

Moral Values Projected by the Poetesses in Abu Tammam's "Diwan al-Hamasa"

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Abstract:

This article depicts the moral values projected by the women poets as mentioned in Abu Tammam's masterpiece "Diwan al-Hamasa", an influential anthology of classical Arabic poetry from the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods. It sheds light on the notable poetesses such as Umm Qays al-Dhabiya, Al-Awra' bint Subay', and others. By their elegiac poems, they articulate honour, courage, justice, and communal responsibility. Their verses project personal inflictions while simultaneously invoking broader moral values that resonate with their communities. By combining individual grief with collective ethical values, these women poets maintained societal norms and offer tribute on duty, loyalty, and resilience. Their works not only enrich Arabic literature but also serve as a stepping stone for future moral discourses in poetry, focussing the enduring strength of community and the complex interplay of loss and honour.

Keywords:

Anu Tammam, Classical Poetry, Arabs, Women Poets, al- Hamasa

Introduction

Abu Tammam's, Diwan al-Hamasa- an important anthology of Arabic poetry from the pre-Islamic and early Islamic period. Among its collective composition, the works of poetesses stand out not only for their emotional depth but also for their impact on moral values and ethical conduct in a turbulent time. This article explores the contributions rendered by the several poetesses included in this anthology, highlighting how their verses project the themes of honour, courage, justice, and communal responsibility.

1. Umm Qays al-Dhabiya

Umm Qays al-Dhabiya is famous for her impulsive elegies reflecting the profound grief of losing her sons. Some of her stanzas question the nature of bravery in the face of adversity, urging her community not to backwash from confronting their adversaries. Her poetry focusses the socio-moral duty of defending one's family and seeking justice, illustrating the respect given to the valorous in Arab culture. Through her voluminous poetry, Umm Qays not only laments personal loss but also calls for communal integrity and courage, demanding the societal expectation to uphold honour.

In her poetry, Umm Qays concerns of defending one's family and community in the face of adversity:

This verse was mentioned in the "Diwan Al-Hamasah" under the title "Elegies," page 438, poem number 281,

Poem :

"Who will stand against the adversaries if the clamor intensifies, After Ibn Saad, and who will lead the lean, noble steeds? In a scene that spared those absent from it, In a gathering of the foremost of people, well-attended."¹

This poem raises questions about courage and duty, emphasizing the moral importance of standing up for justice and the protection of loved ones amidst conflict.

2. Al-Awra' bint Subay'

Al-Awra' bint Subay' hails from the Banu Dhubyan tribe and is known for her elegiac poetry, specifically mourning her brother Abdullah. Her verses depict the stark realities of loss while embodying a moral imperative: to honor the deceased through respectful remembrance and the pursuit of justice. The imagery in her poem, where she likens her grief to a fire, serves not only to convey her emotional state but also underscores the communal bond forged through shared experiences of sorrow and valor. Al-Awra's poetry exhibits a sense of duty among the living beings to carry forward the virtues of the fallen.

Al-Awra' reflects on her sorrow for her brother Abdullah, urging readers to honor the memory of the deceased through virtuous living:

This verse is found in the "Diwan Al-Hamasah" under the title "Elegies," page 452/1, poem number 151, where she laments her brother Abdullah:

¹ Zubair, K. M. A. A. (2024). The Women Poets in the Diwan al-Hamasa by Abu Tammam. London: Noor Publishing. pp:31

Poem :

"I weep for Abdullah as the dawn broke, His fire was surrounded, A thin-skinned man, He did not release his garment from the encircling."¹

Through her loss, she invokes a sense of duty to honor those who have passed by remembering their virtues and maintaining family ties in their absence.

3. Unnamed Poetess from Kinda

The unnamed poetess from the Kinda tribe exemplifies the theme of loyalty and betrayal in her poetry. She laments the abandonment of a leader in battle, ultimately asserting that true honor lies in steadfast support for one's kin. Her moral stance foregrounds the ethical implications of loyalty and the dishonor associated with surrendering one's principles. The poetess conveys that each member of the community has a role to play in times of crisis, illustrating an important moral theme of responsibility and the impact of collective actions on communal integrity.

This poetess critiques abandonment during critical times and emphasizes loyalty to one's leader:

This verse is found in the "Diwan al-Hamasah" under the title "Elegies," page 401/1, poem number 851:

¹ Zubair, K. M. A. A. (2024). The Women Poets in the Diwan al-Hamasa by Abu Tammam. London: Noor Publishing, pp:32

Poem:

"Do not tell the people except that your leader You handed him over, even if you fought and resisted. I mourn a young man whom the sun has not left A single day without affecting, either harming or benefiting."¹

The poem conveys the significance of loyalty and the dishonor in failing to support one's leader, underlining the moral responsibility of standing with one's kin, particularly in times of conflict.

4. Unknown Poetess from Banu Shayban

The contribution of the unknown woman from Banu Shayban reflects on the shared experiences of loss within a community, remarking on how death claims its due from the noble. Her expression that they "shared the deaths" emphasizes the moral fabric of reciprocity and the mutual obligations that bind a tribe together.

By framing death in the context of shared experience, her poetry elucidates the importance of valor and collective mourning, prompting a moral reflection on the necessity of solidarity in the face of life's adversities.

In this elegy, the poetess speaks to shared experiences of loss among her people:

The following verse is found in the Diwan al-Hamasa under the title "Elegies," page 623/1, poem number 76:

¹ Zubair, K. M. A. A. (2024). The Women Poets in the Diwan al-Hamasa by Abu Tammam. London: Noor Publishing, pp:34

Poem:

"They said: 'A noble one from among you was killed. Just as the spear demands of the noble, so does death. We shared the deaths, and it was our share, the best share.'"¹

The text emphasizes the ethos of camaraderie and shared grief, suggesting that facing death with honor is a collective responsibility, reinforcing the moral nature of communal support in mourning.

5. Zaynab bint al-Tathriyah

Zaynab bint al-Tathriyah's elegiac poetry for her brother Yazid resonates with themes of resilience and continuity. The imagery she employs juxtaposes the permanence of the natural landscape against her personal loss, suggesting that while individuals may pass, moral values and memories remain alive within the community. Her reflections compel her readers to recognize the virtues of endurance and the necessity of upholding the deceased's legacy through virtuous living.

In her sorrowful elegy for her brother Yazid, Zaynab highlights the enduring nature of values amidst personal loss: Zaynab's elegy for her brother Yazid can be found in the Diwan al-Hamasa.

¹ Zubair, K. M. A. A. (2024). The Women Poets in the Diwan al-Hamasa by Abu Tammam. London: Noor Publishing, pp:35

Poem:

"I see the tamarisk from the valley of al-Aqiq, Remaining as it was, though the misfortunes have overtaken Yazid. I have cut the sword; it is neither diminishing nor weakened By its past use and its state of decline."¹

The imagery conveys a moral sense of resilience and the necessity to uphold one's values and lineage after loss. The enduring tamarisk tree signifies the strength of familial bonds that persist beyond death.

6. Fātima bint al-Ajhamm

Fātima bint al-Ajhamm's poetry articulates themes of vulnerability and grief through the metaphor of a protective mountain. In her stanzas, she projects the deeper moral aspect of grief, also the resilience required to endure such trials.

Fātima's poetry speaks to the afflictions felt after ransoming the life of a legendary man, maintaining a deep emotional engagement with grief:

Poem:

"Oh eye, weep every morning, Weep for the wounds in fours. You were a mountain for me to seek refuge under, Now you have made me alone, exposed and desolate."²

In her projections, Fātima calls attention to the ritual of mourning as an ethical engagement with loss, asserting that honouring the memory of legendary ones involves acknowledging one's vulnerabilities.

¹ Zubair, K. M. A. A. (2024). The Women Poets in the Diwan al-Hamasa by Abu Tammam. London: Noor Publishing, pp:38

² Zubair, K. M. A. A. (2024). The Women Poets in the Diwan al-Hamasa by Abu Tammam. London: Noor Publishing, pp:43

Conclusion

The poetesses and their stanzas collected in the **Diwan al-Hamasa** engage with moral themes that are key components to the fabric of their society. Through their effective verses, they project moral values such as courage, loyalty, justice and communal responsibility. Their reflections coincide with moral imperatives that compelled their contemporaries to cope up on their roles in an ever-changing world. By showing their personal experiences with wider ethical concerns, these poetesses not only enriched Arabic literature but also served as trendsetters for future moral discourses in poetry. Their voices continue to inspire and provoke thought about the dynamics of loss, honuor, and the enduring strength of community. Each poets carches a unique perspective on the ethical implications of personal and communal experiences, weaving the complexity of human emotions into their literary compositions.

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