

Language and Male Homosocial Desire in the Autobiography of ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī (d. 629/1231)*

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One does not sit down to write an autobiography without a narrative language in which to compose the sentences of one’s life story. Where do the expressions of that language, the supplement of one’s ‘natural’ language, come from? (Fleishman 1983: 471)

I

In this article I argue that the language of ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī’s autobiography, and by extension that of medieval Arabic autobiographies in general, underscores the male–male bond, and in so doing regulates and reinforces homosocial relations between men. Eve K. Sedgwick (1989) has persuasively argued, through her readings of Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*, mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century English novels, and Whitman, that male homosocial desire animates the social bonds between members of the same sex and in turn modulates the structures of male dominance and patriarchy.¹ Desire, in this formulation, is not construed as sexual but as “the affective or social force, the glue, even when its manifestation is hostility or hatred or something less emotively charged, that shapes an important relationship” (Sedgwick 1989: 2). Informed by Sedgwick’s understanding of the “merging pattern of male friendship,

mentorship, entitlement, [and] rivalry,” I attempt to show that the language of the medieval Arabic autobiographical *vita* reveals the closed and male homosocially desiring structure of the relationship between men of the scholarly community. The focus is on the autograph notes of the prominent scholar-physician ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baġhdādī (557–629/1162–1231) as they are preserved by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a (d. 668/1270) in his biographical dictionary of physicians, the *‘Uyūn al-anbā’ fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā’* (“Sources of Information on the Categories of Physicians”).²

Fedwa Malti-Douglas has shown that the male couple “is a crucial phenomenon in the gender dynamics of classical Arabic literature,” via literary analyses of *Alf layla wa layla* (“Thousand and One Nights”) and other prose texts that take into account gender issues and male–male relations (1991: 6, 15, 67–84).³ Indeed, “more different, more complicated, more diachronically apt, more off-centered—more daring” readings (Sedgwick 1989: 11) must be considered if we are to enhance our current understandings of selfnarrative, of gender, and of social structures in medieval Islamic culture. It is of course evident that not all works of medieval autobiography can be made to fit into new models and paradigms. The idea, however, is not to isolate and privilege conforming texts, but rather to use certain texts as starting points for the generation and discussion of models that may be more helpful in explaining certain factors than previous models or interpretations have allowed.⁴ It is true that certain realities particular to the period under study, to the locale, or to the individual writer may sometimes only be incorporated into a model with difficulty, but for heuristic purposes new models do have the distinction of explaining aspects of the work that may not adequately be explained by, or remain unexamined in, current paradigms. (See further Vitz 1989: 8–10).

I use this autobiographical account, then, to show that its language—specific expressions and turns of phrase—serves to reinforce the male homosocial bond. Sentiments about desire, appearance, pleasure and infatuation—in the language of scholarly endeavor and commitment—point to the relations between the scholar and his search for knowledge and books at the hands of his masters, and thereby privilege male–male contact.⁵ I argue that the relationship between master and student may be schematized and

analyzed by recourse to a Girardian paradigm where, adapting Sedgwick, the quest of knowledge by men may be understood as a desire for the object of other men's desire, and that evidence of this homosocial desire is to be found in the language of the autobiography.

II

In his readings of major European fictions (Cervantes, Stendhal, Flaubert, Proust, Dostoevsky), René Girard suggests that the choice of the beloved is often determined not by the qualities of the beloved but by the fact that the beloved is already the choice of the person who poses (or is chosen) as rival (Girard 1972: 7; Sedgwick 1989: 21). Girard's use of the triangle to schematize erotic relations, and his uncovering of the bond between rival males in the love triangle, is taken up by Sedgwick in order to explain homosocial bonding (Girard 1972, especially 1–52; Sedgwick 1989: 21–27 and elsewhere). This triangle of coveting and rivalry between the beloved, the husband or lover, and the new lover, is mirrored in an emotionally much different but structurally similar schematization in 'Abd al-Laṭīf's autobiography. Here, the beloved is the thing desired, knowledge, most often the knowledge contained in books; the husband/lover is the keeper of that knowledge, the *shaykh*, or master (suggesting, in turn, the characterization "mistress" for knowledge and for books); and the new lover is 'Abd al-Laṭīf, the aspiring student (*ṭālib*, petitioner, aspirant, seeker), who is thus in competition with the master. The master is then, in a sense, the cuckold of Sedgwick's readings (in particular of Wycherley's [d. 1127/1715] Restoration comedy, *The Country Wife* [Sedgwick 1989: 49–66]). The rivalry is framed in the magisterial bond between the master and the student/petitioner. It is in this triangular transaction between competing men, ostensibly for the attainment and possession of the thing desired (knowledge), that the homosocial bond most manifests itself.⁶

The adaptation "pupil in search of knowledge from master" is admittedly different in orientation from Girard's paradigm, "male aiming to steal female from rival male," and it can be argued that

in the latter the defeat of the other male (cuckolding) is a sign of success, whereas in the former the defeat of the master is a sign of failure. In this optic, a successful master-student relationship can, admittedly, be seen as one where knowledge is voluntarily shared. But my reformulation of the Girard/Sedgwick triangle is based on the fundamental Girardian notion that all desire is modeled on the sight of another's desire:

[T]he mediator himself desires the object, or could desire it: it is even this very desire, real or presumed, which makes the object infinitely desirable in the eyes of the subject. The mediation begets a second desire exactly the same as the mediator's. This means that one is always confronted with two competing desires. The mediator can no longer act his role of model without also acting or appearing to act the role of obstacle. (Girard 1972: 7)

The "suppleness and organizing power of the triangular schema" (Sedgwick 1989: 28) also reveals a graphic, if at first unapparent, symmetry: that the seeker's desire for the male teacher—and to be (like) the male teacher—is as motivated as his (then ostensible?) desire for knowledge. Sedgwick situates her first reading of this symmetry in the *Sonnets* of Shakespeare, where the valuation of male (fair youth) and female (dark lady) is oppositional as, for instance, in Sonnet 144 (Shakespeare 1986: 148, lines 3–4, 8):

The better angel is a man right fair,
The worse spirit a woman coloured ill . . .
Wooing his purity with her foul pride.

But, unlike this reading, in our autobiography the female element, represented by books/knowledge, is not evaluated against the norm of the master. Thus, we cannot talk, as Sedgwick does, of the asymmetry of powers and energies where the female acts and the male resists (1989: 31). If in the *Sonnets* the symmetry of the sexual triangle and the asymmetry of gender assignments are "startlingly crisp", what resistance there is in our autobiography is not nicely framed in the manner of the *Sonnets'* gender dynamics but instead in the rivalries of the pact between the seeker and the master, at once the knowledge that both in fact are to share, at once one another.⁷

Goals and desires, because they require actualization in the mirror of the other (who is, paradoxically, both the role model and the rival), are then never actually one's own. This apparent double paradox is in fact not one, because it is precisely this very interactive and transactive cohesion that is sought. Sedgwick writes: "For a man to be a man's man is separated only by an invisible, carefully blurred, always-already-crossed line from being 'interested in men'" (1989: 89).⁸ For Don Quixote, that man is Amadis, the transcendent chivalric model. This is Girard's defining mediation, and it is one to which both Girard and Don Quixote return again and again: "Don Quixote has surrendered to Amadis the individual's fundamental prerogative: he no longer chooses the objects of his own desire—Amadis must choose for him" (Girard 1972: 1; see also 2–4, and *passim*).

In my reformulation of Girard's triangle, the transcendent model of the master is replaced by the hero of the very books one covets, here not the hero *in* the books, as Girard situates him, but the hero *of* the books, the teacher empowered to transmit and share them, and later, the Ruler.

III

Images that occur with regularity in our autobiography are the physical appearance of the master, the effect of his appearance on the beholders, matters of the heart, pleasure, and desire. Moreover, all these occur in an embedded narrative, an autobiography within a biography. Guidance and misguidance, leading and misleading, infatuation and hatred, impressionability and resistance: all these oppositions are deployed to enable the autobiographer to describe himself, not in simple, reductive dualities but rather via rivalries and tensions.

