elitist conceptions of literature. The relationship between literature and social, political and economic conditions is perceived as a bipolar one, excluding other important factors such as the mass-media and popular culture. Thus, especially when using it for the purpose of teaching, one should not take this volume for a state-of-the-art reference work but rather a starting point for discussions about literature and the Near and Middle East.

Note. The index is not in all cases reliable: ‘Azerbaijan’, for instance, is not to be found on pages 3, 136, 163 but on pages 5, 136, 165.

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This is a very learned book. The author not only disposes of enormous knowledge, he is fond of his subject, or at least, does not find it as annoying as other scholars may do. All here depends on one’s personal taste. In fact, he envisages “the odium of the puritans”. The present writer is not a puritan, yet neither does he share the opinion of the author that light, scurrilous verse is amusing simply because it is obscene. Much of what he apparently deems to be “witty” (for he quotes it) or even inspired by humour, (but true humour is good-hearted, and thus void of the malice implied in obscene mockery) is in my opinion rather insipid. What are the criteria for a verse being witty? G. does not name them, for the simple reason that the object of this study is not the character of hijâ, nor its literary means or aesthetic values, nor even its effects, but its “reception” i.e. “every kind of reaction or opinion, whether overt or implicit, on hijâ poetry.” “The immediate effects of hijâ have been described in many studies.” (10) Nevertheless, these effects were not meaningless for the author when he laid the framework for his book and decided to “concentrate on a narrower interpretation of hijâ as invective, a type whereby one intends to humiliate, ridicule and insult rather than reform.” (10-11)

G. further decided to analyze his material in chronological order. This being the fact, the results of his scrutiny were more or less predictable. Firstly, different attitudes toward this kind of hijâ were to be expected, and in fact they appear in the book: Some people would dislike, even condemn coarse reviling, such as the famous Khalaf al-Ahmar who emphasized that “the strongest hijâ is what is most chaste and most truthful” (87) or the Umayyad poet Nusâyb (Abū Mihjan), who stated that “the best hijâ is what a virgin may recite in her private room without impertinence” (43). Others would defend it, even with pious argument. Ibn Qutayba in his “Book on Poetry and Poets” “presents both hijâ and madiḥ as instruments of God to lower or to raise people’s reputations” (55). And there were those compilers who condemned obscene hijâ and yet inserted an indecent verse here and there in their anthologies. G. talks of them under the heading of “Inconsistencies”. One might also refer here to a typical statement made by ath-Tha‘alîbi in his Yatîmat ad-dahr while introducing Ibn al-Ḥajjâj, whom G. rightly styles “a paragon of obscenity”. The anthologist justifies his decision to include this poet by pointing to his widespread popularity, even in the circles of the connoisseurs and the cultivated elite.¹

¹ Journal of Arabic Literature, XXIV
The variety of these stances is limited and thus repetition is preordained. One can only admire the author for succeeding in avoiding it to a considerable degree. (May he forgive the use here of this rhetorical figure so favoured in satire, called al-hajw bil-madfh). But it would be unjust to deny that the author has contributed new and interesting insights. One such insight is the remarkable fact that the percentage of poetry greatly increased after the coming of Islam, whereas in pre-Islamic times the principle of cird (honor) apparently "had a restraining influence on hija" (15):

"Those poets who are said to have refrained from making hija are greatly outnumbered by those called hajja, 'making much hija, khabith al-lisân, 'with an ugly tongue' etc. It is only in Islamic times that we find many poets specializing in foul-mouthed hija, or great poets who owe to it a substantial part of their reputation, such as Jarîr and his two great contemporaries al-Farazdaq and al-Akhtal in the Omayyad period, or Bashshâr and Ibn al-Rûmi in Abbasid times." (20)

Foul-mouthed hija was evidently accepted by a large public. Hijâ became "in a sense, a ritualized game." (32) "In the Omayyad period these contests have become less serious and more entertaining than in pre-Islamic times. One gets the impression that the audience delights in those mutual vilifications recited in public and the poets are aware of this and do their utmost to gratify their public, not rarely by means of humour. The flyting has developed into an important art form and thus loses some of its social and political importance." (30)

The question why this was so is not raised by the author. Could it have to do with the fact that the Prophet legitimized hija by ordering Hassan ibn Thâbit:

"Make a mockery of them (i.e. the Meccans)! For, by God, your mockery will lacerate them more severely than an attack with arrows in the dawn!" (22)

Or could the indulgence in obscene satire have sprung from the sexual morals of Islam, with the virile maxim ascribed to the Prophet and quoted by al-Ghazzali in his "Revivification of the Religious Sciences", chapter on marriage: "The best man of my community is he who has the greatest number of wives"? Remarkably enough, