that centered on premodern Arabo-Islamic contexts, I point to some trends in English-language scholarship on sexuality, sources that have constituted a basis for later writing. It is by no means a comprehensive survey of the literature, such as the project that Leslie Peirce for instance provides more as a historical chronology of the scholarship on sexualities, rather relevant scholars whose work has informed my research and may be useful in advancing further work on premodern Arabo-Islamic lesbian love and desires. The sources also do not center studies of premodern gender as a valuable and adjacent field with a much more voluminous literature than that concentrated more focally on premodern sex and sexuality.

While the discourses of sexuality that I primarily attend to are those taking place in English-language academic scholarship, they are also subjects of interest of other-language academic discourses, Arabic, French, Spanish, German, and other. The questions of sexuality identities and desires significantly make up contemporary debates in Arabic-speaking regional feminist and queer organizations and Arabic-language

queer-feminist media platforms, where the conversation is dynamically growing towards locating specific countries of the Arab region with the particularities of their political, legal and socio-cultural contexts in the global discourse of identity politics. The thesis partly incorporates Arabic-language public-facing sources that add and expand on English-language scholarly discourses on Arabo-Islamic sexualities, often more closed and exclusive by virtue of academic institutional structures.

The late 90s witnessed an emergence of scholars who attempted to bridge between understandings of sex and sexuality within religion and medicine, experimenting with the interpretation of the Qur'an such as Tunisian sociologist Abdelwahab Bouhdiba in *Sexuality in Islam* providing what he considers as the sacred presentation of sexuality. On premodern medical views of homoerotic sex Franz Rosenthal's *Society and the Sexes in Medieval Islam* was one of the earliest works on desires between men, and Basim Musallam's *Sex and Society in Islam: Birth Control before the Nineteenth Century* that elaborated on contraceptive methods within premodern conceptions of sex. Everett Rowson further distinguished between the male roles pertaining to homoerotic relationships, the non-irregularity of such desires, in much of his work, including an entry in the *Encyclopedia of Erotic literature* "Arabic: Middle Ages to Nineteenth Century" on Arabic erotica and the anthology *Homoeroticism in Classic Arabic Literature* which he edited alongside J.W. Wright Jr. Certainly, during the same period, Edward Said wrote his infamous work *Orientalism* which propounded on the Western gaze to the sexualized Eastern other, a book that rippled across much of the literature published for the decades to come.

In the early 2000s, the work of Joseph Masad *Re-orienting desire: The Gay International and the Arab world* that responded to Said in certain ways, forged a shift

in the discourse of sexuality, targeting the universalization of gay rights and the gay rights movement's appropriation from the United States in the Arab region. Following the publication of his work, a wave of literature emerged presenting sharp critiques, namely Ghassan Makarem's "We are Not Agents of the West" who points to Masaad's assumption of Arab sexualities as Arab male desires and sexualities, and its essentializing and classist approach to Arab gay activists as agents to the West. Responding to the "Gay International", Sarah Hamdan uses the theory of sexual difference and departs from the reading of shame in *Bareed Mista3jil* to read the legitimacy of lesbian desires outside Western complicity. The scholarly discourse engaged further with the question of modern categories of sexualities, distinguishing them from Western conceptions, and in response, the work of the likes of Khaled el-Rouayheb attracted interest as he traced the roles previously advanced by Rowson pertaining to sexual intercourse between men in the Ottoman empire in *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1600-1800*. Rouayheb's book outlined a basis and methodology to address premodern non-heterosexual male desires away from the current categories and understandings of sexualities. During the same years, Afsaneh Najmabadi in "Beyond the Americas: Are Gender and Sexuality Useful Categories of Analysis?" questioned the usefulness of the modern categories for non-Western societies. Scholars like Kecia Ali analyzed the tensions with contemporary Muslim anxieties related to sex, divorce, and homosexuality among others, in *Sexual Ethics and Islam* referring to classical works of Islamic jurisprudence, while Kathryn Babayan and Afsaneh Najmadi's anthology *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations Across Temporal Geographies of Desire* conversed with notions of sexuality across premodern and contemporary contexts to ponder different religious, temporal and political

atmospheres of desires. In terms of same-sex desires, the literature on lesbianism was limited to male scholars for the most part invested in the motivations behind lesbian desires, yet a few female scholars engaged with premodern lesbian love and sex such as Fedwa-Malti Douglas's early contribution "Tribadism/Lesbianism and the Sexualized Body in Medieval Arabo-Islamic Narratives" to the anthology *Same Sex Love and Desire among Women in the Middle Ages*. Sahar Amer more thoroughly addressed lesbian desires in Arabic literature in her book *Crossing Borders: Love between Women in Medieval French and Arabic Literatures* offering a literary reading of medieval lesbian desires in a comparative framework, as well as later work centering medieval Arab lesbian women in terminology and representation. Samar Habib, in *Female Homosexuality in the Middle East: Histories and Representations*, looks at premodern Arabic erotic writing to motivate contemporary agendas on lesbianism.

The second decade of the 21st century moved towards substantiating legal, medical and literary sources on premodern sexualities to formulate the specificities of these desires, beyond modern tensions and towards a historicized Arabo-Islamic conceptualization of sex and sexuality. In her book *Disability in the Ottoman Arab World*, Sara Scalenghe dedicates a part to "Intersex" discussing the understanding of intersex individuals in the legal Islamic juridical system of the Ottoman Empire. Hina Azam in her work *Sexual Violation in Islamic law: Substance, Evidence, and Procedure* studies the legal processes undertaken towards sexual violations. On the legal premodern definitions of same-sex desires, Sara Omar details the multiple Islamic schools' categorization of offenses and relative punishments in dealing with fornication, sodomy and tribadism in her work "From Semantics to Normative Law: Perceptions of Liwāt (Sodomy) and Sihāq (Tribadism) in Islamic Jurisprudence (8th-15th Century

CE)". And evidently, Pernilla Myrne's work "Of Ladies and Lesbians and Books on Women from the Third/Ninth and Fourth/Tenth Centuries" and her later book *Female Sexuality in the Early Medieval Islamic World Gender and Sex in Arabic Literature* provides a historical analysis of the tenth century context and literary presentation of lesbian women in *adab* writing.

In the most recent years, the literature on Arabo-Islamic same-sex love and desire continues to grow, though that on male relationships outnumbers the work on relationships among women, for reasons of archival scarcity on sources centering female desires, the extensive past scholarship on male desires that renders further literature more feasible and accessible, among other questions related to scholarly exclusions, absences and availability further broached in the coming sections.

C. The Significance of Terminology

The question of sexuality terminology has been a principal and ongoing debate in queer and Middle Eastern studies, in English-language scholarship which is the main focus of this section, and increasingly in Arabic-language media and activist circles. Some scholars writing about Islamicate societies have coined terms that more literally translate the Arabic words used in original manuscripts, while others have opted for modern categorizations for the purpose of an inclusive and relevant discussion to the modern reader. With the lack of critical sources, the conversation on terminology must recur, to explain the negotiations behind the choice of terms. As per Halberstam, it is necessary to look into expressions that are both history-focused and aware of patriarchal continuities.

Primarily, as the subject of this research revolves around desires between women, the term “lesbian” is an initial point of contestation. In the essay “‘Lesbian-Like’ and the Social History of Lesbianisms”, Judith Bennett outlines the linguistic and social use of the word lesbian, its importance and signification in discussing medieval queer desire and coins the term “lesbian-like” that allows for a more expansive and wide-ranging approach to the fluidity of lesbianisms and lesbian-like desires in the medieval literature on sexualities in the European Middle Ages. By lesbian-like, Bennett designates “women whose lives might have particularly offered opportunities for same-sex love; women who resisted norms of feminine behavior based on heterosexual marriage; women who lived in circumstances that allowed them to nurture and support other women” (“*Lesbian Like*” 9-10). Sahar Amer, in turn, in her essay “Medieval Arab Lesbians and Lesbian-Like Women” further draws on Bennett’s useful terminological discussion and demonstrates how the “lesbian-like” term is especially helpful and applicable to discussions of lesbian-like desire in the Islamicate medieval context. Myrne also endorses the usage of “lesbian” in her book *Female Sexuality*, emphasizing that the expressed desires included detailed descriptions of beauty and pleasure, instead of an isolated interest in the act of rubbing.

Rather than using the term lesbian, Fedwa Malti-Douglas in "Tribadism/Lesbianism and the Sexualized Body in Medieval Arabo-Islamic Narratives" tackles the term “tribadism” in reference to the Arabic *saḥq*, as it denotes the act itself rather than a categorical identity. Samar Habib in her book *Female Homosexualities* converses with Malti-Douglas’s terminological distinction and herself adopts the tribade and lesbian differentiation in her translation-based approach to Aḥmad al-Tifāshī’s book. In fact, Habib uses her own literal variation of the term

tribade, in translating the Tifāshī chapter on lesbianism, which is the word “grinder”, for its cultural associations with the grinding of saffron, or the recent English slang term “grinding” as a description of lesbian intercourse.

Habib goes as far as speaking of a bisexual identity that took shape in the premodern period, proposing:

we should not be discouraged from labeling them as such, simply for fear of anachronism, because by following such a line of thought, which has a short history in itself, we are falling into another trap — that of metonyms; of confusing things in themselves with the signifiers that are allocated to them periodically. At any rate, other medieval references to the subject make a clear distinction between “women who enjoy grinding and do not reject men” and those who will only be with female lovers, demonstrating that a distinction between “bisexual” and “lesbian” women was known. (Habib 75)

The latter distinction does not stand for *Jawāmi‘ al-Ladhdha*’s chapter, and the case is similar for many later erotic texts containing references to lesbianism, because women’s desires encompassed a greater variety than the abovementioned binary. Some women described in the chapter by Ibn Naṣr were said to have engaged in intercourse with women for the length of their lives until they had the chance to couple with a man. The opposite is another consideration and more anecdotes express vague responses such as loving a man while refusing intercourse with him, or loving both man and woman at once. In all the cases presented in the chapter, the author does not present any attitudes as superior to another, or fixated on a certain set of desires; his chapter highlights the range of differences in attitudes and sexual preferences. Just as the concept of lesbianism did not exist as an orientation, the bisexual categorization is even further far-fetched, especially that it enforces the idea of premodern lesbians as only possibly attracted to one female lover without any potential arrangements around such a relationship. The anachronism lies in assuming that, for instance, a woman who engages in sex with a female lover while being married to a man, has a mutual sexual and

romantic desire for both partners. While it may be true in certain cases, the literary and historical sources do not permit for a standardization of these desires as one and the same among women in relationships outside of their marriages or in parallel with them.

Another elaborate discussion of such terms is presented in the introduction to *Islamicate Sexualities*, where the main terms denoting sexual practices and expressions of sexualities are disputed and etymologically questioned, such as “same-sex”, “lesbian”, “homoerotic” among others. The discussion tackles most available and used terms, underlining the questions and challenging any choice to be taken in that regard; in other words, they pose various questions without highlighting which set of terms are more historically accurate, nor suggesting scholarly alternatives. However, it prompts the considerations of both relevancies and drawbacks of different English terms for translating premodern Arabo-Islamic queer desires.

As for the terms employed throughout the paper, I subscribe to Amer’s proposition of lesbian and lesbian-like, firstly, because it confirms the sameness of some experiences that can be discussed alongside what is today considered as lesbianism, and secondly, it distinguishes the diverse premodern arrangements around lesbianism from the contemporarily rigid sexual identity through the word “lesbian-like”. This decision is motivated by the problem of accessibility and the aim to bring such texts to light rather than further making their translations or references to their content as exceptional in ways that excludes them from queer discourses today. Premodern lesbian women have often been dismissed, overlooked or misread in literary and academic spaces, and one possible suggestion of incorporating premodern queer desires into feminist memory, queer thought and archives is to avoid the creation of a

separate label that sets them on a shelf so distanced from any modern preoccupations.

At the same time, simply using lesbian without discussing its implications and

limitations is not sufficient as Bennett points out. The term lesbian-like allows us to:

expand lesbian history beyond its narrow and quite unworkable focus on women who engaged in certifiable same-sex genital contact (a certification hard to achieve even for many contemporary women), and to incorporate into lesbian history women who, regardless of their sexual pleasures, lived in ways that offer certain affinities with modern lesbians. In so doing, we might incorporate into lesbian history sexual rebels, gender rebels, marriage-resisters, cross-dressers, singlewomen ("*Lesbian Like*" 14).

For this reason, an expansive term such as lesbian-like, helps bind the range of female desires and arrangements made around them, capturing the resemblances to lesbian conceptualizations and the distinctions at once. I also use the word "lesbianism" as the umbrella term for lesbian and lesbian-like intimacies, desires, attitudes, not only erotic, but romantic and affective as well.

Two other adjacent terms I will refrain from using are same-sex and female-female, the first for its reinforcement of the binary of genders, and the second for the same principles as "lesbian" alone to denote experiences involving strictly two women. To instantiate the shortcomings of these terms, the initial anecdote of *Jawāmi*'s chapter on lesbianism about Layla, a reputable woman who engaged in lesbian-like sex with men, inviting *ghulām* (beardless youth) to grind against their anuses, and should they refuse her orders, she would threaten to stab them with a knife. This intriguing anecdote reflects a woman's desire for a specific kind of sex, that does involve genital rubbing though particularly with young men. Such an anecdote could possibly be evincing a certain heterosexual desire, as it involves male partners exclusively, however it appears as an opening anecdote to the chapter on lesbianism and the text clearly frames Layla as a lesbian-like woman.

Instead, I use the term “queer”, to denote desires that are non-normative, knowing that the term itself was not present or understood as such in the premodern Islamicate period. Through this choice, my aim is not to argue that queerness as it is conceived today had an equivalent Arabic concept, as a matter of fact, the term is often transliterated in contemporary discussions to "كوير/اي" and remains a question of linguistic debate. In the *Gender Dictionary* published by Lebanon Support on traveling concepts and their usages specifically in Lebanon, the entry on the term “queer” provides its general usage standing for “non-normative” sexualities (*ghayr al-mi'yāriyya*), pointing to its primarily academic employment, or as a means of avoiding the LGBTQ term’s correlation with Western agendas. Elaborating on “queer” still being a subject of discussion, Khookha Mcqueer, a feminist activist, artist and performer, draws on the development of the term’s usage in Arabic-language discourse:

لقد استجدّ تطوراً ما في تموقعنا الكويري في خلال الأونة الأخيرة، بالتزامن مع شيوع مصطلح "كوير". هكذا، أصبحنا نشهد تحوُّلاً للذات الكويرية من موضوع يُدرَس أو جسم غريب يُلقى به على طاولة التشريح، إلى كياناتٍ فاعلةٍ تُنتج خطاباً نقدياً وتساوم في قِراءة الواقع وتفكيكه من خلال منظورها وتموقعها.

(Mcqueer)

There has been a recent development in our queer positionality, in conjunction with the popularization of the term "queer". We are witnessing a transformation of the queer self from an object of study or a body laid down for dissection, into active entities that produce critical discourse and contribute to reading and deconstructing reality through their perspectives and positionalities.

The non-normative sense of “queer” centers the disruptive and challenging “forms of desirous, embodied being that are out of sync with the ordinarily linear measurements of everyday life” (Dinshaw 4). It also includes the “strange” attitudes, like Layla’s desires one could say, that are at odds with the normative workings of patriarchy. In the 10th century context, “queer” encompasses a woman’s fluid movement between desires, like reverting to male relationships after a lifetime of having female sexual and romantic

partners, or having multiple relationships with different genders at once. The queerness resides in the interruption of religious, familial, social and cultural values that are interlinked with heteropatriarchal duties. Most importantly, my usage of “queer” does not allude to a premodern distinction of normal versus abnormal or hegemonic versus subordinate, since these binaries have come as a result of modern sexual orientations.

For some terms, such as *sahq*, *nayk* and *zarīf*, I often provide them in their transliterated⁶ form for their specific connotation and recognized meaning. On the practical choices of translation, translator and literary critic Sylvana El-Khoury details the translator’s decision within the complexity of possible approaches:

وعندما يكون المترجم أمام النصّ، فتصير الأمور أكثر تعقيداً والحلول أقلّ جذريّة. يجد المترجم نفسه في عملية مساومة دائمة وسعي لإيجاد توازن صعب بين ما يفقده النصّ خلال الترجمة وما يمكن أن يكسبه في لغته الجديدة.
(El-Khoury)

when the translator is in front of the text, things become more complicated and the solutions to these complications are less radical. The translators find themselves in a constant bargaining process in an attempt to find a complex balance between what the text loses during the translation and what it can gain in its new language.⁷

El-Khoury suggests a binary of translation options, bargaining between what is lost and gained that is less “radical” than theory. Instead, the terminological choice can reflect and maintain the visibility of the bargaining process rather than deal with its consequences as a mediation of two approaches. For instance, when translating or referring to *nayk*, I used the terms “vaginal intercourse”, “phallic sex”, “penetration”, “penetrative sex”, as it is pertinent to the context. For instance, in some verses, there are figures of speech that allude to penetration while others focus on the desired phallus in sex. The fluid usage of these terms contributes to the argument of the research, that lesbianism is presented in fluidity, and pleasures are emphasized for their variety, and

⁶ Throughout the thesis, I rely on the IJMES transliteration system.

⁷ The following translation is provided by Kohl: A Journal for Body and Gender Studies.

so the terminological and translation choices can mimic this linguistic and stylistic diversity. The employment of different terms helps encapsulate the confusion and dissonance of descriptions emanating from the anthology's chapters themselves, a conscientious variety of terms that encourages the perception of translation as a constant conversation and negotiation comprising its very body.

D. Absences, Exclusions and the Production of Ignorance

In "The Speculum of Ignorance: The Women's Health Movement and Epistemologies of Ignorance," Nancy Tuana presents a philosophical approach to ignorance as a production, that is essential to understanding the erasure and representational politics on women's bodies, health and desires. By defining the epistemologies of ignorance as central to resisting patriarchal representations and systematic erasure, Tuana provides a methodological tool to identify the gaps in literature, critique and transform the ignorance on premodern lesbianism. By thinking of ignorance, we can "examine the ways in which not knowing is sustained and sometimes even constructed" (Tuana 3). The gaps and lack of knowledge on a topic such as premodern lesbian desires, through this approach, can then be studied for the way they come to exist and remain in a status of stagnancy. That absence persists is not an accidental phenomenon, and in other words, the 'black holes' of knowledge are systematically sustained through various politically-determined motives.

But taking a step back, what does it mean to not know? The primary answer to such a question circulates around remembrance and collective memory as a root for feminist and queer thought, and a basis for imagining a future that is potentially and ideally different. On the feminist value of remembrance, Bennett affirms: "I *want* to remember;

I think that the achievement of a more feminist future depends on such remembrance; and I believe it is the particular job of feminist historians to ensure that those memories are rich, plausible, and well-informed.” (*History Matters 2*) In studying premodern Arabo-Islamic erotic anthologies for their presentation of lesbian and lesbian-like desires, the purpose is to bring out an archive of desires that has been made and kept dormant, as a result of multiple literary, social and overall political reasons. Remembering is certainly inseparable from the understanding of what is excluded; consequently, the politics of memory is a politics of accessibility and availability. In that sense, exerting efforts into making historical sources available and comprehensible is not merely a form of archival duty, but a queer-feminist necessity to resist mainstream heteronormative and Western-centric narratives of sexualities and desires. Particularly addressing Arabic-language writing on women’s desires, Noha Bayoumi reifies the power relations of knowledge production and the maintenance of dominant patriarchal knowledges, unless destabilized by non-patriarchal questioning of women’s representations:

في الحقيقة، إن ما همّشه التاريخ الأبوي، كما وصلنا، وليس كمل بحثنا فيه، هو الجسد، الخيال، الرغبة، العواطف.
(Bayoumi 22)

In fact, what was marginalized by patriarchal history, as we have received it and not how we have questioned it, are bodies, imaginations, desires and emotions.

Feminist writing and remembrance hinges on the tracing of desires and emotions, and such is the goal of reading lesbian portrayal in premodern *adab* works. Having gaps in the queer-feminist collective memory, not only crystalizes as a lack of knowledge on the past, but as a limited imaginability of how queer love and desires can be conceived, articulated and conceptualized differently from what is taken as a standard understanding of sexualities today.

While the production of ignorance may be read as a deliberate act of erasure, which could be the case for certain publishers, editors or translations, yet when dealing with Arabic editions of the texts, the overlooking of certain manuscripts, the lack of editions and circulation can be motivated by a complex set of criteria, nonetheless politically determined. The location of manuscripts, their accessibility as well as their classification as philosophical, legal or political work would influence the possibility and probability of their undertaking into a literary task like the writing of a new edition. That is to say, the erasure of premodern Arabo-Islamic lesbianism and the absences in knowledge, though politically-driven, cannot be considered an outright form of targeted censorship. The circumstances that permeate for the infestation of ignorance are salient points of study for understanding why lesbian-like love and desires have not been taken seriously. It is not to claim that such *adab* works have been purposefully neglected, since there are many efforts to grapple with these anthologies, nor to claim a singular entity, translator or scholar responsible for the ignorance on premodern lesbian desires, but rather to point to the types of scholarly languages and assumptions as patterns contributing to the production of ignorance and its maintenance.

My argument about the ignorance produced around and in relation to *Jawāmi ‘al-Ladhdha* is multifold: firstly, I refer to the universalist or ahistorical approaches to premodern sexualities by certain kinds of scholarship and secondly, the question of violence in translation’s reproduction of exclusions. Lastly, I elaborate on the limits of knowledge and the necessity of accepting what cannot be known as to not fall into a production of ignorance as well.

1. The Scholarly Gap in Writing Premodern Desires

When signaling to the ignorance produced by certain scholarship, I refer to Orientalist scholars looking to understand premodern Arabo-Islamic desires in relation to the central European Middle Ages or reading premodern desires in relation to Quranic interpretations or Islamic jurisprudence to make ahistorical inferences about Islam's view of sexualities. On another side, I also designate the feminist and queer scholarship that is rooted in the question of modernity and how it informs, benefits and constructs sexuality, thereby illustrating the premodern past either as romanticized "better times" for women prior to the gendered exigencies of capitalist modernity, or the opposite, searching for misogyny and patriarchal portrayal to delimit the past as backwards and problematic for women's desires.

In *Female Masculinity*, Judith Halberstam identifies the difficulties in theorizing sexuality historically, as the fields of study are often divided between "untheoretical historical surveys" and "ahistorical theoretical models" (Halberstam 46). Such a useful distinction helps organize such types of scholarship that aid in the reinforcement and reproduction of absences:

Debates about the history of sexuality and the history of gender deviance have also very often reproduced this split, rendering historical sexual forms as either universal or completely bound by and to their historical moment. The challenge for new queer history has been, and remains, to produce methodologies sensitive to historical change but influenced by current theoretical preoccupations (Halberstam 46).

Some of the literature on the premodern desires takes on universalizing language or presumes historical circumscription. On the one hand, speaking about sexuality as an overarching theme that is socially conceptualized in a similar way across time and geography creates an inoperative framework that blurs the historical specificities of

desires. In the preface to the anthology *Islamicate Sexualities*, Najmabadi and Babayan presents the Islamicate world and its relative field of study as continuing “to be burdened with a scholarly tradition that has all too often situated Islam beyond temporality and geography, thus proving an effect of atemporal uniformity.” (Babayan and Najmabadi xiii) The sameness in the approach to writing on the Islamicate world has taken form as stagnancy, meaning that particular historical moments are not understood as significant because of the overall unchanged “nature” of Islam as a religion and consequently its socio-temporal impacts in the Islamicate countries standing against time or frozen in time. The particularities of the premodern Islamicate period then get lost in the ahistorical discourses. For instance, in an essay by novelist and poet Youssef Rakha, the author pushes the consideration of the history of Arabic literature as an inspiring place for Muslim emancipation, particularly Arabic erotic poetry, by the likes of Abū Nuwās:

كتب أبو نواس في القرن العاشر كما لو كان يرى المستقبل، يكتب باحترام ضمنى لتباين الشهوات وبوعي ثاقب بالسياسة الجنسية. ويكتب - ربما هذا الأهم - بإيمان كامل بالجنس كهوية فردية واخيار جمالي قد يتعارض مع الفضيلة في صورتها المجردة إلا أنه مكون أصيل لبهجة بل ولمعنى الحياة. هل نستمتع لأبي نواس الآن؟
(Rakha)

In the tenth century, Abū Nuwās wrote as though he could see the future, writing with an implicit respect for the diversity of appetites and with a keen awareness of sexual politics. And he writes - perhaps this is the most important thing - with a complete belief in sex as an individual identity and an aesthetic choice that may contradict virtue in its abstract form, but it is an authentic element of the joy and even meaning of life.

Are we listening to Abū Nuwās now?

The reading of sexuality as a universal category standing against time is apparent in the depiction of Abū Nuwās as a poet “ahead of his time”, having the same preoccupations as contemporary tensions with sexual politics. The romanticization of his verses and their modernizing interpretation blurs the distance between distinct contexts of writing

and commodifies ‘classical Arabic literature’ into an object of support for current agendas and liberal imaginations of sexuality.

Yet, in the same vein, some kinds of scholarship isolates expressions of premodern desires, pinning them strictly to their historical moment, and categorizing the past as alien and sharply distinct and disassociated from the present moment. On the approach to the past as a foreign country, Valerie Traub highlights colonial traditions of writing queer histories: “there exists a pervasive teleological logic that organizes the relations of East to West” and “‘first in Europe and then elsewhere’ structure of time”, quoting Chakrabarty (Babayan and Najmabadi 2). Such approaches are associated with the mainstream usage of the term “backwardness”, to signify for the study of premodern Arabo-Islamic desires a travel back in time, often to a time and place that is less “developed” or seen as inferior to the contemporary understanding. The problem with isolated historical readings of premodern Islamicate desires is the reinforcing of tropes of backwardness as a negative distance, at odds with modern preoccupations. Heather Love in the introduction to her book *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* sets forth the question of backwardness and queer history: “The idea of modernity—with its suggestions of progress, rationality, and technological advance—is intimately bound up with backwardness.” (Love 5) For premodern queer desires, it designates the exoticization of love and intercourse between women to exist in a starkly disparate world, to the extent that some scholars find it incompatible with any characteristics of modern “lesbianism”.

However, the writing on premodern desires must encapsulate the complexity of lesbian portrayals between past and present, taking into account the commonalities and

differences at once. In reading *Jawāmi*'s references to lesbian and lesbian-like women, there are multiple facets of similarity with contemporary preoccupations, alongside differences to modern depictions and understandings. The term “patriarchal equilibrium” advanced by Judith Bennett in *History Matters*, serves as a valuable conceptualization of the commonalities of women’s experiences, as bound by patriarchal structures. Bennett defines the term, indicating that “despite many changes in women's experiences over the centuries, women's lowstatus vis-a-vis men has remained remarkably unchanged.” (*History Matters* 4) This proposition is productive for reading premodern Arabo-Islamic lesbian and lesbian-like women to attend to desires in a continuity to the present by the thread of patriarchy, while simultaneously taking into consideration the vast differences in the language and social significations of sexual desires. The similarities sit within the patriarchal equilibrium, such that the experience of non-normative female sexualities and desires has, to an extent, persisted in its lack of recognition, social undervaluing and simultaneous threat to heteropatriarchal standards. The notion of the patriarchal equilibrium must bridge between past and present representations of lesbianism, yet should not constitute an impediment to critically engage with the specificities of premodern Arabo-Islamic lesbian and lesbian-like desires.

The problem with some feminist scholarship is its fixation on the misogyny of premodern literary sources and patriarchal representation of women’s desires, and its quest to otherwise seek sources that are female-authored or less mediated by heteropatriarchal markers to undertake. For my reading of *Jawāmi*, I accommodate the male authorship of the anecdotes of lesbian “speakers” and set out from the unequal portrayal of female-centered anecdotes. For example, tackling phallic centrality, I

identify the rhetoric and the emotions conveyed in verses, to understand the usage of the phallic tropes in different instances, as well as analyzing and translating the references that do not hold the phallus central in the same capacity. The aim is to bring out the fluidity of desires and the non-exceptionality of representations, breaking binaries such as normative versus non-normative or misogynistic text versus one favoring lesbian women, especially since such designations do not stand. These strategies respond to the scholarly gap on Arabo-Islamic lesbian desires, presenting the phallic representations that reflect the patriarchal framing of lesbianisms while emphasizing the non-exceptional and fluid portrayal of lesbian women in the course of the anthology, as to not replicate an anachronistic or Orientalist depiction of the cited premodern lesbian and lesbian-like women.

2. The Trouble with Violence in Archival Writing and Translation

Identifying the failures of available literature is a departure point for understanding the violence such scholarship replicates on already-excluded stories of history. Saidiya Hartman in her essay “Venus in Two Acts” posits the future of abolition to start from the page, the writing of the absences, deliberately “forgotten” histories and accounts of the lives of slave women in the United States: “Must the future of abolition be first performed on the page?” (10) Hartman’s questioning of archival methods and the responsibilities inherent to such delicate works, as writing woman’s bodies and experiences into history, is another key understanding to the literary duties of bringing out female desires in the premodern Arabo-Islamic erotic anthology. While she writes about an entirely distinct racial and spatiotemporal history of women, her method can be fruitful for thinking about the desires of women towards women, and what it could signify for their representation in contemporary discourses of Islamic

studies, women and queer studies. Hartman particularly tackles an elemental question of writing: “How does one revisit the scene of subjection without replicating the grammar of violence?” (4) Similarly, how can one write a history of sexuality or contribute to bringing out exclusions in that matter without replicating orientalist, heteropatriarchal and anachronistic language? The attention and care that queer-feminist archival approaches necessitate is similarly advanced by writer and historian Sana Tannoury-Karam, to avoid partaking in colonial and patriarchal modes of knowledge production:

ليس الهدف "إنقاذ" الحقائق أو القضايا "الموجودة في مكان ما"، بل تخطي ثنائية الوجود/الغياب داخل الأرشيف، وإعادة تصوّر كيفية قيامنا بالبحث، وما الأسئلة التي نطرحها، وأين نبحث عن إجابات. بهذا المعنى، تصبح عملية الأرشيف والأرشيف بحدّ ذاتها أفعالاً وقضايا نسوية.

(Tannoury-Karam)

The goal is not to “rescue” facts or issues that are “out there,” but rather to transcend the presence/absence dichotomy within archives, and reimagine how we do research, what questions we ask, and where we look for answers. In this sense, the archiving process and the archive itself become feminist actions and issues.

The intention of feminist research must not be invested in “making visible the invisible” or claiming to “recover what is lost” but rather re-reading archival practices, in a way that does not replicate the violence of canonization itself. For instance, the analysis of premodern lesbian desires and description of pleasures in *adab* writing does not need to categorize the different lesbian arrangements, as it does not need be read as conjunct to male homosexuality, seeking the identification of partner roles and age distinctions, nor does the description of pleasure need to depart from heterosexual desires to comparatively question the dissonances of lesbianism.

Since this research reads and converses with the Arabic edition of *Jawāmi*⁴ in English, translating my passages as a form of contribution to the interpretation of the anecdotes as well as critiquing and comparing to the English translation, the archival

question strongly stands as one of translation. While writing about the Arabic erotic anthology in the English language and in parallel with the English translation, the passages are interpreted and conceptualized in Arabic and English simultaneously, and by that, the translation and archival interests in studying pleasures come hand in hand. The question of violence pertains to contemporary categories that limit possibilities of representation, and the language utilized to address sexual identities. Writer and translator Nayla Mansour discusses the importance of reception and the fluid possibilities of articulating desires, from a contemporary standpoint. Mansour discusses the daily negotiations of survival, as a violent constant to locate and navigate a certain identity within a fluidity of sexualities across time, stating:

قصتنا الأعمّ هي قصة عنفٍ مستمرٍ لا تتوقف فيه المفاوضات اليومية الميكروية للنجاة، وهي قصة
سيولةٍ في الهويات والذوات، سيولةٍ عبر الزمن والجغرافيا والمقامات والفاعلين من حولنا، ولمن
نوجّه خطاباتنا المتنوعة.

(Naḥwa lugha jinsāniyya insāniyya wa-mukhliṣa li-al-mashāʿir)

Our greater story is a one of constant violence, a perpetual micromanaging of daily negotiations of survival, a story of fluidity in identities and selves, a fluidity through time, geography, positionalities and actors surrounding us, and those to whom our various discourses are directed.

The preoccupation with languages of desire is a continuous process that takes shape in different circumstances. For the purpose of writing about premodern Arabo-Islamic lesbian and lesbian-like desires, any approach whether universalist or historically bound is a negotiation mediated by violence, just as the choice of translating Arabic terms into English. For instance, in selecting the word “tribadism” for *saḥq*, a set of imposed characteristics are brought to the fore. As for a less overt negotiation, utilizing a universalist approach to desires produces a violent blanket that homogenizes desires and effaces the underlying fluidity of pleasures and sexual arrangements specific to the designated century and geopolitical atmosphere. And so, the trouble with violence must

arise as a core concern in evaluating translations of queer desires as well as reading and contributing to the scholarship on these desires. The violence pertains to the contemporary existential mediations of queer and gender identities suggested by Mansour, as much as it speaks to the approaches to the archives of desire that may in itself foster erasures and exclusions.

The major site of interest for this research is translation as a mode that could contribute to the reproduction of exclusions. One example of such pattern appears in the introduction to *Crossing Borders* where Sahar Amer looks at Aḥmad al-Tifāshī's "Delight of Hearts" translated by Edward Lacey and published by the Gay Sunshine Press in 1988, as a means of instantiating the production of the absences on premodern lesbianism:

Not only has this English translation (the only one available) utterly erased lesbian voices in the medieval Arabic tradition, but it has also presented sexual divisions that were certainly not present in the medieval text. Translating only the sections on gay men's sexuality has hence introduced a modern and Western perspective on the medieval Arabic work that places sexual orientations and their various practices on a continuum of behaviors. (*Crossing Borders* 27)

Amer's remark is particularly pertinent to the fact that Tifāshī's book remains one of the very few available manuscripts of erotic anthologies containing a specific chapter on lesbian and lesbian-like desires. The *Delight of Hearts* or *Nuzhat al-albāb fīma lā yūjad fī kitāb* is known to be a rewriting of Ibn Naṣr's *Jawāmi'*, and so, both chapters on lesbianism offer overlapping anecdotes, with some differences in the later thirteenth century *Nuzhat* anthology. The abovementioned English translation, by catering strictly to the press's interest in male homosexuality, replicates the exclusion of the remaining chapters of the book, including that on lesbian and lesbian-like desires.

In comparison to the English translation by Jarkas and Khawwam, the translator's note provides a ground to designate the translation's contribution to the

production of ignorance, for in its articulation of translation intentions, poses their subjective view of lesbianism as a perverse desire, framing their translation choices. It is not to say that the translation is not useful, particularly in its coverage of all the anthology's chapters. The production of ignorance is not specifically a product of the translators' efforts, knowing that the translation was probably attached to its own challenges, but the articulation of conflict of interest and the willful formulation of the disengagement taps into the exclusionary violence. The production of ignorance is a framework to reflect on translation as a mode of fostering exclusions, in the way the English translation effaces rhetorical and genre-specific tropes, uses an informative and systematic style, all of which flatten the representations of anecdotes on lesbian desire and limits the perception of the fluidity of the desires. This is motivated by an interest clearly stated in their preface and their elaboration that tends to inflate and employ imagery in phallic portrayals of pleasure while remaining more concise with the figurative language in the sections centering lesbian intercourse. The Arabic edition however shows the multitude of anecdotes, whether centering lesbian desire or phallic pleasure, both in rich and figurative language, employing an amusing and teasing tone, that adds to the obscene and humorous verses.

The motives and efforts of translation, both articulated in words and undertaken in the omission and restructuring of anecdotes, make for an adaptation of the Arabic sources that can be characterized as a perpetration of violence, by enforcing a patriarchal amplification of the text that is not legible in the Arabic edition. It is the translators' own view of lesbianism as perverse that shapes the translation, while the Arabic edition does not present such a projection. The erasure and the limiting of fluid

desires produce a violent historical reading of premodern Arabo-Islamic lesbian desires, binding translation practices to the problem of ignorance in archival writing.

3. *On (Not) Knowing and the Limits of Knowledge*

As previously outlined, the production of ignorance in this project pertains to three strands of exclusionary writing: the scholarly gap, the violence produced in translation and thirdly, the limits of knowledge often overlooked. The latter refers to the exclusions that require acceptance and coming to terms with their existence. The acceptance of certain exclusions does not entail surrender to the absence of knowledge, rather it invites for a conscientious distinction between the absences that scholars, translators and critics can partake in creating and sustaining, and those which are products of historical complexities of documentation and archival practices. For instance, the anecdotes of the lesbian and lesbian-like women in *Jawāmi‘ al-Ladhdha* are carved into the chapters of the anthology pertaining to *adab* literature, inevitably written by the social elite, knowing that the writer Ibn Naṣr was possibly a physician or the son of a physician⁸ and a member of the upper class. The anecdotes could well be fictional, framed by their male authorship. Myrne brings about the gaps that remain pending, the “truth” being complex to understand and verify: “We will probably never know if they were real women talking or solely fictional, fabricated by the earliest historians and philologists.” (*Female Sexuality* 98) The question that can be then asked about the chapter on lesbianism may not be revolving around how women of the premodern Islamicate period conceived of their lesbian and lesbian-like desires, but

⁸ Sources differ in the specification of his occupation, particularly taking into account his medical knowledge that could have been passed down to him through professional, familial ties or both.

rather: What was expected of the *zarīf* to know about lesbianism in the Abbasid tenth century?

One could also establish the emotional community, later expounded in the third chapter, that was presented in the chapter only as a literary community emblematic of lesbian and lesbian-like women in the premodern Arabo-Islamic context, rather than the “existing” lesbian-like emotional community in tenth century Baghdad, for example. Julia Bray ponders what the visibility of such women, often marginalized in historical sources and scholarly writing, could signify: “That these were matters of lively concern to one emotional community, people of cultivated sensibility—*adab*—is evident in the subjects they chose to write about and how they wrote about them. How far can their thinking about slavery and humanity take us, and how does it compare with that of other emotional communities?” (*Toward an Abbasid History of Emotions* 146) Perhaps the closest a reader can get to respond to Bray’s inquiry is accepting the fact that these anecdotes in *Jawāmi‘* are not direct accounts of premodern lesbian and lesbian-like women themselves but citations that can be interpreted of their depicted emotions in literary form, an approach further elaborated in the last chapter of the thesis. The act of making peace with not knowing is a feminist one, as it avoids projects of rewriting and “filling” the gaps by way of replicating violence, in line with the previous section’s propositions. There are stories we wish were written by women and clearly titled as such, but it is not historically plausible to expect such literary texts, or even wait for an ambitious archival discovery to satisfy such intentions. As Bray suggests, the questions to pose on the available texts must critically implore into the details that the source provides, rather than what the source could have been or could have possibly offered.

Moreover, in relation to the category of lesbianism, Sahar Amer provokes a series of questions on the limits of knowledge produced on premodern lesbian and lesbian-like women:

But Foucault cannot be made solely responsible for the scholarly neglect of the medieval lesbian. The study of female homosexuality in the Middle Ages has been further hampered by anachronistic views of what constitutes lesbianism. Given the definitional fluidity of this category today (Who exactly counts as a lesbian?), critics have been at a loss as to where to search for medieval literary lesbians. [...] What conclusions should be drawn from texts that insert a brief sexually alternative interlude only to end on a heteronormative note? Where is the line between intimate female friendships and female same-sex attachments? What distinguishes the lives of medieval literary single women, prostitutes, and lesbians? These questions, coupled with the fact that medieval lesbians for the most part did not leave traces of their relations and that the majority of surviving literary texts are composed by men, have all contributed to the further silencing of the medieval literary lesbian in contemporary scholarship. (*Crossing Borders* 5)

The limitation of queer categories is an additional layer to the dilemma of absences, as the designations of “lesbian” require expansion to include variations and arrangements around the premodern desires between women. For this reason, Amer’s usage of “lesbian-like” aids in the inclusion of the particularities of forms of intimacy that may not be commonly read to designate lesbianism. The terminological choices permit for accessing certain female desires that are otherwise obscured by modern Western-specific terms, a point elaborated in the coming section. Bennett evinces the significance of this writing approach: “The feminist potential of this particular sort of women's history-focused on feminist issues, aware of the distant past, attentive to continuities, and alert to the workings of patriarchal power.” (*History Matters* 5) Such intricate readings, interpretations and evaluations of translation in *Jawāmi* ‘ rely on admitting that all analyses of anecdotes portraying lesbianism are navigating multiple

limitations to infer fluid possibilities for the literary representation of the lesbian and lesbian-like women.

Accordingly, the production of ignorance can be seen as a lack of diligence towards the limits of knowledge, in the scholarship and translations that seek to produce general answers to contemporary archival and political interests from defined premodern sources. As much as studying *adab* works for their potential of enriching the history of sexuality is a queer-feminist project, the observance and acceptance of historical limitations are equally part of this duty. In other words, there is also ignorance-sustaining violence in imposing an expectation from anecdotal lesbian instances to fulfill the gap of conveying premodern Islamicate lesbian women's very speech and emotions or interpreting the poetic verses as historical evidence of the 'real' social status of lesbian desires in Arabo-Islamic history.

E. Chapter Overview

Chapter 1 frames lesbianism in the English translation and the Arabic edition in two sections to contextualize and situate the chapter on lesbianism of the anthology in both versions, as well as permeate for a wider understanding of lesbian desires across the works. In the first section, I present the methodological tool of untranslatability to identify the anecdotes and style that render the Arabic anthology distinct in its features, and thereby lead to adaptational choices in the translation. I analyze the English translators' note that gives a clear description of the translation motives and the subjective view of lesbianism, focusing on the categorization of repetitions and the formulation of their translation as omitting the "useless" parts, in addition to the intrusions they lay out in the form of footnotes. Following the analysis of their note, I provide my own translation approach, defining where I diverge from the English

translator's motivations and commit to maintaining repetitions and transmitting the poetic, rhetorical and stylistic features of *adab* literature in translating passages of the Arabic edition to English. In the second section, I study the references to lesbian and lesbian-like women across the Arabic edition, departing from the initial chapters that frame love and intercourse between women, as one of the three kinds of love, in an atmosphere that describes sex to be as essential as food in nourishment and sustenance of the body and its humors. Looking at the location of references to lesbianism across the chapters, each portrayal takes a rhetorical importance in correspondence to the argument of its relative chapter, often portraying lesbian women in phallogentric anecdotes that do not valorize lesbian desire for its own pleasure but rather in correlation to penetrative pleasures. Such selections are amply detailed in the English translation, so that the minimization of lesbian pleasure for the sake of highlighting phallic desire aligns with the translators' own motivations.

Following the framing of the first chapter, Chapter 2 looks at the *mujūn* verses pertaining to the anecdotes in the chapter on lesbianism, comparing the rhetoric of humor and play employed in the teasing style of the Arabic edition to the methodical and reason-driven anecdotes provided by the English translation. I start by closely reading the opening page of the chapter that provides a physiognomic description in the introductory paragraph explaining the reason for turning to lesbianism, followed by a unique anecdote on Layla a lesbian-like woman that stands out with her peculiar desires that include coercion, unequal power and a lack of mutual desire. Drawing on the opening paragraph and Layla's story, I show how the opening page sets the teasing tone of the Arabic edition's chapter, while enticing the reader in with destabilizing information and depictions of lesbian desires that are not replicated in the course of the

chapter. The English translation's opening on the other hand is much less threatening and more concise in its presentation of physiognomic reasons for lesbianism and the Layla anecdote does not comprise any verses like the Arabic where the lesbian-like woman gains further dimension. The second section focuses on the trope of phallic revulsion, central to many lesbian anecdotes, as well as the reverse boasting about phallic pleasure provided in other passages, to bring out the obscenity of the verses, their rhetorical and figurative elements and the role of humor and play in the fluid description of lesbian and lesbian-like women. The last section of the chapter spotlights the two main passages of the chapter that offer an elaborate depiction of lesbian sex and pleasure between two women, detached from phallic presence, pointing to the poetic description of movement and sound, defining the power of the lesbian orgasm as the utmost form of pleasure in the Arabic edition. In the English translation, the passages depicting pleasure enumerate the actions comprising sexual intercourse between two women, concise in the provision of the attributes contributing to mutual pleasure.

In an attempt to study the emotions comprising lesbian pleasure, Chapter 3 advances the approach to lesbian and lesbian-like women as an emotional community, two distinct communities in each of the two versions of the anthology. The Arabic edition presents lesbian and lesbian-like women as witty and eloquent speakers whose affective expressions are often used by non-lesbian women as well. The section concentrates on the feelings of contempt for non-desirable pleasures and women who partake in them, the anxieties associated with fornication and the yearning expressed between two vulvas. As for the English translation, the overarching feeling of fear manifests itself across the chapter, particularly the interrelated fears of defloration, pregnancy, slander and bad shame. It promotes the understanding of lesbianism as a

safe alternative to heterosexual love and fornication, and portrays lesbian pleasure as modest in its satisfaction within the fearful dominating atmosphere.

The chapters analyze the depiction of lesbian and lesbian-like women in the anthology through the emotions and humor of the anecdotes in which they are portrayed to speak, bringing out a multiplicity of definitions of lesbianism that are fluid and ambivalent in representation, however are framed as non-exceptional forms of desires in the Arabic edition. The translation, through its omissions, linguistic and stylistic erasures of poetic speech, flattens the representation of lesbian and lesbian-like pleasure and favors the portrayal of the desires as a less-satisfactory alternative to heterosexuality, hence sustaining the ignorance produced around premodern Arabo-Islamic desires.

CHAPTER I

THE FRAMING OF LESBIANISM IN TRANSLATION AND ACROSS THE EDITION

Across its forty-three chapters, *Jawāmi‘ al-Ladhdha* cites lesbian and lesbian-like women in anecdotes at different instances beyond the chapter on lesbianism itself. Looking at how the Arabic edition frames lesbian desires in the early chapters in parallel with the view laid out in the translator’s note furnishes the grounds for situating and elaborating on the anecdotes in which lesbian women are portrayed respectively in the two works. This chapter outlines the atmosphere where lesbian desire is cited to contextualize the close reading of the chapter dedicated to such pleasures. The lesbian portrayals across the Arabic anthology serve two functions; on one hand, the preliminary chapters cite lesbian and lesbian-like love and desire as a non-exceptional type of love among the prevalent three kinds, and on another, the lesbian anecdotes in some chapters substantiate and support the rhetoric of the argument posed by the relevant chapter mostly on the superiority of phallic pleasure, vaginal or anal. The English translation shows to be invested in portraying lesbianism as perverse starting from the translator’s note, to the interferences with the text and most significantly, the concentrated attention to conveying the rhetoric of the anecdotes that utilize lesbian references to praise phallic pleasures and penetrative sex.

Firstly, I detail my approach to untranslatability and the usage of such theoretical concept as a tool or paradigm to understand the particularities of *adab* literature, rather than an obstacle to translation. Looking at the translator’s note and its articulation of choice, the language employed is one of erasure and exclusion, hinging on a categorization of “useless” knowledges and the exoticization of lesbianism, and

alternatively, I present my approach in undertaking the translations of anecdotes. The second section branches out to the references to lesbianism outside the dedicated chapter to create a wide-ranging image of lesbianism throughout the anthology, as a means of understanding lesbian and lesbian-like pleasure in the larger framework of the compilation and how the portrayal of lesbian-like desires corresponds to the broader notions of pleasure-making and sexual fulfillment. With the intent of probing the chapters in which they appear and what their context conveys about lesbian desire, I outline the anecdotes that replicate the central arguments in the dedicated chapter and those that contradict its content and propositions.

A. Untranslatability as a Methodological Tool

Just as translation includes negotiations that may contribute to the production of exclusions, untranslatability is a question of access as well, since it presumes that there are no doors that allow for appropriate access to the source language. The “untranslatable” has been a fraught concern for contemporary translation theorists by the likes of Emily Apter, Barbara Cassin and David Damrosch to articulate the limitations of translating a term that is culturally and historically specific to a source language and transmitting it through another target language belonging to a diverging sociocultural setting.

In “The Allure of Untranslatability”, Aria Fani problematizes the theory of untranslatability, arguing that such a concept is a byproduct of romantic nationalism. Fani writes against Apter’s arguments, and translator and literary critic Shafi’i-Kadkani’s explanations of untranslatability, specifically in translating Persian poet Hafez’s work. What is harmful about untranslatability, stemming from romantic

nationalism, is the reiteration of an “essence” to the language of origin that is not replicable in other languages, an Orientalist approach rooted in essentialism, relevant to both Persian and Arabic. Moreover, it enforces the writer-genius trope, whose original work is of untouchable brilliance that cannot be replicated or interpreted in another language. One of the main arguments of untranslatability, particularly in the realm of world literature, is that the language of origin, for example Arabic, is culturally distant from English. And the cultural difference in addition to linguistic and structural distinctions, render the translation work too complex and nearly unfeasible. By giving an example of Persian and Arabic, two languages of close cultural and historical proximity, Fani shows that the translation of Persian poetry to Arabic, has accomplished similar resonances as its English counterpart. Contrary to possible expectations, the Arabic translation does not bring out any expressions or stylistic ameliorations that English fails to convey from the Persian source text. In other words, two languages that are not fundamentally different as Arabic and Persian does not safeguard the translatability of the text. The text itself, the poetry in Persian, may not be fully comprehended with all its nuances to the “Persian reader”, as such a wide assumed category may not be necessarily familiar with poetic aesthetics knowing the language and style used is not a universal one. Even within the source language itself, the assumption that an Arabic reader, meaning a person who is a native or learned speaker of the language, is attuned to all poetic sensibilities, and this experience of the original must be fully translated to the English-speaking reader does not stand. Such intricate texts as poetry or erotic anthologies are open to ample interpretation within the source language itself, and eventually, one of the interpretations captured by the translator will culminate in the translated text. Fani suggests: “translation should be viewed as a

resolution of an always ongoing process of interpretation and rewriting.” (102) The process of rewriting includes collaborative efforts that bridge between different translations to negotiate the contributions and failures of each, and produce a new translated work that engages with the available ones to maintain a non-restrictive dialogue for constant possibilities. Interpretation by definition alludes to the multitude of meanings and the vast space for intra-textual exegesis, and consequently numerous possibilities of translation.

As it pertains to this research, the experience of source and target languages has not taken shape as a binary transmission, a unilateral move to a receiving language with linguistic and stylistic losses apparent in the English translation. Both the Arabic edition and the English translation utilize one common manuscript source, in addition to two other copies studied by the editor of the Arabic version and one additional manuscript source used by the translators. Upon encountering the English translation in the early stages of this project without the possibility of accessing the Arabic edition for a period of time, the English translation enabled the identification of repetitions and specific formulations that motivated my inquiries into the Arabic edition once made available. For instance, reading the repeated word “fear” in the English text and identifying it as a remarkable feature prompted the study of the language of emotions used in the Arabic edition. Another example is the structuring and sectioning of the English chapter such as its frequent spacings and asterisk separators, which convey a sense of the compiled nature of the text, the paragraphs visually detached from each other and each delivering a different medical or philosophical idea on lesbian desire, in addition to anecdotes in prose. Upon viewing the Arabic anthology, the chapter appeared to have a more homogenous flow, a narrative-like shift from the physiognomic passages to poetic

verses. While the English translation highlights the *adab* literature's compiled character through its mosaic presentation, it makes the author-compiler's writing style more rigid, as the poetic features are impalpable, the medical and anecdotal segments being visually, structurally and linguistically similar. That the English has a fragmented layout and does not mirror the fluidity of the Arabic edition's style and its playful teasing was a starting point for the remarks on rhetoric relating to the *adab* literature's characteristics that I elaborate on in the coming pages. My encounter with both works at different points of the research process and the problem of access that has restricted the primary sources to an Arabic edition and an English translation functioning as an adaptation rather, invited the analysis of translation not as a source-to-target approach, but a complex movement between the two works, keeping in mind the colonial hierarchies inherent to the languages.

In the course of this thesis, I detect the patterns of choices framed by Khawwam's statement about the essential and nonessential knowledges as well as the translators' inflation of passages that serve a heteropatriarchal portrayal of lesbian desires. Examining the motives behind these translation strategies is an attempt to highlight the exclusions produced in translation that create an erotic work with structural features limiting the view of lesbianism as an alternative to heterosexuality. Moving away from Apter's approach to untranslatability as a "transhistorical and normative conceptual framework" (Fani 103) that assumes an essence of the text that cannot be culturally transmitted, the *mujūn* poetry and the *adab* literature's style classification as untranslatable is not as an obstacle to the translation process but the very point of departure, to deconstruct the genius-writer trope which suggests that the work is exceptionally well-written and intellectually unique that it cannot be replicated.

1. *Reflecting on the Translator's Note*

From the outset, Khawwam establishes a racial hierarchy, subscribing to the East-West division that characterizes Orientalist discourses. The translator's note opens with the suggestion that Arabs were nomadic pagans and culturally backwards, dominated by "backwardness, ignorance, idolatry and worship of the sun and the moon" (Jarkas and Khawwam 1). The narrative focuses on the way in which Islam came to make the nomadic people "civilized", with references to "simplicity" as a substitute term for naivety, instantiated in nomads' mistaking bread for parchment, while the people of the "luxurious" (4) countries were more intelligent. The need for erotic works, Khawwam claims, departs from two main reasons. Firstly, he proposes that Arabic as a language contains sexual words more than other languages which "gives a true picture of the excessive sexual enjoyment the Arabs were living in" (31). Secondly, because sex was an important aspect of life at the peak of Islamic civilization, the topic occupied a large and unequalled area of Arab writings, he claims. That erotic anthologies were often commissioned by governors and expected from a class of elite writers serves to indicate a serious undertaking of the topics of sex, and a necessity to propagate a field of knowledge for the refined man to be attuned to the intricacies of pleasure.

It is certainly true that sex takes up a large socio-political space, that is both premodern and contemporary, yet attributing this knowledge to a specific moment of Islamic history essentializes Arab societies as exceptionally sexually-driven. Khawwam describes queer desires as perverse yet widespread among Arabs, making evident his hostile attitude towards lesbian and lesbian-like desires from the translation's opening note. He refers to Ḥubba al-Madaniyyah in his note, introducing her as a profligate woman in Medina who was "reported to have taught the women of Medina different

kinds of coition and to have given a name to every kind” (14). However, Ḥubba is a prominent figure known for her lesbian-like desire, which Khawwam translates in his note to an animalistic and strange desire, in his second and third references to her: she let a dog lick her vulva until she reached climax. He reifies his own position towards lesbianism as well through his characterization of sexual perversion as including “pederasty, passive sodomy, lesbianism, bestiality, transvestism, fetishism, sadism and masochism”(16). Unlike Greeks for instance, Khawwam claims that Arabs did not have “philosophical attitude towards pederasty”, but rather they “resorted to it because boys were more available and would arouse no doubt and also when women were not available” (16). He dedicates a few pages to sodomy and lesbianism each, noting that a “wave of lesbianism” was prevalent and “more general than pederasty” (21), as bondmaids compensated for the pleasure they could not get from men through this “abnormal pleasure”. This desire, he elaborates, could develop into a psychological disease that can become a hate for all things that are penis-like. It is clear, by examining the note, that the translators have a negative attitude to queer desires compared to the fluidity of the Arabic edition’s depiction of lesbianism, and is more invested in categorizing the permissibility of such pleasures, in parallel with assumptive rationalizations of those who act upon those desires.

While the translation was produced during a period of prolific writing on Arabo-Islamic sexualities, the translators’ ideological stance in their note shapes their approach to translation and the content which they provide. Translator Maya Zebdawi articulates the significance of ideology on both the language choice and the content:

وهذا يعني أن الأيديولوجيا تؤثر على اللغة على المستويين المعجمي-الدلالي والنحوي، بالتالي إن أيديولوجية المترجم تؤثر على كل من الخيارات المعجمية والتراكيب النحوية، والآثار الأيديولوجية حتمية من حيث الشكل والمحتوى.

(Zebdawi 78)

This means that ideology affects languages at both lexical-semantic and syntactic levels. The translator's ideology influences both lexical choices and grammatical structures. In other words, ideological implications are inevitability of form and content.⁹

The evident ideological standpoint of the translators reverberates in the selective amplification of passages undermining lesbianism, as an extension of their view of such desires. This selection and sorting process is also formulated in the conclusive parts of their note:

Owing to the fact that many accounts and poems occur in various references, I have chosen the most authoritative of these references, pointing to where an account or a poem occurs and disregarding the other references to avoid useless details. Moreover, many further annotations which are indispensable for a good understanding of the book by a western reader have been included (Jarkas and Khawwam42).

Khawwam's categorization of "useless" details appears to be a negotiation outside of time, in other words, a subjective sorting that does not follow a conscientious rationale. While translation is an inevitably interpretive act, such a statement makes evident the translator's involvement in the text in the form of selecting and assessing the relevance of certain references. He iterates his translation as a "negotiation" (151), using Marilyn Booth's proposition claiming self-authority to sort the passages of the book that seem to be of a smaller importance according to his judgments. In the above passage from his note, the translator focuses on the "most authoritative of these references" while "disregarding" others, signaling a selection process that favors the parts of the texts that he ambiguously refers to as holding superior authority, a claim of power to certain parts

⁹ The following translation is provided by Kohl: a Journal for Body and Gender research.

over others. Since translation is not “merely an act of transferring information, but a process of knowledge production” (Kamal 254), what is included and left out culminates in a specific reading of the Arabic manuscripts he had available, which Khawwam circumscribes to serve a “western reader”. Not only does the produced text safeguard a particular and partial translation, but these negotiations are motivated by a certain readership, and as such aims to make it accessible for the Western reader. Analyzing the translation choices then allows for an understanding of what the translator views as “indispensable” for his targeted reader and his simultaneous categorization of “useless” knowledges. In her article on the epistemologies of ignorance, Tuana brings about that our current beliefs and interest can obscure other knowledges, so that ignorance becomes systematically cultivated. She further emphasizes that ignorance is sometimes the “result of a configuration of interest” (Tuana 4), and so, in reading the translator’s note, the judgment of what is “useless” exemplifies the expression of interest.

In Susan Bassnett’s explanation of the role of the translator, she suggests that “translation is so much more than the transfer of a text written in one language in to another, it is about recreation, regeneration, renewal, and this is why translation has always played such a key role in literary history” (Bassnett 312). Certainly, translation exceeds its transpository role, and thinking about its recreation may be helpful to conceive of the reinvented elements in the target language. This idea fittingly applies to the way Khawwam conceptualizes his translation efforts, a recreation that he charges with all he deems necessary for a Western reader to understand the original. However, looking at translation as just a reproduction for the purpose of an audience risks the tunnel-vision choices catering strictly to the assumed limited cultural knowledge of the

reader to make a text culturally legible or accessible. Rooted in an ideological stance, such an approach has political underpinning, and as Booth explains, politics is at the center of translation and particularly speaking about Arabic literary works, she says: “the politics of it are inescapable. As a translator, one can never avoid the question of what images one is perpetuating or (hopefully) complicating, in a public culture demanding to understand—and manage—the Middle Eastern Other” (Booth 157). For the late twentieth century translation, the evaluative references Khawwam provides aid in the creation of a specific image of the premodern desires in the Islamicate period, but also of Islamic “traditions” more generally as he articulates in his note. The racial hierarchy that fixates the “East” as Other and inferior to the West makes up the translators’ Orientalist framing of lesbian desires, and persists in such depiction throughout the chapters by de-valoring the anecdotes involving lesbian-like pleasure.

2. *The Intrusions of the Translators*

In addition to the preface in which the translators’ view of lesbianism is made clear as well as their investment in eliminating repetition and information deemed useless, the translators intrude into the text, not as interpreters of the content, but in a way of assessing some of the anecdotal suggestions and using a language around sexuality that pertains to modern perceptions. These intrusions stand out as external additions to the primary sources and terminologically distant from premodern notions.

In the English translation, Jarkas and Khawwam often present, in the form of footnotes, their interpretation of references, detached from a substantiation by a particular Islamic school of thought or *madhhab* of Islamic jurisprudence. While in the note, it is suggested that the footnotes aim to point to the sources and explanations of

the presented anecdotes by Ibn Naṣr, a possibly helpful contribution, they stretch out this motivated liberty to provide their own Islamic commentary. They take on these tasks as though subscribing to a unified general truth, that is not the case for Quranic verses and *hadiths*. For instance, the translators provide a footnote on one of the anecdotal lesbian-like women in verse: “When we have lesbian intercourse, We will not have to wash ourselves.” (193) The footnote converses with the anecdote of the chapter, claiming that it cannot be true:

Washing oneself after practicing sexual union is a necessity whether the sexual union is between a man and a woman or between two men or two women. Orgasm, whether it results from sexual union, masturbation or nocturnal emission, makes it necessary to wash oneself. Therefore, the above statement that lesbian intercourse does not necessitate that lesbians should wash themselves, is incorrect. (Jarkas and Khawwam 193)

In this intrusion, the translators set themselves in dialogue with Ibn Naṣr the author of the anthology, in an attempt to rectify the anecdotal lesbian-like woman with an Islamic explanation. Whether or not the footnote reasoning is a religiously accurate one without a certainty of the source, the detailing does not aid in transmitting the text, renewing or contextualizing its reading. Instead, it holds the storyteller accountable for a view of lesbian sex diverting from piety, rather than emulating the portrayal of lesbianism as exempted from ablution in the passage.

Besides their footnote explanations, the usage of modern terms is ample in the course of the translation without any prior clarification of the choice or allusion to the limitations that prompted such choices. This is not to refer to employment of terms like “heterosexuality” and “lesbian” as they are directed to his targeted Western reader and remain terms that are useful for multiple reasons previously mentioned. Instead, some choices appearing in the translation of certain anecdotes essentialize practices and

motivations behind lesbianism, and perpetuate through the language modern notions of sexuality categories. A good example is one of the early anecdotes on Galen's examination of a lesbian woman, though Jarkas and Khawwam present her as Galen's own daughter. The translators provide: "It is said that Galen has a daughter who was a lesbian. Examining her labia and the veins thereof, he could find nothing abnormal about them. He concluded that lesbianism had to be a sort of an itch between the major and minor labia." (Jarkas and Khawwam 189) The passage uses the term "abnormal" in relation to what Galen was looking for in his examination of the labia. The term is an interpretative label to denote that Galen was searching for signs that could lead to lesbian desire, but the question of normalcy is by no means a concern of the chapter nor is it an anxiety relative to the Abbasid context in the same way sexualities are conceived in the modern heteropatriarchal order of society. Using the term "abnormal" is in line with the translators' own view of lesbianism as presented in their note, and it advances the idea that Galen and by extension, Ibn Naṣr, was interested in portraying lesbianism as outside the norm.

In the Arabic edition, the anecdote shows to be lengthier, detailing the procedure undertaken by Galen, in addition to what was reported about it from other sources, ending with a suggestion of the removal of lesbianism:

وحكي أنه احضرت لجالينوس ابنةً ساحقةً فوق علي حرها المحجمة حتى انقلب فتأمل عروقه وعضونه وانحائه وارجائه فلم يجد هناك شيئاً يستدل به، فقال: ينبغي أن يكون هذا جنساً من أجناس الحكة بين الجلدين اللذين أحدهما فوق الآخر. وقال آخرون بل أمر بشرط الموضع والمص بالمحجمة، فيقال هو الذي أزال عنها السحق.

(Ibn Naṣr 182)

It was told that a lesbian woman was presented to Galen, whose vulva he treated by cupping, and once swollen, he observed its veins, sides, extremities and depth. When no indicators appeared, he stated that there must be a kind of itch between the skins of the labia, one superimposing the other. He ordered, others suggested, to slit the area and suction by cupping. It was told that he uprooted lesbianism from her.

It is true that in no other passages or anecdotes of the Arabic edition are lesbian and lesbian-like desires presented as requiring treatment, yet the Arabic anecdote is rather centered on the procedure that could treat the physiognomic markers of lesbianism. The characterization of an itch between labia is not dissimilar to the image of male lovers, particularly the partner who seeks penetration, whose anus is often interpreted by the Galenic-Islamic humoral configuration as a site where an itch or other forms of heat-related signifiers might manifest. In both cases, the desires between men or women are not flagged as encroaching a heterosexual “norm”.

The translation’s intrusions and omission of “useless” passages, evinced by the translator’s note and the footnote interferences, have also been identified in passing in other scholarship such as Myrne and Kurzyniec’s references¹⁰, however were not the subject of detailed study. It is to say that the liberties taken by the translators to adapt and interfere in the anthology exhibit a self-proclaimed authority to assess the author-compiler’s anecdotal instances in the form of modern term impositions or footnotes unavailable in the Arabic edition.

3. My Translation Approach

While interpretation is essential to translation, in my own translation efforts in the course of the chapters, I am invested in conceptualizing translation as an interpretive act with the motive of bringing out the poetics of lesbian and lesbian-like pleasure. I also approach (un)translatability as a methodological tool that guides my access to the Arabic edition in a to-and-fro with the available English translation, a comparative

¹⁰ As mentioned in the introductory chapter, Myrne refers to the English “unscholarly” translation, briefly noting that it includes “omissions and abbreviations” (*Organizing* 183). In one footnote remark, Kurzyniec refers to the “immensely helpful” English translation as “exceedingly rare” and including “hilarious malapropisms.” (Kurzyniec 103)

approach between the two works produced in the 21st and 20th century respectively, of the 10th century anthology that has caught attention in scholarship more recently although highly referenced since the premodern period. The analytical and critical approach does not simplify the reading of the Arabic edition, but brings out the particularities of its style and ambiguous structural and linguistic makeup. Adam Talib comments on the revisiting of texts which are prominently complex and unintelligible, suggesting: “We cannot legitimately argue, it seems to me, that we have overcome the opacity and illegibility of these texts, but what worries me more is that our revisionism is still not confident enough to allow itself to see these texts as opaque and illegible.” (Talib 131) While the opacity he addresses concerns critical revisionism, the proposition converses with the view of certain texts as untranslatable, pertaining to much of the erotic anthologies as multi-sourced works, for instance the anecdotal *mujūn* verses of Ibn Naṣr’s compilation. The initial part of Talib’s statement is in tension with the propositions of untranslatability as a tool, that it is indeed possible to converse with this opacity rather than “overcome” it. Simultaneously, my approach falls in line with the second segment of the statement, that there definitely is a resistance to acknowledging the opacity of premodern texts, but by gaining the confidence to identify texts as illegible or untranslatable for historical reasons, the work already gains a foundation to propel critical readings or translations. For such intricate works with little information and details of the material circumstances of their writing and production, reading this premodern work and translating its major parts does not serve as a way to make the text more legible or overcome its illegibility, but rather to make accessible the opaqueness of its context, to visibilize the little contextualization known to us.

In opposition to Jarkas and Khawwam's and attitude of characterizing and filtering "useless" sentences, my approach rests on containing the confusing and repetitive passages, in an attempt to translate and make available the lack of clarity in the anecdotes and layout of the Arabic edition. The goal is not to filter the details and vague references, or to codify the text, but to highlight the anecdotes that comprise a play on language and humoristic features closely linked to Arabic language's particularities. I am invested in underlining the passages on women's pleasure that don't focalize the necessity of the penis, and maintain repetitions and figures of speech. As the coming section and the second chapter elaborate, Jarkas and Khawwam's translation tends to inflate passages where phallic superiority is highlighted while retrenching many of the anecdotes of the opposite kind. My additions to the translation and the terms employed, as outlined in the introductory chapter, work towards a non-modernizing portrayal of lesbian desire and one that valorizes the poetic and rhetorical strategies as a means of presenting a nuanced image of lesbianism.

B. The Importance of Sex and Lesbian-Like Pleasure Across *Jawāmi*

In a means to frame the rhetorical and stylistic elements of the chapter on lesbianism, examining the references to lesbian and lesbian-like desire presented throughout the anthology aids in the configuration of Ibn Naṣr's perception of these relations and desires. Reading the chapter on lesbianism alone gives a partial picture, yet the perception of lesbianism necessitates looking through the chapters of the anthology to detect similar argumentation used in different chapters and how lesbian and lesbian-like women are used to fulfill distinct argumentative purposes in each chapter. The chapter dedicated to the matter focuses on certain physiognomical

explanations and anecdotal arguments that overlap with passages from different chapters in content, some repeating the anecdotes and others opposing or diverging from the knowledge laid out in the specific chapter. On one side, looking at the repetitions enables a big-picture understanding of lesbian-like desires depending on their location in the anthology: Where do the lesbian and lesbian-like references recur? Which other themes or preoccupations are they grouped with? These questions are essential to frame the chapter and comprehend the relevance of its content beyond the boundaries of the specified chapter, particularly for the sake of understanding the value allocated to lesbian pleasure across the anthology. It is helpful to see what anecdotes other chapters contain, also since the premodern manuscript copies were often purchased or obtained in parts in the premodern period and the repetitions allow the reader who is uninterested in viewing the chapter on lesbianism to derive preliminary ideas of these desires from other chapters. And most importantly, the chapter cannot be read in isolation especially as it appears as a humble and concise chapter of a greater compiled work, and so, visualizing the literary landscape in which it exists brings out the tensions and complexities that the chapter converses with.

1. *The Significance of Sex and Kinds of Lovers*

Prior to delving into the importance and interest in *saḥq*, the early chapters introduce Ibn Naṣr's general presentation and value given to intercourse, later positioning lesbian-like desire within the greater understanding of pleasure. In the second chapter of the Arabic edition of *Jawāmi'*, Ibn Naṣr enumerates the benefits of intercourse, considering *nikāḥ* or penetrative sex as the sixth sense and explaining the reasons why sex remains secretive although essential. He equates sex to food, as both

are natural to the body, with the only difference being the exhaustion that results from the lack of these sources. Due to nocturnal emission, abstaining from sex for a period of time does not cause bodily exhaustion, though it is necessary for humoral balance. The erotic anthology shows that the desires are framed largely within a variety of medical sources, which are rudimentary to comprehend the premodern Islamicate context.

Islamic medical sources discuss reproductive health, the connection between sexual activity and general health, and are more or less filled with remedies of medicine for sexual dysfunctions. [...] For the Islamic physicians, sexual health was a central health issue with impact on the general state of the body. It was generally considered that sexual intercourse with moderation is necessary for good physical and mental health. Excessive sexual activity is not good, but neither is abstinence. (*Female Sexualities* 25)

The Galenic-Islamic medicine spread across the Abbasid period approached sex in the articulation of humors, like other health-related practices. The body and the mind are inextricably bound and reflected in humoral imbalances, should there be any dysfunctions or immoderate activities. In these medical-philosophical understandings, sex is considered a remedy to moderate the humors and relieve pains or illnesses of the body-mind duality.

Another difference that sets sex apart from food as nourishment, is that public exposure to sex arouses pleasure in the person looking at it and allures them to partake in this pleasure-making, an issue that ceases to be a problem with food since the viewer can, without trouble, participate in the pleasure of eating. Ibn Naṣr justifies the importance of writing the erotic compilation by this comparative approach, simultaneously supported by the urgency of the anthology's title *Jawāmi' al-Ladhdha*, that promises a comprehensive work on pleasures. A remark worth noting is his usage of the term *nikāḥ* rather than *jimā'*, defining pleasure as phallic and penetrative from the

very outset. The chapter then establishes the ordinariness and unavoidability of this kind of sexual practice. Not only is sex central to the fulfillment of pleasure, the author-compiler, by presenting it as a sixth sense, suggests sex to be a medium through which a person experiences interactions, a physiognomical perception to engage with the world, similar to sight or smell. In other terms, rather than sex being a reaction of the senses combined, it functions as an innate desire that induces a set of feelings and experiences.

Alongside the natural desire for sex, Ibn Naṣr introduces the three kinds of love in chapter seven *Madhāhib al-‘ushshāq fī al-mubāshara* (On Lovers’ Opinions about Sex) of the anthology’s Arabic edition: that between man and woman, man and *ghulām*, woman and woman. Jeremy Kurzyniec, in “Diagramming the Bedroom Sciences in ‘Alī ibn Naṣr al-Kātib’s *Jawāmi‘ al-ladhdha*”, draws attention to an interesting diagram that appears at the beginning of chapter seven in one of two manuscripts that preserve the diagramming (*tashjīr*): MS Ayasofya 3836, dated 533/1139, the common manuscript used as a source for both the Arabic edition and English translation. The diagram comes in a tripartite arrangement which Kurzyniec suggests corresponds to the kāmashastric tradition (Kurzyniec 120), to designate the three types of love: the first branch on the right remarkably starts with a woman to woman, followed by a man to *ghulām* and finally, a man to a woman. While Kurzyniec stresses on the inconsistency of the diagrams throughout the compilation, he suggests that the modest, single-tier diagram, takes up a large portion of the page, for a statement that does not necessitate *tashjīr* as form of explanation: “It is not, for instance, a long, numbered list with many subdivisions, for which *tashjīr* would be helpful and could, if lacking in a manuscript, plausibly be reconstructed. It is instead rather simple, and one wonders why a diagram was used here at all (Kurzyniec 121).” At the end of the manuscript chapter, Ibn Naṣr

concludes with the same statement on the three categories but in different terms and order, that Kurzyniec characterizes as redundant, since the inverse relisting seems “clumsy” to the “mathematical precision in the ordering of the poetic quotations” (123). The manuscript’s diagram momentarily puts the love between two women at the forefront of the three-branch listing, before this order of enumeration is reverted in the remainder of the chapter. In both cases, this categorization taking up the page of the manuscript alludes to the significant importance given to the three major arrangements of lovers, and repeated throughout the edition’s chapters, making for lesbianism as one of the different kinds, a clearly illustrated non-exceptionality of such desire from the outset. It is not surprising that the categorization is repeated and the switch in order occurs, as both are congruent with Ibn Naṣr’s style in the Arabic edition. The latter is distinguished by discordance, such as the opening paragraph of the chapter on lesbianism, vacillating between physiognomical insights that push for the view of lesbian desire as emanating from the vagina only and other anecdotes that confirm the pleasure from *saḥq* can reside in the labia. The contradictions do not negate one another, rather emphasize the multiple sources of compilation and Ibn Naṣr’s skill at a narrative teasing approach, keeping the reader on shaking grounds towards the topic of each chapter. The initial diagram of chapter seven spread over a valuable area on the page evinces a clear, equal importance to the three kinds of love arrangements, which validates the non-central view of love between man and women, as conceived in the modern sense. The diagram debunks that the relations between two men or two women were peripheral, and more so, the initial diagram of the manuscript interestingly starts by citing these two forms of desires before the man-woman love in order of reading from right to left. Its later reversal within the same chapter might not be arbitrary, but

certainly disrupts any proposition of significance to be given to the order of enumeration, especially keeping in mind the copyist's role in certain manuscript decisions.

Aside from the Arabic edition and manuscript, the English translation offers another categorization at the start of chapter seven claiming that "Lovers are divided into three kinds: Heterosexuals, sodomites and lesbians" (Jarkas and Khawwam 106). The division presented in numeral order, utilizes modern labels as a shorthand rather than the two-partner distinction presented in the Arabic edition, and premodern *adab* writing more generally. The choice falls in line with the translators' investment in clarifying the contents to the Western reader, and as such does not provide "man and *ghulām*" for instance, but sodomites, a modern notion charged with negative connotations that effaces the intimate arrangement of love between both partners, since sodomy focalizes the act of sex between men rather than passion or intimate love.

Adding to the depiction of lesbian desire as one of the many forms and arrangements around love, in the same chapter, *saḥq* is remarkably accorded to the same planet as *nikāḥ*, affording both desires the same source rather than presenting *saḥq* as ensuing from a different astrological root. The Arabic edition encompasses the view of some old thinkers (*qudamā'*) on the origin of all races to come from four instinctive acts: sex between man and man, sex between man and woman, sex between woman and woman and fourth being pampering and taking the lead. The description precedes fortune tellers' assumption (*aṣḥāb al-nujūm*) that *nikāḥ* and *saḥq* come from the planet Venus while *liwāt* and ' *ishq* (passionate love) from Saturn, and *baghā'* (anal intercourse) from Mercury. The statement is followed by a claim from a poet speaking about the origins of *saḥq*:

وحكي عن دعبل الشاعر أنه قال: أول سحقي ظهر في الجاهلية ما كان من هند بنت النعمان والزرقاء بنت حسن¹¹
(Ibn Naṣr 106)

It was said about the poet Di‘bal that he said: The first *saḥq* appeared in the *jāhiliyyah* period between Hind bint al-Nu‘mān and al-Zarqā’ bint Ḥasan.

The reference to the earliest relationship between two women is described once in passing, as part of the chapter on the different kinds of love, however it does not show again in the chapter on lesbianism. The earliest citations of women’s love is said to be in *Jawāmi‘* and has intrigued much popular engagement and interest. Appearing under the types of sexual acts, the brief remark on the earliest love between two women comes to validate the propositions of the paragraph, making for lesbian love and relations a long-standing type of desire. Not only does the lesbian love story verify the historical existence of relationships between women, it comes to eliminate any doubts that lesbian desire is rare or uncommon.

The early chapters of the anthology set lesbian and lesbian-like desires in a climate of high importance accorded to the fulfillment of sexual pleasure, and simultaneously presents lesbianism as common and non-exceptional in different iterations. Provided as one of the three types of love in manuscript diagramming and in written repetition, lesbian love and desire is accorded with an equal importance to other forms of love, whether astrologically or philosophically, in addition to the historical evidence of the popular lesbian love story pertaining to the *jāhiliyyah* period.

¹¹ This relationship is said to be one of the earliest recorded, and the reference, according to G.H.A. Juynboll’s entry in the Encyclopedia of Islam, appears in “a report of the *awā’il* genre cf. Abu ‘l-Faradj al-Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, in which it is alleged that, forty years before the emergence of male homosexuality (= *liwāṭ*) the first woman who loved another woman was Hind, the daughter of the last Laḥmid king of Ḥīra, al-Nu‘mān b. al-Mundhir, who fell in love with Zarqā’ bt. al-Ḥasan from Yamāma. The story is told in some detail in ch. 9 of *Ruṣhd al-labīb ilā mu‘āsharat al-ḥabīb* by Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ‘Alī Ibn Falīta (d. 764/1363)” (Junybol).

2. *References to Lesbian and Lesbian-like Sex in the Arabic Chapters*

Alongside the categorizations of lesbian lovers as non-exceptional, many anecdotes portraying lesbian and lesbian-like sexual desire and intercourse across the Arabic chapters appear as an extension of the chapter's argument rather than represented for the lesbian pleasures themselves. The reading of the references outside the chapter on lesbianism confirms the fluidity of lesbian portrayal, as some depictions that may be read as lesbian-like are detailed in anecdotes that make no inferences or classifications of the descriptions to be of lesbian or lesbian-like women, and others, where lesbians are evidently presented as such, are said to achieve mutual pleasure through phallic or penetrative sexual acts.

The sexual relations between lesbian and lesbian-like women are referenced in some anecdotes to exceed the pleasures for *sahq* and include more than one form of sexual practice, to support the desires promoted by the chapter in which they occur. For instance, looking at the chapter *Fī al-fatayayn* that precedes the one on lesbianism about the “two men” or male homosexuality, it is a much more comprehensive account of desire and intercourse among men than its lesbian counterpart. The major difference in the presentation of *liwāṭ* is the chapter's focus on sharing anecdotes about those who partook in such acts and desires, rather than finding the reasons behind them in the same way the chapter on lesbianism ponders the motivations. The chapter also ends on a favorable note, providing a recipe of incense that intensifies man's the attraction to *ghilmān*. However, one anecdote accompanied by a verse about two lesbian women appears in the early pages of the chapter:

وقالت ابنة الخسّ لحبّي المدنيّة، وكانتا سحّاقتيّن: أيُّ الاشياء أشهى اليك؟ قالت: أن أناك من خلفي ومن قدّامي.
 وقال الشاعر:
 أيام أمشي للهوى عرضيّة وأناك من خلفي ومن قدّامي
 (Ibn Naṣr 150)

Ibnat al-Khuss asked Ḥubba al-Madaniyyah and they were both lesbians: Which is more pleasurable to you? She replied: That I am penetrated from the back and from the front.

And the poet said:

Sometimes I walk sideways into love penetrated from behind and from the front

The placement of the anecdote within this chapter serves to support the anecdotes and arguments on the pleurability of anal intercourse. Coming from two lesbian women, the exchange further proves that this form of desire is not exclusive to men but also stretches to reputable lesbian women who would ideally choose to be penetrated in different ways. In the chapter on lesbianism, there are no expressions from lesbian and lesbian-like women that include anal penetration, mostly vaginal intercourse or *saḥq*. The usage of the verb *nayk* in its first-person form in the second segment of the verse points to the desire of simultaneous vaginal and anal penetration, although the suggestion of grinding “from the front” may not be totally dismissible. The poet’s verse however, highlights the desire as an unusual challenge to love with the lesbian woman defiantly choosing dual penetration

The discussion of women and the desire for anal sex emerges again in the fifteenth chapter *Fī al-madhhab al-mālikī* (On the *Mālikī* School), where two types of women are described: those that choose it for the fear of slander and unwanted pregnancy, while others have a strong desire for anal penetration. The distinction imbricates with the choice behind lesbianism outlined in the chapter on lesbian desires, which encourages the observation that lesbian-like sex is not strictly used for the fear of pregnancy, rather different forms of non-vaginal penetration were also portrayed as alternative to pregnancy and signs of fornication. In other terms, a woman afraid of

falling pregnant may well indulge in anal sex, as much as she could favor lesbian and lesbian-like intercourse for that matter.

In another remarkable reference, the description of women who do not enjoy intercourse with men is not presented as a lesbian-like, although strongly corresponds to depiction of lesbianism in the dedicated chapter. The anecdote provided in the fourteenth chapter *Al-qawl fī shahwat al-nisā' li-al-nikāh* (On Women's Desire for *Nikāh*) goes as follows:

فأما اللواتي لا يشتهين من الرجال المُجامعة بل الضَّمَّ والقبل والشَّمَّ والمفاكهة والحديث والمزاح واللَّهو والجماع في غير الفرج فهنَّ: التي لم تُراهق، والقصيرة، واللحيمة، والبيضاء، وذات البعل اللّازم.

(Ibn Naṣr 219)

As for those who do not desire vaginal intercourse with men but prefer one hugging, kissing, smelling, joking around, flirting, and non-vaginal sex: these are the pre-pubescent woman, the short, the chubby, the white, and the one with a constant companion.

The characteristics laid out in the above section may easily be lesbian-like features, as the desired preferences seem to be identical in many parts with the chapter on lesbianism. Such a reference symbolizes the range of desires, acts and behaviors that may at times be classified as lesbian and lesbian-like, while very similar articulations may not necessarily be linked to these forms of desires. This instance confirms the fluidity of lesbianism as a category of representation in the anthology in such a way that does not allow for a set of defined characteristics of lesbian and lesbian-like women.

In addition to the chapters that cite lesbian women in contexts that do not initially seem relevant such as the chapter on male homosexuality, the opposite is true of lesbian and lesbian-like references absent from chapters where the desires may be particularly pertinent, especially that the chapter on lesbianism makes these associations. For instance, in the chapter dedicated to physiognomical features of the

vagina, there are no references to the qualities of the genital that can lead to lesbianism, such as the length of the vagina being too short or large for the penis, affecting the experience of pleasure and the reversion to lesbianism, as suggested in the opening of the chapter on lesbianism. While it may be expected that such a serious physiognomic description would recur in the chapter dedicated to the genital itself, this explanation is not repeated, a matter that further emphasizes the singularity of the lesbian chapter's opening outlined in the coming chapter and the ambivalence of lesbian representation.

3. *The 'Willful Ignorance' of Translation*

The references to lesbian and lesbian-like desires that extend the arguments of their relative chapters are especially a site of interest in the English translation, as they center phallic portrayal. The English translation takes on an approach that minimizes lesbian and lesbian-like desire and mutual pleasure, while valorizing the translation of lesbian-like passages across the anthology that include phallic or penetrative pleasures. In chapters such as those where lesbian women appear to promote anal intercourse, the Arabic edition's focus on phallic pleasure is in concert with what the English translation wants to convey and accordingly, the discrepancies between the two versions are less prominent. The misogynist bias of translation resonates with the term "willful ignorance" used by Tuana, referring to the "active production and preservation of ignorance" (Tuana 10), in the translator's non-passive favoring of phallic pleasure in the representation of lesbian women, in line with the portrayal of lesbianism as perverse in their note.

The first chapter that presents an extant characterization of lesbian-like pleasure is the fifth chapter *Fī manāqib al-dhakar wa-al-farj* (On the virtues of the penis and the

vagina), containing five passages in the section dedicated to the description of the penis, confirming the phallic as ideal from the perspective of lesbian and lesbian-like women who had previously lived without it. The initial anecdote, similar to ones in the chapter on lesbianism, involves women who tended to *saḥq* until the taste of the penis changed their minds. Another brief anecdote that follows introduces two women engaging in sex and struggling to ejaculate, and so attempt to mimic men by recalling beautiful women:

وَبَلَّغَنِي أَنْ وَاحِدَةً كَانَتْ تَسَاحِقُ وَاحِدَةً وَلَمْ تَنْزَلْ، فَقَالَتْ لِصَاحِبَتِهَا: تَعَالِي حَتَّى نَذْكَرَ حَسَانَ أُخَوَاتِنَا لَعَلَّنَا نُنْزَلُ، فَإِنَّ الرَّجُلَ يَفْعَلُ مِثْلَ ذَلِكَ، فَلَمْ تَبْقَى حَسَنَاءَ إِلَّا ذَكَرْنَهَا فَلَمْ يُنْزَلْنَ.

(Ibn Naṣr 69)

I was told that a woman was having sex with another woman. When she failed to ejaculate, she told her partner: “Come, let us recall the most beautiful of our sisters so that perhaps we may ejaculate, for men do it as such.” Not a single woman was left unmentioned yet they still did not ejaculate.

The anecdote highlights women’s failure to achieve the male potential in sex, hoping, yet falling short of being man-like. Within the chapter’s context, the lesbian women’s common aspiration is to obtain the same pleasure procured by the phallus, and in its absence, the orgasm remains unattainable. This image is not paralleled in the chapter on lesbianism and presents a rare instance of two women partners mutually desiring to imagine other women, not as a fathoming of their own pleasure but an imitation of male behavior. The failure of female ejaculation between the two women implicates the untransferable pleasure of heterosexuality, that the two lesbian women cannot simply borrow a male strategy of pleasure-making. Sex, in this anecdote, is expressed as a form of thinking together and experimenting with interpretive tactics towards the achievement of an orgasm.

The remaining lesbian-like stories of the fifth chapter follow the same pattern, where the penis is reiterated as superior in speech anecdotes by lesbian-like women who

denounced their lesbianism upon experiencing the virtues of the penis. In this case, lesbianism is employed as an argumentative tool to effectuate absolute characteristics of the phallus's supremacy. And as per the last anecdote, the citations of lesbians' failure to achieve the male potential of pleasure, invites towards an approach to heterosexuality as having an untransferable set of pleasurable constituents that cannot be merely appropriated by lesbian women.

The English translation confirms and elaborates on this view and goes further to merge the anecdote that follows with the abovementioned one, bringing attention to the instance on the page in the length of the story that builds on multiple dialogues to intensify the authority of the penis:

I have also been told that two lesbians, practicing lesbian intercourse with each other could not reach an orgasm. One of them said, "Why not imagine female beauty so that we may reach an orgasm. Men do the same." Then they mentioned the names of all the beautiful women they know, but they did not reach an orgasm. Then the other one said, "Mr. so and so is beautiful indeed and he has such a big penis." At the very moment, when the penis was mentioned, both of them reached an orgasm. The first one, being intelligent, thought, "That which causes orgasm by name rather than by sight must really be preferred to that which we have." Then she got married. When, however, her fellow-lesbian had known of her marriage, she asked her, "When did you get on top of the minaret? The night its mere name made us achieve an orgasm," she answered. (Jarkas and Khawwam 83)

The translators bring together two anecdotes that in the Arabic edition are separate instances around the same topic, a narration that inflates the value of the penis for both lesbian women and propounds that the presence, even symbolic, of the penis suffices to bring lesbian women to ejaculate. As a lengthy anecdote, the narration promotes a view of lesbian sex to be less threatening, since the phallus may still prevail as the major pleasure-making tool. It does not come as a surprise that the references to lesbianism

outside the chapter are rich in description in the English translation, such as the above selection, particularly that the translators consistently show great interest in detailing the anecdotes that speak highly of the penis and negate the desires of lesbian women towards each other.

C. Conclusion

From its title, *Jawāmi' al-Ladhdha* claims to bring together all forms of pleasure and takes on the project by outlining the value of sex in the early parts of the book. The explanation helps situate the conversation of lesbianism in the anthology within a literary representation of sexual intercourse as necessary for physiognomic nourishment and humoral balance, and moreover, a sensory experience that stimulates interactions and encounters with the world. A person's sexual desires, by that, do not define the identity of the person as in contemporary conceptualization, but rather defines the set of attitudes and feelings in the engagement with other people.

Upon deliberating the anecdotes on lesbianism appearing throughout the chapters of the anthology, the non-exceptionality of lesbian and lesbian-like pleasures is established by the repetitive depiction of desire between women to be one of the types of love arrangements. At the same time, many references fulfill a rhetorical role in the chapters where they appear and so, lesbian pleasure does not occur for the sake of the very representation of lesbian women, but to reify a phallogocentric argument in the respective chapter. A great instance reflecting the rhetorical objective is the appearance of a lesbian reference in the chapter on male homosexual desires, to confirm the pleasurable of anal penetration as approved by lesbian women, however, this

interference is non-reciprocal between the chapters, since the chapter on lesbianism does not involve citations of male homosexuality.

These references occur in detailed anecdotes in the English translation, as phallic superiority negates the value of lesbian-like pleasure, aligning with the translators' own view and motivation outlined in their note. Such depictions of lesbianism outside the chapter in fact are more thoroughly presented in the translation than those included in the chapter dedicated to lesbian desires, an approach further expanded in the next chapter that focalizes the style of the first page and the rhetoric of the *mujūn* verses, where the translators deflate their efforts in depicting the pleasures of lesbian and lesbian-like women.

CHAPTER II

THE PLAY AND HUMOR OF *MUJŪN* VERSES IN THE CHAPTER ON LESBIANISM

Lesbian and lesbian-like women are often presented in well-written verses, charged with double entendre, humor and witty responses serving as rhetorical objects of the Arabic edition. Myrne confirms that the anecdotes compiled in such anthologies are “more historical fiction than history writing”, elaborating:

Historians have found *adab* useful sources for studying unofficial history, the history of women and the non-elite. This is primarily due to lack of material about these groups in mainstream history books, whereas they frequently occur in *adab* compilations where there are numerous anecdotes about witty and eloquent women whose clever remarks make confronting men everything from pleasing to being dumbfounded. (*Female Sexuality* 4)

The range of stories and interpersonal dialogues, while they may or may not have occurred, are valuable as written sources, indicative of the common-place and diverse view of such desires, away from black-and-white, legal and illegal, natural and unnatural, accepted or punished distinctions. The naming of some women like ‘Ai’ sha Bint Abi Hārūn al-Tammār, famously recognized for her lesbian-like desire, reinforces the social “popularity” of some women included in the work, assuming the *zarīf* reader’s recognition of the cited lesbians, while other women remain unspecified gathered from indeterminate sources.

The entertaining aspect of *adab* writing, particularly central to the tenth century *Jawāmi‘* is as much argumentative as the physiognomic, legal and philosophical passages dealing with sexual desires, since the play of the *mujūn* literature also imbue the sense of pleasure inextricable to sexual intercourse. Studying the play and humor of

the verses in the Arabic edition brings out the rhetoric reflecting the author's view of lesbianism and highlights the assumed knowledges on premodern lesbian pleasure, and consequently, the loss of such poetic features in the English translation produces an erasure of style and rhetoric. The *mujūn* verses as a site of speech, eloquence and argumentation pertain to the popularity and flourishing of this poetry in the early Abbasid period. Humor and play are characteristic of the literature:

Libertinage, licentiousness'; a term used to describe both a mode of behaviour and a genre of medieval Arabic poetry and prose. Closely related to *khali'a*, the throwing off of societal restraints, *mujūn* refers behaviourally to open and unabashed indulgence in prohibited pleasures, particularly the drinking of wine and, above all, sexual profligacy. *Mujūn* literature describes and celebrates this hedonistic way of life, frequently employing explicit sexual vocabulary, and almost invariably with primarily humorous intent. ("Mujūn" 546-7)

In its consideration as lighthearted, cynical and anti-romantic¹² poetry, *mujūn* is an essential component of the anthology's storytelling, threatening and destabilizing notions of sexual pleasure while retaining the threat by contrasting provocative verses with a reversal of their intentions. When arguing that the Arabic edition takes on a teasing style, I refer to the structuring of anecdotes and information, as it complements the *mujūn* verse which "itself can be thought of as a kind of game" and according to

¹² The Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature's entry on *mujūn* describes the literature as "essentially a product of the early 'Abbasid period. Pre-Islamic poetry sometimes describes sexual adventures (most notably in the *Mu'allaqa* of Imru' al-Qays), but without the graphic and waggish qualities of true *mujūn*; and while pre-Islamic and Umayyad abuse poetry (*hijii'*) is often extremely coarse, and can also provoke laughter, its defamatory intent sets it off from *mujūn's* essential lightheartedness. The rise in Umayyad Arabia of the '*Udhri* school of love poetry, chaste and emotionally overwrought, provided a perhaps essential foil for *mujūn's* anti-romantic and sometimes cynical stance, while the growing practice of *tashbib*, embarrassing respectable ladies by composing love lyrics about them, prefigures *mujūn's* delight in breaching the barriers of what can be said in polite company. But it was in the very different social climate of early 'Abbasid Basra and Baghdad that true *mujūn* first flourished, and above all in the person of Abu Nuwas." ("Mujūn" 546-7)

Emily Selove, “the style of language known as *mujūn* is by definition playful” (Selove 119).

Examining the opening page of the chapter on lesbianism, the author’s style is characterized by a teasing approach, combining anecdotes that pose a threatening instance with an antithetical articulation which sets the chapter off on a destabilizing note arousing the reader’s curiosity. The first anecdote in the chapter about a lesbian-like woman centers forceful and non-mutual pleasure, defining lesbian pleasure from the start, as greedy in pleasure and fluid in its desires that could include an inferior male partner. Then I study the rhetorical tools that enforce the disruptive and playful portrayal of lesbian and lesbian-like desires throughout the chapter on lesbianism in the Arabic edition, looking at the trope of phallic revulsion and the contrary boasting on the phallic pleasures. The English translation does not encompass much of the *mujūn* and the *adab*’s stylistic traits as it presents lesbian-like desires in the light of structured and reason-driven prose rather than verses comprising a humorous or playful tone. In the last section, the two major passages that detail the utmost pleasures of lesbian desire reify the association of lesbian women’s desire with power, the orgasm fascinating in power and vulnerability at once and illustrated in the rhythm and poetic musicality of lesbian sex, while the repetition of movement and sound are absent from the English translation.

A. The First Teasing Act

Lesbianism is presented in the Arabic chapter as a range of non-threatening disruptive acts, attitudes and relationships among women, or relating to a woman with a desire to engage in *sahq* with different non-female partners. The lesbian and lesbian-

like women are portrayed as eloquent speakers, using humorous, provocative and playful language in the anecdotes to express their pleasures and desires. The diverse possibilities for queer desires are conveyed by a teasing style that encourages tempting conclusions about lesbianism followed by diversions from such ideas. By breaking down the opening paragraph, there appears a series of premises that reflect the author's own assumptions of lesbianism. Contrastingly, the English translation puts forward lesbian desire as a logical alternative to sex with men for reasons of pregnancy and slander, depicting lesbian and lesbian-like women as driven by reason, and interested in the act of *sahq* itself without much expression of love and intimacy associated with sexual desire.

1. The Opening Paragraph

Ibn Naṣr's style in the writing and compilation of the work on lesbianism takes on a teasing approach, starting from the first page of the chapter and extending towards the rest of the pages. The opening paragraph is emblematic of the anthology's style of writing: it highlights the writer's interest in portraying multiple attitudes on the subject of the chapter, and it shows the structure of the *adab* literature, particularly its shift in the tenth century towards including more poetic and light-hearted narration in physiognomic and philosophical description. The teasing style initially appears in the disturbances of the first lines, the provocations in the presentation of physiognomic information, embodied in a play with his power of knowledge. He juxtaposes disruptive possibilities for women engaging in *sahq*, before confirming that they could not prevail among all women, to end with a suggestive statement that favors non-phallic sex.

In the opening paragraph of the chapter on lesbianism, Ibn Naṣr outlines several medical premises that foreground the reasoning behind turning to lesbianism, using an affirmative tone that intertwines the physiognomic writing with a narrative-like approach. In addition to the strategically outlined medical explanations, Ibn Naṣr employs terms and stylistic elements that render the first paragraph into a storytelling format, using features of narration rather than mere medical description. The English translation's opening, on the other hand provides a writing structure that is distinct from the oscillating arguments of the Arabic edition, especially different from the Arabic's stratification of premises that instill fear or curiosity in the reader, stacked over those that bring reassurance, in the author's overall sense of congeniality towards lesbian-like sex.

Opening with a statement about women having different vagina sizes, the disquieting statement, set up as form of storytelling hook in the first premise of the Arabic chapter, establishes a threatening difference among women's bodies, to tease the reader into the chapter. It debuts with the differentiation between short and long vaginas, the latter solely resulting in women's enjoyment of a penis as it can reach the upper wall of the vagina. Based on this fact, a vagina that is greater in length than a penis, results in a woman becoming a lesbian:

العلقة في من أحبّ من النساء السحق هو أن حلقوم الرحم يختلف فيهنّ مقداره، فيكون الحلقوم في بعضهنّ قصيراً،
وفي بعضهنّ طويلاً.

(Ibn Naṣr 181)

The premise behind those of women who enjoy *saḥq* is that the size of the vagina varies, so that some women have short vaginas and others have long ones.

For instance, the first word that opens the chapter is the term *al-‘illah*, denoting the premise or motivations behind women who enjoy lesbian-like sex. Starting with such a

term promptly draws the attention to the subject of the chapter and triggers the curiosity of the reader to inquire into the roots of such desires. Often, chronological narration introduces the background of a story or sets the scene for the subject to come, and this rhetorical device is clearly utilized in the opening of the Arabic chapter. It also establishes the writer's authority, when the first line of the chapter claims to know the premises behind vaguely discussed desires between women. From the very initial term, the writer states his cognizance of these root premises behind lesbian-like desire, and then in the coming sentences, enjoys the authority of knowledge when proposing different options for women's vagina, some short and others long. The first premise quickly activates a playful game of options through the categories claimed by the author and the threat it undermines for women with short vaginas and also those with a vagina larger than the size of the penis.

In the English translation, the premise is differently worded and affects in turn the opening of the chapter. Jarkas and Khawwam pick up the claim on long vaginas being favorable to intercourse with men: "A woman will experience pleasure in sexual union only when the penis reaches the bottom of her vagina and touches her womb" (Jarkas and Khawwam 188). The translators start with a singular condition about women in general rather than introducing lesbian and lesbian-like women as the primary concern for the physiognomic description, continuing the paragraph in a consequential rationale to reach the motive behind lesbianism in the very end of the opening paragraph. The English chapter takes on a systematic style of reasoning compared to the teasing narration of the Arabic, each characterized by a different tone.

In the second premise of the Arabic paragraph, the initial tease fades out into an assuring statement, that pleasure certainly does not reside in the labia of the vulva,

followed by two affirmative reasonings: (1) women would otherwise have all been lesbians if it were true and (2) women would have equally enjoyed the rubbing of a male's penis against their labia as much as men enjoyed it. This premise soothes any threats that may arise from the thought of pleasure coming from the labia, or not necessitating the presence of a penis, with the two explanations that serve as a form of reassurance that not all women could be lesbians. The English translation, annexing the explanation to the first, limits the explanation of the labia as not constituting a site of pleasure for women and includes that the idea was widespread by the formulation: "contrary to what is supposed", as though signaling that this assumption prevails. The English opening's language in the first couple of lines are not threatening and are marked instead by a sequential logic, while the Arabic necessitates the second premise for reassurance.

Lesbian-like desire, in the third premise, is supported by the previous statement, and elaborates on the transformative capacity of such desires, rather than presented as an intrinsic feature, discussing women who develop an addiction to *saḥq*. A woman can become a lesbian and may thereby start detesting men and cursing those who love them. While presenting a conciliatory certainty about women's pleasure being outside the labia, Ibn Naṣr confirms that only women who "obsess" over *saḥq* become lesbians and detest men. This suggestion brings to the fore the possibility of women engaging in *saḥq* without the hatefulness towards heterosexuality or the abstinence from engaging in intercourse with men. Such a proposition enables an array of options, in line with the multiplicity and fluidity of desires, as women could enjoy lesbian-like sex without necessarily being "lesbians" in the sense of singular partnership with women and in opposition to any sexual interactions with men. Only at a certain degree of indulgence

in lesbian-like sex do women become lesbians. The English translation does not convey a sense of fluidity in the lesbian desires in the early part of the chapter, in fact, the first paragraph's structure rather incites a unitary reading that centers a logical cause-effect determination behind lesbianism.

The Arabic paragraph's final assertion enforces the value of intercourse to be non-phallic and non-penetrative, both denominations of lesbian and lesbian-like sex. The opening paragraph wraps up with a concluding remark that the objective of sex is both movement and touch (*al-ḥarakah wa-al-mamāsah*) (Ibn Naṣr 181), a claim unavailable in the English translation. This ending is particularly remarkable as the author, although starting from a place of inquiry and biological arguments, conveys an evident investment in disruptive recounting of medical knowledge, on one hand. The narration entices the reader with threatening and reassuring attributes. On another, it lays out a multitude of prospects for women's lesbian-like desire that could embrace or oppose male partnership.

2. The Prestige and Desires of Layla the Lesbian-like Woman

Following the physiognomic introduction, the first anecdote epitomizes the disruptive teasing style, as it tells of a renowned lesbian-like woman who engages in coercive lesbian-like sex with a male partner, accompanied by a song in verse about Layla and the threat she instills in young boys. The latter is only available in the Arabic edition, while the English translation includes the main anecdote only without the tease of her wide reputation on the streets among young boys. The story is remarkable for its lack of reciprocal pleasure and two-sided participation, set in contrast to the preceding introductory paragraph that takes into consideration the mutuality of desire. The

anecdote presents Layla, a reputable and wealthy woman, recounted by her neighbor Ja‘far Ibn al-Muktafī bi-Allah, the son of an Abbasid caliph. Layla pertains to a higher social class, since she resides in a part of town for the elite, and shows clear signs of power, both materially and symbolically. The male servant at the door of her house safeguards her desire with a drawn sword while she invites the young men (*ghulām*) to serve as objects of pleasure, upon which she fulfills her sexual desires. Layla assumes a position of power by virtue of her social status, and increasingly so within her home by objectifying young men and depriving them of their own will in service of her desire. She also holds the knife in her hand, a fatal and phallic tool as a reassertion of power. The story speaks of a possible resistance coming from the *ghulām*, one she responds to by a pierce with the knife, particularly if he attempted to partake in the pleasure or seduce her for his own benefit. The *ghulām*'s resistance in anecdotal form hints at the non-normativity of such behavior, posing a threat to the young men.

In this arrangement, there is no phallic penetration but a symbolic punitive one enabled by the knife, rendering Layla a performative male penetrator, with the receiving end being the *ghulām*, often considered to take the penetrated role in intercourse between two men. The anecdote contradicts the argument posed in the first passage since it defies the claim that pleasure can ensue from the external rubbing of the vulva, and simultaneously confirms the possibility of lesbian-like desire that includes a male partner. Additionally, other anecdotes of the chapter express different emotions and feelings towards their partners, however Layla's story shows queer sex divorced from intimacy, centered around the sole goal of ultimate pleasure and encourages the attribute of lesbianism to someone who enjoys *sahq* as an act detached from emotional connection. Even though the subject of her desire is a male partner, the fact that it is

specifically a young beautiful man, ponders the social perception of *ghilmān*, often seen as surpassing women in their beauty and having women-like soft beardless faces. The story could, on one part, reinforce the desirability of *ghilmān* even to some women, and on another part, suggest that such lesbian-like arrangement with a mature adult man may not be plausible.

The anecdote of Layla is also distinguished by the verse it includes, that is not the lesbian-like women's own speech, which is the case for the chapter's anecdotes, but her reputation instead invites for verses sang by boys on the streets about Layla, the most threatening woman cited in the chapter (Ibn Naṣr 181):

ليلي يا ليلي وليلي،
تعال ليلى طبق الورد، وحوله بهار،
يا شؤم بختي لكان ورد ليلي لآلي

Layla, Layla, oh Layla,
Come Layla, the rose has closed to bud, surrounded by specks of spice
What bad luck it would be, if Layla's rose were mine

The lesbian and lesbian-like women are often presented to speak for themselves, in a form of hearsay anecdotes, many lacking names or figures behind the anecdotal speech. As the first in the chapter and the only of its kind, in this story, Layla does not speak herself but is spoken about, exceptional in popularity that her name on the streets is sung by young boys. The verses indicate that the kind of sexual arrangement was specifically known, expressed through a metonymy: the rose symbolizing the lips of her vulva rubbing against the *ghulam*'s anus, that may include a growth of black hair in the area. The last verse validates the menace instilling young boys with the fear of serving Layla's desire if their turn comes, once more confirming the disruptive view of lesbian-

like women. Although the anecdote is available, the song is not present in the English translation, however in the Arabic story, it evokes a comical exaggeration of the subversive lesbian-like desire, an absolute pleasure that is not expounded as a physiognomic need such as an itch in the labia, nor an alternative to fornication and slander. In fact, her reputation as a lesbian-like woman with a particular sexual desire is claimed to fill the streets, a prerogative of her class position rather than a hazard to her status.

The significance of this anecdote as the first one appearing in the chapter on lesbianism is multifold, particularly due to its spotlighting of nonreciprocal pleasure, oppressive desire and lack of intimacy. Opening the chapter with this initial anecdote destabilizes the expectations from a lesbian-like woman and the relevant assumptions laid out in the introductory paragraph and the remaining anecdotes of the chapter. Such a unique story portrays lesbian-like women as having a strong unstoppable desire which may involve violence, as attaining utmost pleasure is of high importance. This image fortifies the value given to women's sexuality in the premodern Islamicate context, while pushing this sexual appetite towards a threatening and untamable behavior. Layla's social privilege also guards and sustains the enactment of these sexual relationships, and the servant with the sword at the door embodies this protected status. As the first lesbian-like woman cited in the chapter, the anecdote correlates lesbian-like desire with social prestige, rather than relationships among slave women or lower-class women. The choice on the author's behalf speaks to Ibn Naṣr's target reader, the *zarīf*, who is a member of the elite to which Layla also pertains. In this sense, the placement of this anecdote functions as a rhetorical tool, drawing in the reader to the chapter by initiating with a story about a lesbian-like women who belongs to the same social

environment as the caliph's son and well-read figures, bringing attention to her nobility as a means of making her desires permissible. At the same time, the story stands out from the rest of the anecdotes, marking the chapter's opening with the outlandishness and peculiarity that can characterize certain women engaging in *sahq*.

As opposed to the association with wealth, the brief anecdote following Layla's in the Arabic edition, provides the same involvement of a male partner derived of his own pleasure and even fertility by castration, reaffirming the power hierarchies and denial of mutual pleasure as the preceding story among women of lower-class status. The wealthy lesbian-like woman's story is contrasted in this one-liner with a reference to women who enjoy queer sex with servant-eunuchs; if castrated at a young age, the member grows gradually with time to reach the opening of the vulva, while that of a man castrated at an older age doesn't grow. The line describes the member's size as the primary site of interest for women of such desire, which in turn explains the attention to penis size and enlargement in erotic works, as even some lesbian-like women care for a member of great length. This anecdote is also unavailable in the English translation.

The two starting stories in the chapter both confirm the inclusion of male partners in lesbian-like desires in certain capacities, where the relationship dynamics tip towards an unequal distribution of power in favor of the woman, yet do not encompass any suggestions of penetration, only lesbian-like sex or rubbing (*musāḥaqa*). In these two instances, the act itself is valorized as a fulfilment of the woman's desire, rather than presented as an intimate encounter involving two women, later opposed in other anecdotes. However, that the chapter sets out on this note imposes a preliminary view of lesbianism to denote aggressive or exploitative desire, uninterested in an adult desirous male. These portrayals broaden the possibilities for queer sex and emphasize the

subversion associated with lesbian and lesbian-like women, and reify Ibn Naṣr's own delectation in disturbances and disruptions as the frame of his teasing narration.

The opening page, from the physiognomic display of information to the anecdote about Layla the lesbian-like woman followed by some women's sexual engagement with eunuchs, forms a strong argumentative gateway into the chapter. In just the first page, the author establishes a teasing style that destabilizes the reader's assumption, posing a threat only to hold it back, and this style continues to prevail in the chapter. The preliminary lesbian anecdotes, while they portray a fluidity of desires from the outset, spotlighting desires of lesbian women to male partners, the two instances present a uniquely forceful and greedy depiction of lesbian-like pleasures that is not replicated in the rest of the chapter. Although they aid in establishing the rhetoric of humor and obscene portrayal of lesbian desires, the images introducing these desires serve their own rhetorical effect to arouse in the reader a curiosity, and diverse questionings in mind that the rest of the chapter aims to answer. The teleological medical introduction and the absence of parts of the anecdotes from the English translation culminate in the erasure of the author's provocative style and preliminary efforts to portray a fluidity of lesbian desires.

B. Obscene Humor and its Rhetoric

As part of its teasing style, the chapter on lesbianism in the Arabic edition of *Jawāmi* employs a multitude of rhetorical tools in prose narration and poetic stanzas through which the lesbian and lesbian-like women are portrayed to "speak". The hearsay verses are a form of *mujūn* poetry that vitalize the presentation of lesbian desire, using humorous and obscene speech to serve as a tool of the author's rhetoric and

simultaneously perform a teasing function pertaining to the author’s style. In “Humour and Sexuality Twelfth-century Troubadours and Medieval Arabic Poetry”, Jerónimo Méndez describes the flourishing of the *mujūn* poetic genre among the elite of the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad, attracting the interest of ruling and religious figures. In the flourishing literary writing of the tenth century, it is both timely and unsurprising that Ibn Naṣr includes ample poetic verses throughout the anthology, making for a rich blend between physiognomic, philosophical and anecdotal poetic passages. On the features of *mujūn*, Méndez elaborates: “Frivolous and humorous descriptions of indecent and obscene manners appear often in combination with scurrilousness and shamelessness in the stanzas of *mujūn* literature (Méndez 120). Looking at the *mujūn* stanzas of the chapter, the shameless and obscene intermesh to form brief instances of disruption and subversion, on one part, endowing the text with the entertaining attribute that makes the erotic anthology enjoyable to consume, and on another part, a seeming-frivolity that substantiates underlying arguments and grounds the strategies used by the author-compiler in persuasion and appeal to the *ẓarīf* reader.

1. The Trope of Phallic Revulsion

The humor of the verses that lesbian and lesbian-like women are said to exchange appears through the figures of speech and imagery employed throughout the chapter. In one *mujūn* verse, Sumayyah bint ‘Abdallah bin Yazīd al-Hilāliyya rejects her former lover Khasīf bin Warqā’ after she was troubled with lesbianism (*buliyat bil-sahq*), and showing no empathy towards his plea said:

ترید تحظى بخيري فاطلب لأيرك غيري

(Ibn Naṣr184)

Should you seek my own good seek, for your penis, someone else

The rhythmic sequence of the verse is contained in the three-word division of each segment and an end rhyme (*saja'*) to complete the musicality of the verse, serving the aim of mockery while exhibiting a shamelessness in the flagrancy of the second segment. The amusing element also emanates from the anticipation of the end rhyme (*irṣād*), a cue for the reader to momentarily partake in the witty wordplay. The lesbian-like woman asserts in the imperative that her former lover's sexual desire will not be fulfilled by herself, contained in the demand to pursue another person for his penis's sake. In this conditional suggestion, the woman asks from her former lover to act upon his care for her by abandoning any hopes for a sexual relation between them. The obscenity of the verse lies in the combination of rhythmic poetry with a shameless sexual disruption. Sumayyah is introduced as a lesbian-like woman who has acquired a desire for *saḥq* using a connotation of troubling, which has disrupted her amiability to men, confirming the premise outlined in the opening paragraph of the chapter. The usage of her full name with that of her former lover, an infrequent occurrence among the hearsay anecdotes, adds to the audacious view of the named lesbian and amplifies the serious discontent she has developed towards phallic sex. Unavailable in the English translation, the anecdote in the Arabic edition provides an instance of lesbian desire that can develop following relationships with a male partner, one of the many arrangements and presentations of lesbian-like women.

The trope of phallic revulsion recurs throughout the chapter, particularly in rhyming verses, and in some parts are combined with other figurative elements. For instance, in two principal anecdotes, the trope is brought into play through Christian motifs. Sinan Antoon points to the literary topos of *mujūn*, in *Poetics of the Obscene in Premodern Arabic Poetry*, that tend to “toy with Christian symbols and terminology” in

relation to bacchic themes (Antoon 106). The latter is manifested in verses that are carved by lesbian and lesbian-like women on their rings, a symbolic performance of the permanence of their sexual desires, by way of self-marking their contempt for the penis.

ونقشت وهيبة السحاقة على خاتمها:
أعوذ بالله من الأير ومن دخول القس في الدير

وكان نقش خاتم فهدة أخت هارون المدينة وبها كان يُضرب المثل في أيامها:
ألا وعيش الخوخة المشرعة لا دخل الراهب وسط الصومعة
(Ibn Naṣr 184)

Wahībah the lesbian carved on her ring:

God forbid me from the penis and from the priest entering the monastery

It was also carved on Fahda's ring, Hārūn al-Madaniyyah's sister, and in her name, it was said in her days:

To live like a plum within reach not a monk entering the center of his cell

Both sets of verses use similar rhetorical elements, namely the double entendre (*tawriyah*) in the second segment of the verse, pertaining to the image of a monk or priest entering a prayer space, whether the monastery or solitary cell, standing for the church. The image alludes to the phallic penetration of a vagina, in other words, referring to *nayk*, set in opposition to the desired *saḥq*. The humorous play is embodied in the subversion of the Christian symbol of piety into an obscene image of penetrative sex. The first verse carved by Wahībah on her ring attempts to ridicule the penis and its sexual capacities in a targeted denunciation of the member, while Fahda's ring is carved with a verse that entails a metaphor in the initial segment that favors herself as an attainable fruit. While symbols of Christianity were often associated with debauchery in the premodern Islamicate period, the blasphemous implication magnifies the championing of lesbian-like desire as superior and oppositional to phallic-penetrative intercourse.

The religious associations are unavailable in the English translation where the verses blatantly describe unwanted penetration, the two verses presented in the following manner about Wahībah and Fahda’s ring carving respectively (Jarkas and Khawwam 191):

Cursed be the penis and
The penetration thereof though the vulva!

I swear by my vulva that
No man shall copulate with me.

The verses also position penetrative sex outside the scope of the lesbian and lesbian-like women’s interest, however devoid of rhetorical features that portray wit or eloquence on their behalf. In fact, the English verses present honest and consistently rational lesbian women compatible with the portrayals of other lesbian-like women in the anecdotes of the chapter, without any linguistic or stylistic sense of individuality among them, as usually made apparent by rhymes and figures of speech. The second set of verses on Fahda’s ring even utilize the term “copulate”, an obsolete verb referring to intercourse that further distances the contemporary reader of the translation from the unbashful Arabic anthology in an unproductive manner.

Alongside Christian motifs for penetrative sex, the positioning of non-lesbian sex as contemptible desire recurs in food-related tropes, a prevalent literary relation for the consumptive similarity between food and sex, both desirable and essential for humoral wellbeing. In the below anecdote, the lesbian woman metaphorically uses meat comparisons to denote the difference between the pleasures of the penis and the vulva:

وكتبت أخرى الى معرفة لها تزوّجت وهجرتها:
تركت أكل الكباب واخترت أكل العصيب

(Ibn Naṣr 187)

Another woman wrote to her former lover who got married and abandoned her:

It is *kabāb* that you gave up eating and instead, chose to eat a dreadful thing

The verse is built on the double entendre (*tawriyah*) of eating the two kinds of meat, set in hierarchical antithesis to fulfill the purpose of mockery (*sukhriyah*). The trope of *kabāb* is not uncommon in much of *mujūn* poetry, usually in reference to the favorable penis, while in this case, it is employed to stand for the vulva in lesbian intercourse between the woman and her addressee, choosing a tougher and less desirable meat to ridicule her former lover's choice of diverging away from lesbianism to marry a male lover. Although it is not a blasphemous appeal, the anecdote rests on the obscenity of the sexual representation of food, as well the playfulness of the rhymical concision; the two segments mirroring each other in structure and similitude of word choice. The trope operates as tool of blame between the two lesbian lovers, teasing her with the primacy of lesbian-like intercourse.

Similarly in the English translation, Jarkas and Khawwam (194) make use of the food trope, comparing the vulva to steak and the penis to kebab:

You give up eating steak?
And choose to eat shish kebab?

The translators bestow the two types of meat with a cultural hierarchy, signifying the Western “steak” as a desirable choice in comparison to the “shish kebab” that appears to be distasteful. Such a differentiation is certainly not present in the Arabic, particularly that steak has Euro-specific origins emerging in the early modern period. The orientalist portrayal evidently caters to the targeted Western reader, providing an extraneous interpretation of the Arabic anecdote.

By drawing on the repulsive pleasures of the penis, whether for their association with fornication and pregnancy, or oppositional positioning that praises lesbian desire,

the obscene verses transmit through humor the rhetorical and argumentative purpose of Ibn Naṣr's anecdotes. The wordplay is an essential part of the author's teasing style in the Arabic edition and cements the favoring of lesbian desires. In the English translation, the prose narration, lacking in humorous imagery, presents a flat and unamusing anecdotal display of lesbian-like pleasure, feeding into the reason-based systematic tone of the translators.

2. *Boasting About Phallic Pleasure*

Exemplary of the Arabic edition's style, the trope of phallic revulsion in some anecdotes is reversed, providing a contrary celebration of phallic pleasure over its lesbian—lesser— counterpart. In very similar articulation as the earlier anecdotes, the married woman often taunts the lesbian woman about the pleasure that she is unable to attain, being uninformed of the penis and having no taste of it.

The symbolic ring carving appears to be employed for the opposite object in some anecdotes, signaling the permanence of phallic desire as a means to renounce lesbian pleasures:

ونقشت واحدة منهنّ على خاتمها بعد أن تزوجت برجلٍ ووجهت به الى معرفتها: لو تطعمت بأيره ما تلذذت
بغيره.

وكتبت أخرى الى معرفتها تغايظها بزوجها: لو تطعمت بأيره ما تلذذت بغيره.

(Ibn Naṣr 187-8)

One of the women carved on her ring after she married a man, addressing her lover:

If his penis you taste, no pleasure would replace.

Another woman wrote to her former lover, boasting about her husband:

If his penis you taste, no pleasure would replace.

Similar to the previous selection, the verses follow a parallel structure and end rhymes serving the aim of mockery (*sukhriyah*) with the same workings of humor as the other

three-word verse divisions and the anticipation of the ending (*irṣād*). The two lines are almost identical, a repetition that occurs frequently in *adab* compilations, and in this part of the chapter, reifies the centrality of the phallic pleasure in a contrary gesture to the preceding verses claiming the opposite. The superimposing of these anecdotes exemplifies Ibn Naṣr's teasing style that puts forth a disruptive verse only to follow it with a reversal of said verse, serving the exact opposite of the subversive anecdote and highlighting the fluidity of attitudes around lesbian-like sex.

Although centering phallic pleasure, one remarkable anecdote in the Arabic edition alludes to lesbian desire as including self-pleasure, to expand of the fluidity of such pleasures. Compared to other one-line anecdotes in the chapter, Jarkas and Khawwam seem to amplify such statements that celebrate the penis, while retaining brevity and abridgement of obscene, blasphemous or ridiculing anecdotes that praise the vulva as a site of superior pleasure. The anecdote appearing in the later pages of the chapter and using devices of humor as well, expresses wonder and amazement (*istighrāb*) towards the penis in a rhetorical question serving the purpose of praise:

ونظرت سحافة إلى رجلٍ كبير الأير فقالت: مثل هذه المدقة في الدنيا وأنا أدقّ ثيابي منذ ثلاثين سنة بيدي؟
(Ibn Naṣr 189)

A lesbian looked at a man with a large penis and said: in this world such a pestle exists and I have been pounding my clothes by hand for thirty years?

What the verse alludes to in the latter portion of the question is a suggestive metaphor on masturbation and self-pleasuring, a rare encounter in the chapter. However, the verse identically appears in the chapter on the virtues of the penis (Ibn Naṣr 69), where it justifies and supports the superiority of the penis. The reaction of the woman speaker expands the understanding of lesbian and lesbian-like desire to encompass *saḥq* that potentially does not necessitate or involve a partner. In the witty speech, the lesbian-like

woman is startled by the sight of a penis, with a sense of regret for the years she spent in the ignorance of such a tool. The English translation elaborates on this anecdote detailing and embellishing the story:

A lesbian, looking at a man's big penis, exclaimed:
"Good Heavens! I've been beating my laundry dry for thirty years now. How is it that I have been unaware of the fact that there is such a big hammer to beat my laundry dry therewith? How thoughtless I have been!" Then she married the man (Jarkas and Khawwam 196).

The translation elevates the anecdote by detailing the lesbian woman's speech including ample description. The anecdote enforces a more patent regret in the exclamatory statement "How thoughtless I have been!" in addition to the lesbian's marriage to the man. Although the latter addition could be a feature of different manuscript readings or interpretations, the repetition of the lesbian's unawareness of the penis followed by a regretful gesture broaches the translator's particular interest in laying out such an anecdote in evocative expressions unparalleled in the language utilized for various other anecdotes. The inconsistency of imagery throughout the anecdotes tips the scale of lesbian and lesbian-like representation in the English chapter towards the guilt-ridden lesbian desires by highlighting the parts that posit a contrite tone.

While the phallus is central in many of anecdotes, mostly as a tool of mockery and ridiculing, in some anecdotes the revulsion was expressed by lesbian women and carved on their rings, though in other times, its praise was communicated by married woman or lesbian-like women who had chosen to divert from lesbianism. The mockery resides in the obscene, blasphemous and frivolous verses, that do not only serve an entertaining purpose enriching the erotic anthology, but signifies a site where lesbian and lesbian-like women gain dimension in eloquent speech, that aids in understanding the social perception of lesbianism intended to be portrayed by the compiler Ibn Naṣr.

The structure of the verses and their layout serve the author's teasing style, with anecdotes shunning the penis while others suggesting its high desirability, to consistently ripple through the chapter the disruption of multiple desires from lesbian and lesbian-like women at different stages of their lives, with varying attitudes towards other women and arrangements around *saḥq*. The rhetoric of humor is mostly absent from the available English translation, and its absence signifies an erasure of a critical feature of the chapter that shapes the presentation of lesbian-like women and presents different possibilities and expressive attitudes towards queer desires. It does not procure any sense of teasing or witty play on words eloquently told by lesbian woman essential to the genre of writing, and offers a systematic translation of lesbian motivations, clean of much of the obscenity relevant to the Arabic edition and, more importantly, characteristic of the works pertaining to *'ilm al-bāh*.

C. The Utmost Pleasures of Lesbian Sex

The Arabic chapter on lesbianism is majorly preoccupied with the motivations behind sexual desires, the rivalry between lesbian and non-lesbian women as well as the allusions to pleasure in verse. The anecdotes situate the desires through an array of emotions and presentations, framing the lesbian women in association with their medical, social and legal contexts. Only in two major passages does the Arabic edition make available a detailed narration of the very particularities of lesbian and lesbian-like sex, while this designation dominates other chapters of the anthology such as the chapter on desires between men or that on the modalities of sex between man and woman. Reading these two passages closely enables an understanding of what lesbian sex between two women was perceived to include by Ibn Naṣr and the descriptions

characterizing the lesbian women partaking in intercourse. As opposed to phallogentric humor and anecdotes, such narration comprises the sexual act itself between two women and the pleasures ensuing from the mutuality of their desires. The English translation on the other hand provides a concise and orderly narration of the lesbian intercourse with little regard for the mutuality or intimacy shared between two lesbian women.

1. *The Poetics of Movement and Sound in Jawāmi‘*

The rhythm of the body and its sounds is amply described in the verses on pleasure, the repetition mirroring the movements intrinsic to sex. The immensity and exceptionality of pleasure emerge in a passage that appears to show an intricate interest in the specificities of the sexual encounter between women, the lesbian orgasm being the heightened moment of vulnerability and power at once. In a quote by ‘Alī al-Rāzī al-Ṣanī‘a, reporting the answer of an experienced lesbian who is knowledgeable on the topic of *saḥq*, she provides:

أطيب السحوق سحوق الحاذقة فإنها إذا جمعت فرد رجلٍ ومدّت فرد رجلٍ وخالفت فرد رجلٍ وجنتها ثم ركبت عليها
وقبضت عليه قبضةً ودلكت ساعةً حتى إذا اشتدّت الحرارة وحمي ظاهر السفر أمسكت عن ذلك وعن مصّ
اللسان، فحينئذٍ يُغشى على المفعولة بها وتنتفخ عيناها وتعاين الملائكة والشياطين والموتى من شدة اللذة.

(Ibn Naṣr 183)

The best *saḥq* is that of an experienced lesbian woman, for if she joins a leg, extends a leg and bends a leg, then mounts her and lays hold of it by a clasp and rubs it for an hour until it grows hot and arouses her clitoris, then she ceases from rubbing and sucking the tongue, at that moment, the woman loses consciousness, her eye bulges and she sees angels and devils and the dead due to the intensity of pleasure.

The explanation provides a vivid illustration of stimulation, focusing on the role of movement and different positions that are applied for a prolonged period of time, until the heat, a main component, arises in the vulva and bares the clitoris. The anecdote also foregrounds the intense pleasure as a loss of consciousness, an allusion common to

premodern descriptions of an orgasm even continuing till the early modern period. The sixteenth century French euphemism *petite mort* or “fainting fit” then popularized in English as well, are modern examples of the notion of momentarily death or numbness at the heightened point of pleasure. As per the excerpt, the lesbian women experience peculiar bodily reactions like the bulging of the eye, as well as supernatural sensations at the climax. The reference to angels, devils and the dead elucidate the psychic-like effects in the peak of pleasure, elements that could imply the extraordinary joy provided by lesbian intercourse as much as it could promote a wondrous and outlandish portrayal of the lesbian women to the *zarīf* reader. The suggestion then confirms that lesbian desire, as briefly discussed in other sections of the chapter, when fulfilled propounds an intense and other-worldly pleasure.

Bringing out the sensible and intimate qualities of lesbian sex, the second and lengthier quotation by Abū al-‘Anbas on what he has heard from lesbians, expands on the descriptions of lesbian women, first highlighting corporeal beauty in similes to trees and fruits, then providing depictions of the vulva itself through animal tropes, smell and character. The later part of the passage offers precise specification of the movement and sounds made, the recounting relying on rhymes, repetition and dual groupings with a poetic resonance, and underlining attributes of kindness and tenderness conveyed through the intimacy of words and gestures. The importance of verbal exchange in pleasure-making is apparent in one line stating:

"تلك الألفاظ الرقيقة المحللة لتامور القلب، المخدرة للركبتين والوركين"

(Ibn Naṣr185)

Those kind words that melt the heart’s wall, numbing the knees and the hips

The articulation binds the affective ripples of endearing words with the arousal of sexual desire, insinuated through the dual effect of the sweet utterances on the heart and the lower body parts both exuding a sense of vulnerability. It shows the value of speech to lesbian-like intercourse in kindling the fervor between the two lovers.

The intimacy between both bodies is further outlined in the physical contact of the two lesbian women, described in a point-by-point approach to the closeness of the similar body parts:

فإذا صافحت الخدود وانحدرت الدموع فيما بينها لرقّة الشكوى ولطافة النجوى كالطلّ على ورق الورد، وتطابقت الصدور على الصدور، وانضمّت النحور الى النحور، وتراكبت الشفران على الشفرين، فاختلف كلّ جانبٍ منهما على الأخرى، حتى إذا تعالت الأنفاس، وتشاغلّت الحواس، وارتفعت الحرارة الى الرأس [...]

(Ibn Naṣr 185-6)

If the cheeks meet and the tears fleet in between, due to the tenderness of the pain and the gentleness of rapture, like dew on rose petals, and the chest pressed against the chest, and the breast meeting the breast, and the labia overlaying the labia, so that each side strokes the other, even if the breaths rise and the senses rouse and the heat soars to the head [...]

The tears falling on both cheeks points to the emotional sensibility of pleasure, an unexceptional description of intimacy common to forms of intercourse among both men and women. The grouping of opposite words such as tender pain and gentle rapture enforce the duality of meaning, pointing to the intricacy of straining pleasure. It comes to show the rootedness of lesbian pleasure in emotional connection, crystalized in physical attributes and imagery like tears as dew on a petal and the activation of the breath and senses.

The elements of sound and rhythm are rudimentary in the diverse description of the movements and what they encompass in sensations, especially as they emphasize the mutuality of pleasure through the sounds produced by the partners simultaneously:

ودام في ما هو نعيمه، بين مصّ وقرص، ورهز ونهز، وشهيق وخفيق، ونخير وخرير ونعير، لو سمعه أهل
ملطية لصاحوا التّفير، مع رفعٍ ووضع، وغمز ولمز، وضَمّ وشَمّ، والتزام وقبل، وطيب عمل، وانقلاب حدقٍ من
غير قَلقٍ ولا نزقٍ [...] (Ibn Naṣr 186)

And in bliss it persists, from sucking to pinching, shaking and shivering, wheezing and wailing, grunting and groaning and howling, if the people of Malṭiyya had heard they would have blown the bugle call, with lifting and dropping, and winking and muttering, and hugging and sniffing, and silencing and kissing, and the sweetness of the deed, and a swift rolling over in the absence of any worries and frustrations [...]

The passage shows the myriad of actions that lesbian sex entails as well as the audible expressions that are described as exceptionally loud, intertwining gestures of arousal like shivering, pinching and sniffing with intense vocal impressions such as wheezing, grunting and groaning. The gestures and sounds are amply provided and continue to be laid out almost in a loop of resounding repetitions, in compliance with the notion of never-ending pleasure of lesbian-like sex. Many of the auditory expressions are coupled in two rhyming sound words, the groupings enforcing the mutuality of pleasure between the two lovers. To further spotlight the magnificence of the orgasm in an almost-comical depiction, the hyperbolic expression of the sound incites a mobilizing response; that the people of Malṭiyya upon hearing, would have mistaken it for an attack and responded to it by calling for army formation. This expression contrasts the flow of rhythmic description portraying the vulnerability of intimacy, to interject it with a statement on the immense power of this orgasm. Moreover, the sum of movements, though charged with depiction of softness and power, form a release of all tensions or emotions for the lovers, in other words, the sweetness of sex leaving no room for worry. The orgasm is illustrated as both the sum of all emotions, feelings and possible sounds, abundant in sensations, yet also capable of releasing any unwanted tensions or feelings.

The poetry of sound and movement configures the orgasm in a dual softness and power, the detachment from tension once indulging in the pleasure with the intimacy of sweet words that it encloses, while on the other hand, immensely strong and loud that it instills an alarming fascination in those who witness it. The detailed anecdote concludes with the intensity and ardor of such desires in the awe brought to philosophers as well, expanding on the notion power it entails:

فلو نظر الفلاسفة الى ما هم فيه لهاروا، ولو أشرف عسكرٌ فيه ألف عنانٍ على مصرعهما لخروا على الأذقان،
فتبارك الله رب العالمين.

(Ibn Naṣr 186)

If the philosophers had witnessed them, they would be left puzzled, and if an army with a thousand soldiers witnessed the bodies of the lovers they would fall on their faces, and blessed be God, lord of the worlds.

The conclusionary statement solidifies the image of lesbian sex as beyond rational explanation or philosophers' imagination, illustrated as an unimaginable pleasure even if it were witnessed by the eye, and even the strongest troops would fail to stay up on their feet at this sight. In both images, the effect of defeat is central to the perception of the lesbian orgasm. On one hand, philosophers, as the highest authorities of knowledge and power, do not possess the tools to comprehend the immensity of pleasure, which is depicted as outside the realm or scope of their understanding. On the other hand, the biggest possible army with their insurmountable power would be defeated before this orgasm. The conclusive lines of the passage embody the fascination of the lesbian orgasm as destabilizing to the structures of power, while humorous in its exaggeration, illustrates the climax as a moment of conquer. The call to God at the very end is a celebration of the pleasures provided by the creator as a way to extend grateful praise to the bestower of such desires. Not only do the women in the act experience an array of

emotions but nonetheless those who know of the pleasure or witness it by eye are struck by wonder and admiration. Lesbianism is depicted to surpass any expectations tied to sexual desire in these passages of the Arabic edition, with awe-inspiring sounds and movement both a site of vulnerable intimacy and power-challenging intensity.

2. Unclimactic Climaxing in the English Translation

In the English translation, the two main passages detailing the acts comprising lesbian sex between two women, similar to the translation of *mujūn* verses centering lesbian pleasure, are invested in concision by way of enumerating actions and in modest depiction with little poetic, rhythmic or rhetorical elaboration. The question propounded by al-Rāzī on the experienced lesbian's "experience of an orgasm" suggests:

A woman can get utmost pleasure when she practices lesbian intercourse with an experienced lesbian who unites with her by sucking her tongue and rubbing her labia against hers so excitedly that when the surface of the labia gets hot, she stops friction and sucking. It is then that the woman to whom the lesbian intercourse is done, experiences such pleasure that she loses consciousness and sees angels and devils (Jarkas and Khawwam 189).

Lesbian sex is described to include sucking, rubbing and friction done to a woman, with little sense of mutuality, particularly in the second sentence that states "that the woman to whom the lesbian intercourse is done" experiences an orgasm, leading her to a loss of consciousness. This strange formulation evinces an idea that an experienced lesbian procures pleasure to a woman who is not identified as a lesbian herself, neither a lover or partner, for that matter. While intercourse usually denotes the activity of two ends, in this portrayal, the translators depict sex as an infliction on a woman of no experience in this pleasure. The sense of arousal is briefly presented at the end, and in light of the lack of reciprocity, is even further minimized in this passage, effacing the intimacy and mutuality of lesbian pleasure.

As for the lengthier passage encompassing detailed descriptions of lesbian women's beauty and the specific actions in sexual intercourse, the translators list the physical and sensory features of the act in a methodical enumeration, grouping organs together concisely. The second of the two-paragraph passage provides:

It is with a woman of such aesthetic qualities that we have lesbian intercourse during which we enjoy listening to her sweet voice, looking at her charming eyebrows and are enthralled by her coquetry. It is then that our cheeks meet and become wet with tears of soft complaints and whispers as rose-leaves become wet with dew. It is also then that our chests, necks and labia unite and we begin to move. When, however, we are thus united, we feel hot, begin to snore and, sucking, pinching, smelling and kissing each other, we experience such pleasure that we lose consciousness and move like a branch of a tree shaken by the rain. It is a moment which would puzzle philosophers (Jarkas and Khawwam 192).

In allusion to the movements comprised in lesbian sex, the translation modestly infers that intercourse is when the “chests, necks and labia unite and we begin to move”, a factual citation of body parts uniting. The unity includes heat, snoring, “sucking, pinching, smelling and kissing each other”, a shy listing that does not aim to entice in its presentation. The only sexual imagery present towards the end of the section compares the movement to the shaking of a tree branch by the rain, aside from the tears compared to dew on rose leaves. Within their brevity, the terms used circumvent the language of arousal, for instance in the last line, signaling to the orgasm by the term “moment” that will puzzle philosophers. The section does not maintain any repetitions to signify the rhythm or quality of enjoyment of these sexual acts, rather presents them as factual information limited in their capacity to delineate particularities of lesbian pleasure. Above all, the translation effaces the dual complexities of power and vulnerability apparent in the Arabic, particularly the figures of speech that emphasize wonder and fascination, and by that, it minimizes the depiction of the lesbian orgasm as immensely

powerful. This is not the case for many passages that center phallic pleasure where the description often does not shy away from expounding sensory details. Yet, it complies with the presentation of *mujūn* verses in the consistent leveling efforts of overtly obscene and playful narration or poetic illustration.

D. Conclusion

In the Arabic edition, the structure of the anecdotes in its teasing style as well as the play of the *mujūn* mimics the frustrations and thrill of sexual intercourse, and aids in portraying lesbian and lesbian-like women as preoccupied with validating the superior kind of pleasure. The first page of the chapter reveals a set of premises that motivate lesbianism later punctured in the chapter and introduces Layla, a notable lesbian woman with peculiar desires involving power enforcement and selfish pleasure that is not replicated in other anecdotes. The opening of the chapter sets the teasing style that propagates threatening information and unpredictable desires, before alleviating the reader with a variety of anecdotes that establish the fluidity of lesbian and lesbian-like representations. The play of the *mujūn* verses comprises figures of speech such as metaphors and metonymies in rhyming stanzas, embodying pleasure in majorly phallic tropes, some repudiating penetrative sex and other non-lesbian speakers boasting about its supremacy. The verses also incorporate motifs of food and Christian symbols, similar to those used by Abū Nuwās, as a means of comparing pleasures and belittling the undesirable.

As for the English translation, the anecdotes of lesbian speech are mostly written in prose and lack the stylistic and rhetorical aspects that culminate in the humor and play inherent to the genre. Instead of utilizing metaphors or figurative language, the

translators posit their summarized interpretation in narration that effaces the nuances of lesbian and lesbian-like portrayal, while proffering systematic and logic-driven illustrations of lesbian speakers. The interpretation, by abridging the amusing elements of the anecdotes, limits the possibilities of lesbian-like desires and the imaginative language that ponders multiple understandings of the anthology's presentation of lesbian pleasures. The translators also minimize the extent of lesbian pleasure in the passages elaborating on the details of lesbian sex, by avoiding repetitions and maintaining concision, devoid of poetic and rhythmic imagery which render the sexual acts between women evidently graphic.

On the other hand, the Arabic edition is generous with the technicalities of movement and the meticulous coupling of terms that reflect the breathing, sonorous harmony and bodily rhythms of the two lesbian lovers during sexual intercourse. The sensory experience of arousal and the mutual achievement of an orgasm is rigorously portrayed in a language of repetition and excess that mirrors the lavish and superfluous pleasures of lesbian intercourse. Such instances are particularly worthy of attention, since the references to lesbian sex outside the chapter, as outlined in the previous chapter, exist in service of argumentative purposes, while these detailed passages focalize on the very pleasure for the sake of pleasure itself. In the chapter on lesbianism, most anecdotes revolve around phallic negotiations, with the exception of the two major passages. As the reading of lesbian pleasure for its own literary characterization shows to be bounded by comparisons to heterosexual or phallic desires, in the following chapter, I engage in an analysis of the emotions conveyed in verse or implicated in the *mujūn* rhetorical figures of speech. The approach to the depicted lesbian and lesbian-

like women in the Arabic edition and English translation as literary emotional communities brings out the affective experiences subsuming lesbian sexual pleasure.

CHAPTER III

THE LITERARY EMOTIONAL COMMUNITY OF LESBIAN AND LESBIAN-LIKE WOMEN

Centering the affective expressions in *mujūn* verses and anecdotal presentation, the chapter analyzes the emotions pertaining to the lesbian speakers in the chapter on lesbianism. In light of the scarcity of literature on premodern Arabo-Islamic lesbian love and desires and particularly the pleasures that lesbian women are said to enjoy, the literary depiction of feelings opens a space for recognizing and thinking of the presence of lesbian and lesbian-like women as not only in the dimension of sexual desire and pleasure-seeking, but in the intimacies of the act of *sahq* and feelings articulated or alluded to pertain to a *sahhāqa*. Motivating the aims of the chapter is a question posed by Lauren Berlant: “[What happens] To the glances, gestures, encounters, collaborations, or fantasies that have no canon?” (Berlant 285) It might be unreasonable to seek knowledge about the very feelings of lesbian and lesbian-like women in the Abbasid period, both as a broad category of women and a far-fetched possibility within the lack of sources on women-centered experiences. However, I suggest approaching the literary presentation of women depicted as lesbian and lesbian-like women in the course of the anthology with diverse desires and indulgence in sexual pleasure as one way to inquire into the emotions assumed on their behalf accompanying their sexual pursuits and arrangements. This encourages the view of *adab* literature as dealing with desires and sexual pleasures which are inextricable from affective expressions, attitudes and exchanges. Looking into the feelings accompanying pleasure enables the reconciliation with the absence of a pure, unconditional and unrestrained pleasure, neither in a premodern nor a contemporary context, nor in heterosexual versus queer

approach, as sex has been and continues to be impacted by material, social and cultural conditions.

The starting point for the study of emotions was the conspicuous usage of “fear” in the English translation that prompted the analysis of emotions in the Arabic edition. In relation to women whose desires are not reproductive or contain the potentiality of reproduction such as lesbian women, an association and imposition of “fear” further delegitimizes the desires. In fact, emotions constitute a political feminist project, a preoccupation in contemporary feminist discourse as a form of seeking bodily agency and self-reclamation of desires:

البطريكية تتحكم حتى في تعابير وجوهنا. وحقيقة يبدو وكأنه لا يوجد مفر من هذا الشكل من السيطرة على
مشاعرنا [...] لذلك من الأفضل أن نعمل جاهدين للرفض، رفض هذا النوع من التحكم، رفض أن يتم التلاعب بنا وتشكيلنا ضد
رغباتنا لتقبل الأشياء كما هي.
(Maghāzi 56)

Patriarchy even controls our facial expressions. In fact, it seems that there is no escaping this form of control over our emotions [...]
So, it is better that we work hard to reject, to reject this kind of control, to reject to be manipulated and molded against our desires to accept things as they are.

Extending the contemporary discussion of emotions to the reading of premodern Arabo-Islamic desires of women, and particularly due to the emergence of emotion words in the male-authored translation with misogynist biases, the aim of inquiring emotions is to unpack the feelings defining lesbianism, and alternatively provide translations of the Arabic passages that favor the nuanced emotions in figurative speech that do not undermine lesbian and lesbian-like desires. The reading of emotions is also in line with the early chapters’ depiction of sex as a component of the senses, stimulating interactions and encounters with the world, as though defining affective dynamics and experiences.

When referring to the lesbian and lesbian-like women in the chapter as an “emotional community”, I refer to the imagined or actual lesbian and lesbian-like women in their literary representation; in other words, the attitudes that the male author provides of them, including feelings assumed on their behalf. In “Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions”, Barbara Rosenwein defines emotional community as “largely the same as social communities—families, neighborhoods, syndicates, academic institutions, monasteries, factories, platoons, princely courts.” (11) Departing from the *mujūn* verses on lesbian and lesbian-like women as a form of historical fiction, the occurrence of the speeches-in-verse can be read as the social currency of emotions tied to lesbian-like pleasure. Distinguishing between the two possibilities of actual versus imagined emotional community is not only impossible, but also shows to be inefficient for the purpose of the close reading, as the ultimate goal is not to classify the work as verifiable evidence of premodern Islamicate lesbian-like desires. The purpose is rather to read the content as a range of possibilities presented in a widely-circulated erotic anthology of the tenth century, and the multitude of accompanying questions about the absences accompanying and surrounding the literary work in the later centuries.

There are many notions that I do not assume in the usage of “emotional community”. Firstly, it is not to say that the author himself conceptualized them as a community necessarily, or that lesbian and lesbian-like women perceived of their desires and experiences in this way, but to read the economy of emotions through which the author situates a collective of women framed as “lesbian and lesbian-like”. Studying the expressed feelings is a passageway for identifying what the anthology provides on ways the lesbian and lesbian-like women “define and assess as valuable or harmful to

them”, “the emotions that they value, devalue, or ignore” as well as “the modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate, and deplore” (Rosenwein 11). Secondly, the emotional community in its literary portrayal is a very porous one, in such a way that one cannot categorize a set of emotions as pertaining strictly to lesbian and lesbian-like women in the anthology. This might seem as though defeating the purpose of an emotional community, a cohesive group sharing a common sense of sexuality and affective experiences. Yet, the objective of the term is to map out the web of feelings and emotions articulated in repetition across anecdotes by women who are presented as lesbian or lesbian-like, or other married women who are conversing with other lesbian-identified women. So, the emotional community clusters the repeated emotions used in the rhetoric of speech surrounding lesbianism, and as such it may not be viable to say that even the literary emotional community of lesbian and lesbian-like women can be classified under a particular defined set of emotions. Rather, the literary emotional community engages with major emotions, sometimes advanced by lesbian women speakers and other times by married women to lesbian women in the Arabic edition, though the range of emotions are much less prominent in the English translation. The reading as such destabilizes the idea of a premodern emotional community, especially literary, that has clear boundaries and a stable grouping of emotions with well-understood nuances. My own depiction does not cover all nuances of emotions in every anecdote, and even, as Lela Behzadi highlights in her work, my own reading of emotions in is “a classification in itself” (818) as well as the choice of anecdotes and accompanying translation efforts.

The instability of the literary lesbian and lesbian-like emotional community is due to a multifold of factors. Some anecdotal portrayals of lesbianism indicate

similarities between the different women, and others show contradictory or diverging desires. What makes Layla, the lesbian woman opening the chapter, similar to Ḥubba al-Madaniyyah, both denoted as *sahhāqa*? And what emotion or cluster of feelings does the attribute of *sahhāqa* include? Certainly, the proposition cannot be that there are a set of emotions replicated in the same way across lesbian and lesbian-like women's depiction in a homogeneous manner, however the commonalities provide an understanding of the stakes of intimacy grouped under *sahq* or *sahhāqa*. Rob Boddice brings about the value of reading emotions in their historical context: "The aim of historians is not to understand emotions per se, however, but rather how they were experienced, what aroused them, in what form, and with what effects." (Boddice 11) What does it mean to desire *sahq* and how can one read the anecdotes of lesbian and lesbian-like women as more than eloquent, stylistic and rhetorical tools? Such questions can be explored by analyzing how feelings of contempt and yearning for instance among others are conveyed in verses, taking shape in figures of speech and conversing with medical and legal explanations of queer desires.

In my analysis of emotions, I mostly rely on interpreting the *mujūn* verses exchanged between women to bring out the implications of emotion. On the possibilities of locating emotions, Behzadi elaborates:

As researchers, we can encounter emotional performances in a) the vocabulary, i. e. words that signify a certain emotion, b) the images and metaphors that cover a sensation and illustrate an emotion, c) physical reactions that stand for certain emotional conditions, or as a result of a certain feeling, and d) certain actions, for example behavior that symbolizes a certain sensation, or a conduct as a consequence of a specific feeling that can tell us something about the sentiments felt (Behzadi 819).

From the above listing, in the course of the chapter, the images and metaphors are the primary sites where emotions are conveyed, in rhymes, repetition and imagery that emphasizes an emotional attitude or sensations. The stylistic devices and layout of the anecdotes can evince the symbolic feelings, so that humor doesn't only function as a device of argumentation as proposed in the previous chapter, but also a tool through which emotional responses are embedded and transmitted. Moreover, I suggest that translation, as an act of interpretation itself, can come to portray a wholly distinct emotional community than that presented in the original text, in other words creating, through the imagery or lack thereof and language choices, a different economy of emotions that can further obscure and erase the characteristics and stylistic features relevant to the genre. It can fall into presentist configurations of lesbian and lesbian-like intimacy or the erasure of premodern Arabo-Islamic perceptions of intimacies, as done in the English translation.

The following chapter identifies three major emotions in the Arabic edition, starting with contempt for the undesirable pleasures that could be expressed by lesbian women and directed to the married women and phallogentric pleasures or vice versa. Expanding on the characterization of anxiety related to fornication, the emotion is present as a background tension often expressed in humor and other times, more forwardly worrisome motivating the seeking of lesbianism. As for the emotion of yearning, it is utilized to speak of the physical vulvas, symbolizing perished pleasure or an unfulfilled longing for a lover. Contrastingly, the English translation provides fear as repeated and overarching feeling pertaining to pregnancy and slander, making for a more unitary lesbian emotional community, driven by reason to lesbianism and aware of the demure satisfaction of lesbian pleasure. Accordingly, the Arabic edition presents

a literary emotional community distinct from that propounded by the English translation, the latter less nuanced and flattening to the portrayal of lesbian pleasure.

A. The Ambivalent Witty Lesbians of the Arabic Edition

Embedded in verse and prose, the emotions of lesbian and lesbian-like women are portrayed in their fluidity and ambivalence throughout the chapter on lesbianism in the Arabic edition. While the feelings are diverse, this section focuses on the feelings of contempt, anxiety and yearning as recurring in affective expressions, illustrating a power play among women of different desires, an awareness to legal and social consequences as well as a passionate intimacy between lesbian-like partners. Rather than inquiring into the definition of these emotions, I make use of Sara Ahmed's question "What do emotions do?" (Ahmed 4). These complex feelings, intertwined with other emotions, differ in their presentation, and come to show that the affective experiences of lesbian and lesbian-like women were not seen by Ibn Naṣr as exceptionally peculiar. The webs of lesbian-like feelings were often reversed to serve the eloquent speech of a married contemptuous woman, and hence confounding that lesbian and lesbian-like desires were seen as non-normative or marginal compared to those between man and women perceived as central. That this distinction did not pertain prompts the view of such feelings as non-exceptional, to say that the emotional community of lesbian and lesbian-like women depiction in the Arabic edition has porous perimeters. The attitudes towards *saḥq* can also overlap with the formulations of phallic desires by women, which signifies that the lesbian-like feelings were broader notions of women-centered affective potentials surrounding and accompanying sexual pleasure.

1. *Contempt for the Undesirable*

As a means of boasting about their own pleasures, lesbian women in verse are exhibited with contempt for those who seek penetrative pleasures. The emotion of “contempt” (*izdirā*) encapsulates the hostile attitude towards “a person or thing one regards as inferior, worthless or despicable” (“Contempt, n1”), coming from the Latin root *contemnere* which joins force with despise. Contempt fittingly reflects a display of power (force) while considering the addressee lacking of respect. Unlike “pity”, it doesn’t include compassion and does not involve the hate encompassed by the term “despise”. I choose contempt, and in relevance to Arabic term whose root (z-r-y) serves the purpose of *istikhfāf*, as it aims to belittle in verse for the rhetorical object of flaunting one’s pleasure.

It is not a surprise that the feeling of contempt prevails across the chapter as it is closely tied with the *mujūn* poetry style, combining eloquence with obscene imagery, in a form of witty arrogance. The latter term denotes the light-hearted intentions of persuasive power-centric discord, denoting contempt, mostly apparent in verse. “An emotion may be positive both in its attitude toward its object and toward the subject (as love enhances both the beloved and the lover), but an emotion may be positive in its attitude toward its object but quite negative toward oneself, or it may be negative in its attitude toward its object but quite positive toward oneself. Contempt, for instance.” (Solomon 173) In this sense, contempt is positive for the speaker herself but has a negative attitude towards the addressee. The contempt does not comprise a targeted hatred of one woman to another but a self-empowering display of desire through the

mischievous subordination of the other addressed woman. One lesbian turning to her lover says:

سبحان ربّ الخلق يا قلبي ما أحسن السحق بنا دهرنا
فدام ما نهوى لنا عمرنا وأسمح النيك بطلايه

(Ibn Naṣr 185)

Blessed be the creator, my heart how sweet is *saḥq* to our lives
And loathsome are seekers of penetration May that which we desire be a life-long
blessing

The two types of intercourse *saḥq* and *nayk* are set in opposition, praising the former in the name of God and ridiculing those who do not desire the lesbian speaker's same pleasure. The woman addresses her lover with a word of endearment, and to celebrate their sexual fulfilment, extends her wishes to keep this form of intimacy alive. Not only does she describe penetration as undesirable but she delineates the hideousness of those who engage in it. The verses encompass the arrogant hope that the desires of the lesbian speaker persist, for they are worthier than the counterpart. However, the tone conveying the hierarchical attitude is amusing and witty, rather than showing serious disdain, an aspect that is apparent in the use of rhetorical elements like the rhymes and antithesis as well as the little space that the undesirable sex takes up in verse.

In line with the above portrayal of *saḥq*, an earlier partial verse of the page further elaborates on the contemptuous view of women who engage in phallic penetrative intercourse, as described by a lesbian woman:

لو ذاقه الخلق لما قصرّوا لكن باغي التّيك لم يشعر

(Ibn Naṣr 185)

Those who would have tasted would not resist
but the one who enjoys penetration is ridden of feelings

The desirability of *nayk* is belittled by claiming that if the masses would have sought *sahq*, they would not be able to resist its indulgence. Again, the anecdote exhibits a tenacious confidence that lesbian-like desire is not only pleasurable to the speaker and her lover, but the usage of the term *khalq*, referring to God's creations, confirms the view of such pleasure as the most notable among all desires and to all people. Lesbian and lesbian-like desire, in this instance as a few others, manifests in its supremacy over other intimacies, and the most sensible of them.

The contempt of lesbian women towards women who don't engage in lesbian-like sex is reified in another verse as part of the longest dialogue between married and lesbian women in the chapter, exemplifying the extent of mockery absorbed in the self-reclamation of power. In the disputation, the lesbian woman says on behalf of her peers:

فنحن سعيدات خلقن لنعمة وأنتم شقيات خلقتن للذل
(Ibn Naṣr 186)

We are the happy ones created for grace
and you, the wretched ones created for humiliation

The line displays a heightened sense of ridicule, distinguishing between the lesbian women's gracious nature and the married women who are born to lead degrading lives. The statement further sets *nayk* in subordination to queer desires; in fact, the verse does not overtly mention sex and focuses instead on the attribute of derogation, suggesting the view that a married woman is undignified by her responsibilities towards her husband, the necessity of penetrative sex and the burdens of child bearing and mothering. Ibn Naṣr presents the lesbian women as aware of the expectations regarded to women who desire men as sexual and/or romantic partners and subsequently position themselves as free from the societal expectations. At the same time, the speaker of the verse relies on a destined implication of these desires, by insinuating that these attitudes

are a result of godly work with privileges reserved for the lesbian and lesbian-like women. The antithetical statement sets the contrast of the joys and blessings of lesbianism, in stark opposition with the desolate fate of women who develop relationships with men.

The contempt for penetrative sex is not only a lesbian woman's tool for belittling the married or fornicating woman, but even serves as a reassurance to a lesbian lover that their pleasures outshine phallic desires. Taking the form of boasting, the lesbian woman writes to her lover describing penetrative sex as deceitful and the desire for it thereby illusive:

السحق والله هو المشتهى والنيك يا أختي اضاليل
 قد فضل السحق لنا معشر بيض مقاويل بهاليل
 فالهي عن النيك واشباهه فإنما النيك تهاويل

(Ibn Naṣr 184)

Sahq, by God, is that which is desired and penetration, my sister, is false-hearted
 Only *sahq* has served us well away from what jesters and fools tell
 So abandon the likes of penetration for penetration is but a delusion

The stanza repeats rhyming words such as *aḍālīl*, *bahālīl* and *tahāwīl* in relation to phallic sex, contrasting it to lesbian-like sex that is the desirable one. The terms referring to falsehood and illusions enforce the notion of contempt towards women who enjoy penetrative sex and will eventually be deceived, while the enjoyment of lesbian intercourse comes as a diametrical opposite rooted in a truth free of deception. The above verses bring to attention the desirability of lesbian sex in juxtaposition with a contemptuous feeling towards the other penetrative form as a way to validate the lesbian speaker's own interest through the negation of other desires. The lesbian lover through the verses could also be disparaging non-lesbian intercourse to preserve her

lover and prolong their relationship, by assuring her of the rewards of *saḥq* compared to the misleading pleasures of *nayk*.

It is important to note that such approach within the same chapter is often taken by married women towards lesbian and lesbian-like women, who in turn portray queer desires as ignorance-driven and false. For instance, two consecutive ring carvings point to the delusion of lesbian sex:

ونقشت أم القاسم بنت بلبلٍ العطار على خاتمها، وهي من كبارهنّ: ملّ من الباطل فرجع الى الحق.

ونقشت أخرى على خاتمها: إنما السحق دخان من رهز الرجال.

(Ibn Naṣr 188)

ʿUmm al-Qāsim bint Bulbul al-ʿAṭār, one of their elders, engraved on her ring: Wearied by falsehood, so reverted to the truth.

And another engraved on her ring: *Saḥq* is but the smoke of men's orgasms.

Even in the symbolic permanence of ring carving, the hierarchy of pleasures is depicted in the contempt of the speaker for the undesirable pleasure. While ʿUmm al-Qāsim's verse aligns with the citations of illusions, the second verse goes farther to identify *saḥq* as nothing but an intangible and fleeting experience, incomparable to the phallic orgasm.

The feeling of contempt in verse is associated more broadly with women defending their own pleasures before other women, past lovers or other, in a frame of rivalry as presented by the author. Because the same arguments are often reversed and used by the opposite end, the discord is not sharp or consistent in a singular manner, so reflects a form of play between desires, at different instances argued to be superior. The contemptuous verses are parts of the eloquent expression and serve a rhetorical role,

feeding into Ibn Naṣr's teasing style as the contention briefly persists before it is reversed.

2. *Anxieties of Fornication*

Often accompanying contempt, in many passages of the Arabic edition's chapter, there are allusions to the frustrations linked to pregnancy or those emanating from fornication, that can lead women to choose lesbianism. I find "anxiety" (*qalaq*) in its plural form to comprise the "uneasy concern" with fornication, pregnancy and slander, etymologically corresponding to the classical Latin *anxiētās* signifying worry and solicitude ("Anxiety, n.1"). It is different to "fear" and "worry", as the two terms have a connotation of constant thinking or preoccupation with unpleasant things, and distinct from "distress" that implies great pain and unhappiness, which is not the case for the tensions around fornication often frivolous, concealed and wavering in portrayal.

From a legal standpoint, the implications of this feeling are connected to *zinā*, or fornication, and in that sense, could be understood as an avoidance of the severe punishments for this legal transgression, aligning with the moral and religious sin that is also socially unwelcomed. In premodern Islamic jurisprudence, a sane man and a sane woman who engage in fornication are subject to the *ḥadd* punishment that could include stoning to death, beating or lashing up to a hundred times, among other forms. Sara Omar provides a detailed account of the differences in legal punishments of all forms of intercourse, highlighting the importance of penetrative sex, as well as the mental and legal age of each member of the sexual activity. The treatment of male same-sex desire shows to be measured by the same standards of other phallic intercourse, with the exception of *saḥq* or lesbian desire, treated by *ta'zīr* only, hence a reduced form of punishment compared to fornication.

The anxieties associated with the consequences of non-marital intercourse or sexual relationships without the object of child bearing occupy some space in verse. These feelings are also implied through the underlying intentions of certain anecdotes, and in many cases, the anxieties are presented in passing, in humorous language or employed as a reasoning for engaging in the desired lesbian-like sex. For instance, a two-liner anecdote appearing in the Arabic text, shows a dialogue between Abū Ṣāleḥ and a woman whom he desired:

وقال أبو صالح: دعوت حبتي إلى النوم معي. فقالت يا سيدي إذا عملنا نونو جاءنا بوبو، فما زلت أضحك حتى
غشي
علي من طيب كلامها.
(Ibn Naṣr 183)

Abū Ṣāleḥ said: I invited my lover to sleep with me. She said: Oh sir, if we did *nunu*, we would get a *bubu*. And I couldn't help myself from laughter until I fainted from her sweet words.

The anxiety of pregnancy is solidified in a humorous appeal, conveyed by the terms “*nunu*” and “*bubu*”, two words that do not exist in the formal Arabic language but are colloquial references, the former to sex understood from context, and the latter, a designation of a baby or potential of pregnancy. The anxiety embedded in the short conversation's playfulness invites to an interpretation that, as much as it could be a sincere anxiety of pregnancy, the expression hints at the witty woman's rejection of sex with the man through this well-versed excuse. As the verse points to a possible romantic relationship between the woman and Abū Ṣāleḥ, the addressed lesbian-like woman may have enjoyed a particular intimacy, one that excluded any engagement in penetrative sex, concealed in a humorous joke about pregnancy. That the anecdote ends with Abū Ṣāleḥ's amusement and amiable reaction to the woman's words further shows that the lesbian-like conceptualization of pregnancy is not an absolute threat, as Ibn Naṣr

chooses to present such an anecdote where the anxiety subliminally fades in the wit and eloquence of the speaker provoking the chucklesome rejection of the sexual invitation.