Indeed, the homosocial bond that ties the men of our autobiography together is not one of brotherhood, as the pedagogical milieu might suggest, but, as Sedgwick adumbrates in her readings of Hogg (d. 1251/1835), one of "extreme, compulsory, and intensely volatile mastery and subordination" (1989: 66). The nature and

development of this mastery and subordination may be seen clearly in the trajectory of ‘Abd al-Laṭīf’s attitude toward his teachers and mentors and the unfolding of his success. In medieval Arabic autobiographical and biographical curriculum vitae, such success is not measured only by works authored, but also by debates won and masters surpassed.

Early in the autobiography, and in ‘Abd al-Laṭīf’s education, he meets a master called Kamāl al-Dīn, of whom he says, “I couldn’t understand any of his continuous and considerable jabber, even though his students seemed pleased enough with it” (*fa-badbara kalāman mutatābi’an lam afham minhu shay’an lakinna al-talāmīdh ḥawlabu yu’jabūna minhu*; al-Baghdādī 1965: 684, iii). ‘Abd al-Laṭīf already hints at his superiority over the master by describing him as foolish, and over the older (rival) students by showing that he is not taken with the teacher’s jabber as they are, even though he is younger. In fact, his youth turns out to be the narratological reason for his transfer into the care of al-Wajīh al-Wāsiṭī.

Now sensitized to the rivalries and the competition for knowledge and books, ‘Abd al-Laṭīf the protagonist is able to comprehend the rules of the game. Al-Wajīh takes him in “with open arms” (*fa-akhdhanī bi-kiltay yadayhi*; 684, v–vi) and shows him “kindness in many ways” (*bi-wujūh kathīra min al-talattuf*; 684, vi). ‘Abd al-Laṭīf “uses” al-Wajīh to get ahead, surpasses him, and enjoys the double advantage of al-Wajīh’s and Kamāl al-Dīn’s initiatory company. A partial displacement is already evident in the fact that while he is still affiliated (*ulāzim*; 684, xi) to these two professors, some “pupils . . . preferred my instruction” (*talāmīdh yakhtaṣṣūna bī*; 684, xiv). His mastery will become such that his fame will precede him when he meets the illustrious Ibn Shaddād (*wa kāna qad ittaṣala bihi shubratī*; 687, vii–viii). And when al-Qāḍī al-Fāḍil tells him to go to Damascus, he is able to demand that he be allowed to travel to Egypt instead: “I said that I preferred Egypt . . . ‘It simply must be Egypt,’ I insisted” (*fa-qultu urīdu Miṣr . . . fa-qultu lā budda lī min Miṣr*; 687, xv–xvi).

With the appearance of the mystical Ibn Nāṣilī, the contours of the homosocial triangle come into focus: “A wandering traveler from the West, in Sufī garb, splendid and elegant . . . his face was comely and his appearance showed traces of piety and evidence of travel.

All who saw him were influenced by his appearance, even before getting to know him" (685, x–xi). The text begins to reveal the importance of the appearance of the masters, the effect of their appearance on the students/aspirants, and a new transactive relationship between the gazer and the gazed upon. Indeed, inasmuch as autobiography is "a mode of reading as much as it is a type of writing" (Lejeune 1989: 30),⁹ and inasmuch as its intended audience is other male scholars, the text of the autobiography is consigned to fall beneath the gaze of other males and to help cement in writing the relationship between the male role model and the aspiring novice, all the while simultaneously preserving and subverting the triangle.¹⁰

‘Abd al-Laṭīf writes of Ibn Nā’ilī a few lines later, "He would attract the hearts and souls of men with his appearance, his diction, and his deceit. He filled my heart with a yearning for all knowledge" (*Kāna yajlibu al-qulūb bi-ṣūratihī wa-manṭiqihī wa-ṭhāmihī fa-mala’a qalbī shawqan ilā al-‘ulūm kullihā*; 685, xvi–xvii). ‘Abd al-Laṭīf is enticed but, soon after, Ibn Nā’ilī leaves (him), so he gives up "sleep and pleasure" (685, xviii) to devote himself instead to books, deriving what benefit and pleasure he can from them. But he discovers that this is insufficient: pleasure can only be obtained through the guidance and mentorship of a master. Paradoxically, desire can only be fulfilled if the master is cuckolded but also re-placed, for to remove him completely is to disturb the symmetry of the triangle. Having only books is not enough; there must be a master or rival aspirant against whom and with whom the triangular transaction can take place. The futility of reliance on books alone is partly reflected in the insufficiency of the books themselves, written by authors who "indulged in sham transmutations and false, perfidious experimentation".

‘Abd al-Laṭīf seeks out masters; but "when there no longer remained in Baghdad anyone to win my heart or to satisfy my desires" (*ḥayṭhu lam yabqa bi-Baghdād man ya’khubhu bi-qalbī wa-yamlā’u ‘aynayya*; 686, i), he journeys to Mosul. There he finds al-Kamāl ibn Yūnus, but finds no guidance from a man whose love is misplaced: "His love of alchemy and its practice had so drowned his intellect and his time that he began to dismiss and disdain everything else" (*qad istagbraqa ‘aqlahu wa-waqtahu ḥubb al-kīmīyā*

wa-ʿamaluba ḥattā šāra yastakbiffu bi-kulli mā ʿadābā; 686, iii–iv). Al-Kamāl forsakes the company of men for alchemy.

ʿAbd al-Laṭīf’s attention is then excited by the news of al-Shihāb al-Suhrawardī; but he is sorely disappointed both by him and by those who, in ignorance, exalt him (686, vii–xi). On the road once again, ʿAbd al-Laṭīf encounters al-Kindī in Damascus; but he “surpasses him on many topics” (686, xvi–xvii). Al-Kindī’s hostility at ʿAbd al-Laṭīf’s departure is further evidence of the homosocial pull. ʿAbd al-Laṭīf writes, “I soon left his side, and this neglect [of mine] offended him, even more than people were offended by him!” (*Abmaltu jānibahu fa-kāna yataʿadhbā bi-ihmālī labu akthar mim mā yataʿadhbā al-nās minhu*; 686, xvii). We see the affective glue of the bond also in ʿAbd al-Laṭīf’s reluctance, or unwillingness, to break completely with Ibn Nāʾilī, with whom he temporarily resumes contact: “So I pulled myself away, but not entirely” (*fa-aqlatu walākin lā kulla al-iqlāʾ*; 687, iv), Ibn Nāʾilī, like al-Kamāl, has given himself over completely to his studies, and has therefore sacrificed being “waited on hand and foot” (by male students) (*makhdūm ʾūl ʿumrik*; 686, xxvi).

The last master with whom ʿAbd al-Laṭīf has a close association is Abū al-Qāsim al-Sharīfī, a relationship that ends only with the master’s death. Abū al-Qāsim is the perfect (Girardian) rival because he is the perfect companion. Kamāl al-Dīn, we remember, jabbered; al-Wajih was surpassed by ʿAbd al-Laṭīf in memorization and comprehension (*ilā an širtu asbiqubu fī al-bifz wa-al-fahm*; 684, x); Ibn Nāʾilī was a dabbler (685, xv) who attached value to “procedures [ʿAbd al-Laṭīf] thought contemptible and trivial” (*ʿmāl aʿtaqidu annahā khasīsa nazra*; 686, xxv). Al-Kamāl ibn Yūnus was only partially learned (*mutaṭarrif*), and much misguided (686, iii–iv); al-Shihāb al-Suhrawardī was a deluded fool (*anwak*; 686, xii); al-Kindī “was taken with himself” (*muʿjaban bi-nafsihi*), “offensive to his company” (*muʿdhiyan li-jalīsibi*), and ʿAbd al-Laṭīf surpassed him in debate on numerous subjects (686, xvii–xviii). Yāsīn the Magician he found to be “a sweet-talker, a liar, a conjuring cheat [and] churlish” (*muhāliyan, kadhbāban, mushʿabidhan, daʿīf al-ḥāl*; 687, xxiii, xxvi); and Maimonides, though “tremendously learned” (*fādīlan fī al-ghāya*), was “overcome with the love of leadership and