While the anxiety is humorously depicted in some parts, in one anecdote, the anxiety takes up large attention in verse, with expressions of worry more forwardly presented by the lesbian speaker:

قنعت بحبّتي ورفضت أيراً
إذا ما قيل قد حبّلت فسحقاً
وما عذري إلى الأبوين منه
وقد قطع الزناء حبال عذري
عواقبه بذات القدر تزري
لأولاد الزناء بديق صدري

(Ibn Naṣr 183)

I embraced my woman and refused the penis
its consequences punitive to the same extent
Should it be said that I fell pregnant
at the very thought of fornicators, my chest tightens
What possible excuse could I, to my parents, offer
Shall fornication cut off the thread of my virginity?

The stanza lays out a multitude of consequences for pursuing the penis, all of which are circumvented through lesbianism. The metaphor of virginity and figurative chest tightening embody the preoccupation with thoughts of pregnancy and fornication, their legal and social significance and the resulting unfortunate fate. In contrast with the previous anecdote, Ibn Naṣr reifies the link between fornication anxieties and lesbian motivation without a humorous intention, only a validation of lesbian-like sex as a safer alternative to other desires, especially that virginity is solely associated with phallic sex. Lesbian and lesbian-like women are portrayed in many instances like the above as virgin women who are safe from slander, more virtuous than fornicators.

The feeling of anxiety towards the potentiality of pregnancy or bad fame caused by fornication intertwines with other feelings conveyed in verse in some anecdotes, making for an affective landscape that complicates the reading of said anxieties. Contempt often accompanies the anxiety of pregnancy as a means of setting apart the

anxiety as an excuse for rejecting arrangements beyond what is desirable to the speaker, while in certain other parts, the anxieties may take on a more serious tone.

3. *Yearning Vulvas*

Aside from contempt and anxiety, the pleasures of lesbianism in verse encompass the feeling of yearning (*tawq*), detached from rivalry or tensions external to the two lovers. The Germanic base of *yern* signifies being “keenly desirous or eager, earnestly occupied”, and yearning is then the “feeling of strong desire or longing” (“Yearning, n.1”). Although the feeling of longing itself encompasses a length in duration, pertinent to the parting of the vulvas cited in the chapter, the term yearning better captures the element of desire inextricable from the segments in which the bodily separation of the lovers recurs, heightening the desirous expression.

The few anecdotes centering yearning are particularly valuable as they present the intimate passion tied to sexual pleasure, especially that the presentations of lesbianism most commonly focus on the motivations behind the desires and the justification of their existence. In an anecdote, a woman wrote to her lover:

مذ غاب عني السحق يا حبتني حالفني الهمّ فلا أرقد
قد كنت والعيش لنا صافياً حتى رماني دهرنا الأكد
فهل الى ذلك لنا رجعةً فإن نار القلب لا تخمد

(Ibn Naṣr 184)

Since *saḥq* has deserted me, my love
worry has accompanied me in my sleepless nights
I was pleased with life until
destiny threw me to sulk
Is there a return back to those days?
for the fire of my heart does not subside

The personification of *sahq* introduces the verse to the addressee, positioning sexual desire as the primary facet of the lesbian woman's yearning, and only in the last verse does the affective expression turn to the heart, a symbol of undying love. While the climate in which the words are exchanged is ambiguous, the middle verse posits the separation of the lovers, formulated as an affliction of destiny. Another woman also writing to her lover conveys her yearning through the parting of vulvas:

يا ليت شعري كيف لي أن أرى كسك مذ فارقه الكس
أراه في جهدٍ وفي حسرةٍ فهكذا من كسها رمس

(Ibn Naṣr 185)

How I wish I knew of a way to see your vulva since it parted from mine
I labor and suffer to see a woman whose vulva is a grave confined

The lesbian speaker laments her separation from her lover, utilizing a language of torment and a conspicuous usage of the term vulva (*kuss*). The theme of the forsaken vulva recurs as a trope of yearning, grounding the unfulfilled desires of one lover to another, a poetic element common to love poetry. The second verse rests upon the figure of death, starting with the elements of suffering in the search for pleasure and ending with the absent vulva as a motif of perished desire. The lamentation as a form of yearning discloses the solemnity of pleasure between the partners, though the sense of passionate love may only be in the backdrop of the verse.

Similar to other feelings, yearning is not characteristically tied to lesbian and lesbian-like experience, as it is often apparent in designations of the superiority of the penis. However, what is common between the different yearning expressions across the chapter is the association of the feeling with the vulva itself, as a reference to the burning pleasures of the woman. One anecdote evinces the figure of speech, through the verses of writers addressing some women who do not reciprocate sexual initiation:

عوجي على الأير فإن الشفا
لو دقت طعم الأير يا حيتي
في الأير يا من كسها يالم
صبوت لكن حرك لا يعلم

(Ibn Naṣr 188)

Conform to the penis for cures only
come from the penis, you whose vulva aches
If you had savored the penis, my love
now rejuvenated, but of the truth your vagina is not aware

The anecdote is one of the few verses conveyed by male speakers to women seen as potentially lesbian-like, the aching vulva symbolizing the woman's yearning for the unknown, though the speaker establishes that true pleasure emanates from the penis. The approach to the woman's longing desire in the first verse provides phallic pleasure as a cure to an ailing vulva and in the second verse, underlines the replenishing powers of the penis in an accusatory tone to her vulva's inexperience. The symbolic physical pain implies the feeling of yearning, however, the speaker suggests it may only be sedated by the penis, with the late segment of the verse engaging a contemptuous attitude.

The lesbian and lesbian-like emotional community presented by Ibn Naṣr in the Arabic edition centers sexual pleasure in anecdotal expressions, with the contemptuous, yearning and anxious experiences motivating such desires. Although lesbianism is not often presented in its passionate love, the feelings in verse are fluid and reversible; contempt may be read as an argumentative and rhetorical tool or an exhibition of wit and eloquence to foreground lesbian desires, anxieties of fornication can persist in efforts to humorous dismissal of non-lesbian relationships or a worrisome preference of lesbian desire, and yearning may underline the pains of separation and unfulfilled desire to unite with a lesbian-like partner.

B. The Fearful Emotional Community of the English Translation

If one was to come across the 20th century translation, the emotional community presented by the translators centers an overarching feeling, that of fear. The translation of the chapter on lesbianism provides sparse accounts and details of lesbianism's pleasurability while giving a greater importance to the motivations and drive behind these desires. Almost every anecdote in the English chapter contains an allusion to fear, emanating from the tension around heterosexual intercourse, and framed in a didactic style that contains little amusing value or portrayal of the playful wit of lesbian and lesbian-like women as discussed in the previous chapter. That is not to say that women would not have engaged in sexual relationships with women if it weren't for their fear of pregnancy for instance, but that fear was a frame linked to much of the expressed pleasure and desires through the chapter, alongside the disgust articulated in the comparison of desires.

While the word *khawf* is utilized in some anecdotes of the Arabic edition and in other instances concealed in imagery, the translation fixates on the term fear in English across the anecdotes, whether the word is present or implied. Aligning with the choice of characterizing "anxieties" of fornication in the Arabic edition's earlier explanation, the word *khawf* defined in *Lisān al-ʿArab* as *fazaʿ* (Ibn Manzur 1290), or, *jazaʿ* as Behzadi provides (820), does not pertain to the anthology's lesbian portrayal. The remarks across the chapter about the avoidance of pregnancy and in relation to the references outside the chapter that suggest possibilities of anal sex and other forms of circumventing fornication, result in the threat of pregnancy a concern for lesbian and lesbian-like women but not necessarily a frightful object. Since the fear of pregnancy emerges from a physiognomic worry, it poses an intriguing question since it could be

assumed than women in the premodern Islamicate world had limited access to contraceptive methods such as the possibility of birth control or abortion, yet Basim Musallam notes in *Sex and Society in Islam* that medieval physicians gave “extraordinary attention to birth control”, and still “the most significant method before the twentieth century was coitus interruptus, and it was Islamic jurisprudence, and not medicine, which contained detailed information on this technique.” (Musallam 76) The lack of knowledge on contraceptive methods then did not constitute a threatening problem, as the most practical and rational methods were thought to be withdrawal and pre-coital intra-vaginal insertions. Here, Rob Boddice’s argument about feelings being historically specific is especially productive. In “The History of Emotions: Past, Present, Future”, he emphasizes the importance of reading emotions in a non-universal manner:

The temptation toward the universality of emotional phenomena is embedded in the sources with which we work. We are easily duped by continuities in language and by loose translations into thinking that love is love, fear is fear, anger is anger, and so on, and that we only need to take note of the changing contexts of expression with regard to these human biological universals. (11)

Such an approach invites for a consideration of the feelings in the text, namely that of fear of pregnancy, as not necessarily identical to the contemporary conception. It falls in line with the argument that having contraceptive methods readily available and socially recognized does not eliminate the tensions towards pregnancy, and at the same time, indicates that a non-substantiated choice and repetition of the word “fear” risks the conflation with the modern “fear” of pregnancy.

1. Lesbianism as a Logical Alternative

In the English translation, the anecdotes include the fear of defloration, pregnancy, bad fame and slander, interconnected and rooted in a medical, social and legal

dimensions, making for a chapter that is invested in the logical approach to the motivations behind lesbianism, rather than reflecting the nuanced intimacies that are used and reversed in a tone of play. When presenting the reasons why women choose to be lesbians, the translators cite four major interrelated fears:

On the one hand, virgins choose to be lesbians because they feel afraid of defloration, bad fame and disgrace if they surrender their chastity to men. On the other hand, unmarried women have a fear of being pregnant. One of these unmarried women once said:

No matter how often we practice lesbian intercourse,
We find it more helpful in hiding our acts than coitus.
It does not make us pregnant and so it displeases our enemies;
Neither does it give rise to slander, which is worse.
Above all, it does not deserve punishment as fornication does. (Jarkas and Khawwam 189)

This framing suggests that these fears were catalysts for the choice of lesbian-like desires, enforcing that it is the fear of pregnancy that motivates an unmarried woman towards lesbianism. Through this systematic explanation, the risks posed by heterosexual intercourse could be eliminated by the practice of lesbian-like desire. In the narration, Jarkas and Khawwam refer to lesbian intercourse as “more helpful in hiding” non-coital acts, validating the utilitarian value of lesbian sex. Then the lines to follow enumerate the additional advantages in an instructional language, without delivering any tone relative to the lesbian speaker. In other words, lesbianism is articulated as a tactical choice, detached from affective connotations, and the absence of figurative language rigidifies such a characterization. In the Arabic edition, one line solely presents the list of anxieties followed by contemptuous verses of a lesbian women speaking about the illusionary pleasures of the penetration, and includes rhymes and a playful boasting attitude. This creates a wholly distinct view of the tensions with

the fears of the English passage, since the Arabic does not rely on a structured and serious listing.

An exemplary conversation in the last parts of the chapter alludes to lesbianism as a practice for lack of a better option, a bypassing of the fear of disgrace and bad fame. In the dialogue, Ḥubba al-Madaniyyah inquiring the bondmaids of Medina about their recourse to something which allows them “to do it without men” (Jarkas and Khawwam 195). The bondmaids answer that it is not the case, but is “better than getting pregnant and suffering disgrace” (195). On the same note, during an extended dialogue between a lesbian and a married woman, the lesbian speaker claims:

If, on the other hand, we stay away from home longer
Than usual when we go for a walk,
We needn't have fear for being blamed. (Jarkas and Khawwam 193)

The excerpt spotlights the fear of being blamed, not only in relation to fornication, but to the responsibilities and expectations towards a husband, implying that lesbianism evades the restrictions of marriage that come along phallic desire.

Through the language of the translation, lesbianism is framed as rational alternative to the pleasures that may lead to pregnancy and slander and this central representation of fear, repeated in different formulations and a systematic style, reduces the depiction of lesbian and lesbian-like pleasure.

2. The Modesty of Lesbian Pleasure

In addition to driving women away from heterosexuality, the articulation of fear fosters a very demure portrayal of lesbian pleasure, as the grandeur of fear minimizes lesbian enjoyment. For instance, two lesbian lovers in an anecdote discuss the fear of

heterosexual love and intercourse and so encourages in return the pleasures of
lesbianism:

Lesbianism is pleasurable indeed
And heterosexual union is fearful, O girl!
Many a beautiful, white-complexioned woman
Prefers lesbianism.
Turn away from heterosexual intercourse,
For it is fearful indeed. (Jarkas and Khawwam 191)

The repetition of the term “fearful”, as an over-translation corresponding to “*al-nayk aḍālīl*” (Ibn Naṣr 184), indicates the gravity of this feeling in written exchange as conceived by the translators, and the narration in the last two lines takes on a cautionary tone that further consolidates the feeling of fear. In the earlier parts of the passage, lesbianism is scrupulously designated as pleasurable and preferable through concise words, accentuating the fears rather than the enjoyment of lesbian desire. The laconic attention to lesbian pleasure in comparison to the magnified dread of fornication, phallic desire and marriage is apparent in an anecdotal narration by an unmarried woman stating:

Contented with lesbianism,
I rejected fornication, which is disgraceful to a
respectable woman.
How disgraceful it is to say, “She is pregnant.”
Nay, I cannot put up with bastards.
Questioned by my parents, how shall I justify my pregnancy
through fornication
By which I was deflorated? (Jarkas and Khawwam 190)

The speech suffices to describe lesbianism with the term of “contentment”, a modest satisfaction, and on the other hand, accords the references to fornication and disgrace many repetitions and a fearful projection on the thought of pregnancy and defloration as an unmarried woman. The third line underscores the disgrace of pregnancy by isolating

the statement “She is pregnant” and setting it between quotations, as an utterance within her speech, to imagine the extent of harm and consequences such a statement would incite. The following line “Nay, I cannot put up with bastards” further emphasizes the social pressures induced by fornication, ones she is unable to mitigate. The English translation suffices to identify lesbian sex as pleasurable and contenting, modest in depiction as it continues to be attached to the feeling of fear. However, in the Arabic edition, contempt often prevails to undermine the anxieties of fornication and using figurative language, elaborates on the pleasures of lesbian and lesbian-like sex in generous detail.

While the English translation’s anecdotes include a few expressions of emotions on behalf of the lesbian and lesbian-like women, the major feeling reverberating throughout the chapter on lesbianism is the fear of fornication and thereby heterosexuality, particularly the interrelation of pregnancy, disgrace, slander and bad shame. This feeling is overstretched and portrayed by the translators as the focal motivation for lesbian desire, while in the Arabic edition the approach to fornication is much more composed, encompassing nuances of anxieties often serving a light-hearted intention or an underlying worry that accompanies the pleasures of lesbianism. The English translation then produces a depiction of the lesbian and lesbian-like emotional community that predominantly relies on the eminence of fear and dims the subtleties of other affective components of lesbian pleasure. Lacking in complication, the emotional community of lesbian women in the English chapter perpetuates the centrality of heterosexuality by locating lesbianism as a largely fear-based alternative, a conceptualization that is not as pertinent in the Arabic edition.

C. Conclusion

The challenge in reading emotions historically rests within the specification of emotion words that were part of the particular emotional possibilities of the period and context. Alongside the Arabic terms, the corresponding English terminology poses an additional set of decisions that can convey the precise sensibility of the Arabic emotion. This chapter attends to such questions by interpreting the literary potentials of emotions in verse, not to say that the portrayed lesbian and lesbian like women certainly experienced those feelings, or as historical fiction, that the author has conceptualized the emotions of lesbian women in writing and compilation, but to suggest possible readings of emotions and preliminary affective notions that can support the interpretation of *mujūn* poetry and lesbian sexual pleasure. The literary emotional community then clusters the fluid and equivocal emotions in each of the Arabic edition and English translation, arguing that each version with its own structure and style in laying out the verses produces distinct communities. The Arabic edition, with its teasing style and verses dense in figurative imagery, depicts lesbian and lesbian-like women in their ambivalence and wit, expressing contempt towards the undesirable pleasures, with anxieties towards fornication and its consequences and perpetuating a feeling of yearning illustrated between the vulvas of two lesbian lovers. On the other hand, the English translation fixates of the repetition of the emotion word “fear” in reference to *khawf*, a term cited in the Arabic edition as well, but the English term gives priority and high significance to the fright from pregnancy directly associated with the choice of lesbianism. This interpretation valorizes the drive behind lesbianism, and the replication of fear to rigidify the conceptualization of lesbian desires as a logical alternative to heterosexual pleasure, though less gratifying in satisfaction. Exemplifying the

production of ignorance, the discrepancy in the images of the literary emotional communities is comprised of two literary distinct understandings of the experience of lesbian and lesbian-like pleasure, one that embodies fluidity and ambivalence, while the other circumventing frightful consequences.

The significance of the project of interpreting emotions is to propound *mujūn* verses, not only as a manifestation of humor that enables a reading of rhetoric elaborated in the second chapter, but also as a terrain for unpacking the affective expressions wrapped in a humorous and lighthearted appeal. Moreover, expanding on the methodological tool of untranslatability posited by the first chapter, the study of emotions taps into the troubles of locating analogous emotion words between languages in literary interpretation, in itself necessitating scholarly conversations on affective dimensions of erotic or obscene poetry, though considered “anti-romantic” like *mujūn*, does not lack in emotional sensibilities. And most importantly, the depiction of literary emotions enriches the perception of lesbian and lesbian-like pleasure to include the intimacy among women that scarcely occupies literary and scholarly writing on premodern lesbianism.

CONCLUSION

At a first encounter with the anthology, contemporary readers of *Jawāmi ‘al-Ladhdha* might seek to discover a surprising depiction of lesbianism, perhaps informed by the current view of queer desires, that lesbian women were attributed features and description in literary form particular to them and emphasizing their anomaly. However, in the course of Arabic edition, the depiction is not starkly distinct from other pleasures, granted that the verses spoken by lesbian women include tropes and figurative language used by unmarried women in the same work. Lesbian and lesbian-like women in the chapter dedicated to lesbianism involves a multitude of depictions, with “*sahḥāqa*” denoting women who have some romantic engagement with men while choosing to partake in *sahq* with women, women engaging in lesbian-like sex with young men, women who engage in intercourse with other women and even women who practice masturbation or self-pleasure, among others. The diverse portrayals are apparent in the form of anecdotes and *mujūn* verses, within an overall teasing style, propounding a threatening anecdote for the *zarīf* reader that centers non-mutual lesbian pleasure, power enforcement, or lesbian desire as superior to other forms of pleasure, only to be reversed by an anecdote that destabilizes the propositions of the lesbian speaker. The verses themselves are a dense site for interpretation, lighthearted and playful in their figurative language and imagery, serving a rhetorical purpose and an entertaining appeal relative to the *adab* literature. The attitudes of the lesbian women speakers in verse present an opportunity for interpreting the emotions that accompany pleasure, through reading the lesbian and lesbian-like women in the chapter as a literary emotional community, encompassing fluid emotions that highlight the ambivalence and wit of the depicted

lesbians while having porous boundaries to include women-centered affective experiences of pleasure.

Approaching the verses and anecdotes of lesbian and lesbian-like women, the English translation minimizes the representation of nuanced desires among lesbians, by laying out the anecdotes in the form of prose narration with little figurative language or stylistic layout that conveys the entertaining humor of the speakers, and consequently effaces essential features of the anthology's genre. The translators articulate in their note the perversity of lesbianism and as such, the translation reflects the attitude in the choices of inflating the passages that focalize phallic pleasure between lesbian and lesbian-like women, as well as repeating the feeling of "fear" in the chapter, enforcing the view of lesbianism as a safe alternative to fornication although less satisfactory than the pleasures of penetrative sex. The translation then contributes in the perpetuation of portrayals, whether rhetoric or affective, lacking in nuance and directed to the "Western reader", contributing to the sustenance of ignorance on premodern Arabo-Islamic desires.

The value of critical interpretive reading and translation of a work that dedicates a chapter and many references to lesbianism like the tenth century *Jawāmi'* lies within constructing a history of sexuality that resists heteropatriarchal narratives of desires involved in orientalist and modernizing categorization of queer sexualities and consistently framing them as non-normative. As a means of disrupting the production and sustenance of ignorance, the efforts of queer scholarship must continue to challenge exclusionary translations and discourses that reify ignorance, in one sense, by keeping alive the debate on the challenges of terminology in translation and addressing premodern sexualities in their historic specificity, without necessarily forging a set of

new categories and vocabulary that limits the possibilities of including more types of desires, representations and understandings of sexual desires and intimacies. The discussion would particularly encourage the consideration of translation as an ongoing conversation where questions recur in such a way that an attempt to translation opens a dialogue to which other translators may add and converse with these interpretations. The goal is to move away from the author-translator, source-to-target text conceptions, towards translations that build on each other and comment on one another rather than remaining in solitary tension with the author of the designated text. My own translations of certain passages intend to be subjects of constant revision and reconsideration as editions of the book unfold and promising work on premodern lesbian love and desire come to light. The translation in that sense converses with itself in the ongoing practice of negotiating choices, emerging out of new questions and discourses in translation and queer literary studies. The dynamic attitude towards scholarly conversations can be extended to the reading histories of emotions, since what can be read as “contempt” by one interpretation may benefit from other affective suggestions to challenge the premises of analysis.

The research lays the ground for future studies to explore the literary representation of premodern Arabo-Islamic lesbian and lesbian-like desires and notions of sexual pleasure. Expanding on my interest in *Jawāmi‘ al-Ladhdha*, the next project entails undertaking a study of the chapter on lesbianism across the available manuscripts, striving towards a critical Arabic edition and a full English translation of the chapter. I intend on revisiting the anecdotes on lesbianism and read them alongside female-centered *mujūn* poetry to outline the patterns of rhetoric and portrayal of pleasure more widely across female speakers, as well as expand on the analysis of

emotions across female speech in the anthology to see how the feelings differ or compare to women's different sexual desires and experiences of pleasure. As the anthology is rich in description of the movements, actions, aesthetics and sounds making up sexual intercourse, I also strive to translate passages from its various chapters that specifically formulate the intimacy of sexual actions, as attempted in the second chapter, since the poetry of such meticulous illustrations of sex encapsulates much of the notions of beauty, arousal, and passionate love in the act itself of sex, in the absence of medical, legal and philosophical approaches to the matter. Experimenting with readings of the Arabic anthology that grapple with translation questions or diverge from them as well, such studies would be particularly interesting to write about in the Arabic language, further engaging with Arabic-language scholarship and discourses on sexualities, to produce critical work that decentralizes English as the language of academic literature. Finally, the greater aspiration of this work is to continue the study of literary lesbian portrayal across *adab* works that preceded *Jawāmi'*, and ones that followed, to contextualize the representation of lesbianism and its development in erotic anthologies over different premodern periods and settings.

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