of service to worldly lords" (*qad ghalaba 'alayhi hubb al-riyāsa wa-khidmat arbāb al-dunyā*; 687, xvi–xvii). It is in Abū al-Qāsim—to whom 'Abd al-Laṭīf cries out, "It is you I seek!"—that we find the fulfilment of desire. And after him only masters *extraordinaires* will do, namely rulers: Saladin, "a great sovereign, generous, affectionate, and awesome to behold, who filled the hearts of those near and far with love" (688, xii); al-Malik al-Afḍal; al-Malik al-'Azīz; 'Alā' al-Dīn Dāwūd ibn Bahrām; and Shihāb al-Dīn Tughril al-Khādīm Atābeg.

The following passage describes 'Abd al-Laṭīf's first encounter with Abū al-Qāsim al-Sharīfī and their ensuing association. The language, which emblematically uncovers for us the force of homosocial desire, is occupied with appearance, fulfilment, companionship, and seduction.

One day, when I was in the mosque with a number of people gathered around me, a master in ragged clothing entered. His face shone [*nayyir al-tal'a*] and his appearance was pleasing [*maqbūl al-ṣūra*]. The gathering was in awe of him [*hābahu al-jam'*] and put him above themselves. I finished what I had to say, and when the lecture was over, the Imam of the mosque came up to me and said: "Do you know this master? This is Abū al-Qāsim al-Sharīfī." I embraced him and said, "It is you I seek [*fa-tanaqtubu wa-qultu iyyāka atlub!*]" I took him to my house [*fa-akbadhtubu ilā manzili*], where we had food and spoke at length. I found him to be as hearts desire and a sight to behold. His conduct was that of the wise and learned, his bearing likewise. He took little pleasure in the world, not involving himself with anything that would distract him from moral excellence. He became my constant companion [*lāzamanī*], and I found him to be learned [*qayyim*] in the books of the Ancients and the books of Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī. I did not trust any one of those authors, because I used to think that Ibn Sīnā had gained access to all philosophy and stuffed it all into his own books! When we engaged in debate, I would surpass him in disputation and use of language and he would surpass me in producing proofs and in the strength of his argument. I was inflexible in not submitting to his enticement, and did not abandon my stubborn and passionate resistance to his theorizing [*wa-lā aḥid 'an jaddat al-hawā wa-al-ta'aṣṣub bi-ramzihi*]. But he began to present me with work after work by Abū Naṣr [al-Fārābī] and by Alexander Themistius, to tame my aversions and to soften the tenor of my intransigence [*yu'nis nisfārī wa-yulīm 'arikat shamāsī*], until I began to incline toward him, hesitant, unsure which step to take next [*hattā 'araftu 'alayhi uqaddimu rijlan wa wa'akhhbiru ukbrā*]. We were inseparable from morning till night, until he passed away. (688, i–x; 689, iv–v)

IV

Learning and the transmission of learning in the medieval Islamicate context were both dominated by men. Women were to some extent anomalous in religious and legal scholarship, disciplines from which they were institutionally excluded in a system where men wielded structuring definitional leverage. To paraphrase Rowson (1991: 72), women's entry into the public world would provoke an ambivalent reaction in men, who might find unsettling the challenge to them in a realm where their own dominance was taken for granted. The absence of women in our autobiography is therefore explicable.¹¹ As Meisami explains, "'Homosocial desire' has less to do with female sexuality (and male fear thereof) than with male dominance of public life, enacted on various levels of social interaction and of discourse" (1995: 306). Describing al-Malik al-ʿAzīz, ʿAbd al-Laṭīf praises the young ruler's abstinence from women (*furūj*) and, by implication, his preference for the company of men (689, xiii–xiv).¹² The one (mediated) reference to a woman in our text occurs when ʿAbd al-Laṭīf writes that he learned the *Maʿānī* of al-Zajjāj from Ibn al-Khashshāb on the authority of the female scholar Shahda bint al-Ibarī (685, v–vi). Shahda is a far cry from being Malti-Douglas's victim of oppression or a mute object of heterosexual desire. Indeed, her voice must be heard, as it is on her spoken authority that ʿAbd al-Laṭīf and every other scholar who studied with her may authoritatively use, teach and transmit the *Maʿānī*.

In some autobiographical accounts, where childhood and early adolescence are recounted, there is sometimes mention of the mother. Tashköprüzādeh (d. 968/1561), for example, begins his autobiography with the observation that shortly before his birth a handsome man appeared to his father in a dream, announcing that the child would be a son and that he should be named Ahmad; his father then recounts this story to his mother (1975: 326).¹³ This is in some ways typical of the mention of a female, as the vehicle for the production of more males. But the notion of maternal nurturance is almost a fiction in the world of the scholar-to-be, as it is from his mother that he is removed to be transplanted onto and into the homosocial community of scholars. ʿAbd al-Laṭīf writes, "I was raised in the lap/care of Shaykh Abū al-Najīb" (*wa-tarabbaytu fī hijr*

al-Shaykh Abī al-Najīb; 683, xxvi). Readings of autobiographies such as ‘Abd al-Laṭīf’s thus inscribe a different elaboration of family, one where women form part of the scholarly environment primarily—Shahda is a rare if insistent exception¹⁴—as the means through which homosocial bonds are enabled and sustained, through procreation, filiation, genealogy and circulation.

Male relationships do not obstruct the mechanisms by which heterosexual identity is instilled,¹⁵ such as the continued attention to and affection for books from the moment of first contact till death. Indeed, the kinship between writing and death of which Foucault and others have spoken is relevant here.¹⁶ Foucault in fact invokes the *Thousand and One Nights* as a classic example of this, where the storyteller prolongs the narrative in order to delay the inevitable moment when all will of necessity fall silent (1977: 116–17). What Foucault fails to observe is that in the case of the *Nights*, it is the female body/word that is seeking to wrest the oral narrative process from the male domain and to forestall its own death; and that the larger body of male writing, including our autobiography, is in fact the heroic remapping of a life, and avoidance of death, through the immortality of the written narrative outside of a purely heterosexual cartography. The act of autobiography is not a protection against death but a rewriting of that death. And the act of rewriting is the making manifest of latent desire.

Notes

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1. Sedgwick argues that “concomitant changes in the structure of the continuum of male ‘homosocial desire’ were tightly, often causally bound up with . . . other more visible changes . . . in an intimate and shifting relation to

class." For her discussion of the seamlessness and simplicity of the female continuum, comfortably encompassing "women-loving-women" and "women promoting the interests of women", versus the disjointed and discontinuous continuum for men, see Sedgwick 1989: 2–4. She also hypothesizes an unbroken continuum between homosocial and homosexual as a strategy to enable her to make generalizations about the structure of men's relations with other men (*ibid.*: 1–2). On her use of the terms "homosexual" and "homosocial", see the cautionary remarks in Van Leer 1989: 603. I should mention that Sedgwick's discussion of the *Sonnets* does not extend to Shakespeare's "A Lover's Complaint", published by him together with the sonnets. The importance of this kind of neglect is taken up in Shakespeare 1986: 1–18.

2. All references in the text are to al-Baghdādī 1965: 683–96; page numbers are followed by line numbers in roman numerals. Translations are mine as they appear in Toorawa (forthcoming). For an extensive paraphrase of the notice in English, see Makdisi 1981: 84–88. See also Stern 1962, which includes a short résumé. For an abridged translation into French, see Leclerc 1876, 2: 182–87. On 'Abd al-Laṭīf, see Stern 1962 and Makdisi 1981.
3. See Malti-Douglas 1991 for a feminist response to the male mental structures of autobiography; Chs. 6 and 7 provide a suggestive reading of the intersection between the discourse of physicians and that of modern autobiography. On the issue of sexual and gender roles in medieval Islamicate society, see Rowson, 1991, to which my attention was drawn by Meisami 1995.
4. For Malti-Douglas, for example, the medieval male autobiography is an important locus for the study of the ways in which medieval Islamicate culture has manipulated the male-homosocial spectrum and directed its misogyny. But see the highly critical remarks of Meisami (1995), where she pointedly and convincingly argues that Malti-Douglas perpetuates the classic Orientalist construct of a monolithic, static Islam by focusing on a small, unrepresentative sample of prose writing by men. Although I am indebted to Malti-Douglas for a good number of my initial thoughts and formulations, my views have now been seriously reformulated and nuanced by Meisami's critique. I do not argue that (and could not produce evidence for) the notion that the ideal world of medieval Islam is a world without women; nor that medieval Arabic prose works conceal an essentially misogynistic vision.
5. The idea of voyage, too, may be read as the manifestation of homosocial desire. In our autobiography, voyages are undertaken ostensibly in the quest for knowledge, but the company of other male scholars lies on this route, which leads away from the heterosexual environment of the hearth, and toward the exclusively male environment of the mosque, the *madrasa* (college of law) and the *ribāṭ* (Sufi retreat). Although Malti-Douglas sees this "flight

- from sex, the female, and corporeality” as emblematic of the precedence of homosociality over heterosexuality (1991: 7, 110), it must be stressed that homosocial desire is not about heterosexual anxiety. On this, see Meisami 1995: 305–06, and below.
6. In looking at the transition from a sexual model of desire to an educational one, it is perhaps useful to remember that in Western philosophy learning and loving have been linked since the spelling out of the Platonic ideal, for example in *Phaedrus*. I am indebted to Roger Moss for pointing this out.
 7. In Sedgwick’s reading, Girard’s point is Shakespeare’s point: “that the speaker [in the *Sonnets*] cares as much about the fair youth as about the dark lady for whom, in the last group of sonnets, they are rivals,” exemplified by Sonnet 42 (Sedgwick 1989: 29; Shakespeare 1986: 97); cf. for example line 6: “Thou dost love her because thou know’st I love her.”
 8. This is not to suggest—and this should go without saying—that I read homosexual innuendoes in ‘Abd al-Laṭīf’s language, or homosexuality in ‘Abd al-Laṭīf himself.
 9. For Lejeune, autobiography is “a historically variable contractual effect”, such that “the history of autobiography would be therefore, above all, a history of its mode of reading” (1989: 30).
 10. It is important to remember that “The triangle is no Gestalt. The real structures are intersubjective. They cannot be localized anywhere; the triangle has no reality whatever; it is a systematic metaphor, systematically pursued” (Girard 1972: 2).
 11. I do not adduce the absence of women in the autobiography as evidence of the antifemale nature of Arabo-Islamic discourse written by male scribes, as does Malti-Douglas, though I do see that there are texts where “The feminine has . . . to be deciphered as forbidden, in between signs, between the realized meanings, between the lines” (Irigaray 1974: 20, quoted in translation in Moi 1985: 132).
 12. For Malti-Douglas, “attempts to create a functioning heterosexual couple are played out against a greater civilizational pull for a male homosocial couple” (1991: 5).
 13. One of the fundamental facts of autobiographical narrative identified by Lejeune is that “the final object of any autobiographical endeavor is the impossible quest of birth” (1989: 73).
 14. On the absence of women in Girard’s triangle, see Moi 1982.
 15. Yāqūt, for instance, describing how he showed no one his work before its publication, writes: “I decided to go easy on myself, seeing that others had been in the same predicament; and I realized that people are stingy with their treasures and reluctant to expose their brides in public [*shahība bi-ibrāz al-‘arā’is*]”; 1980, 1: 62, emphasis added; translation by Michael Cooperson, whom I thank for bringing my attention to this remark.

16. Compare Girard's conclusion: "The ultimate meaning of desire is death" (1972: 290).

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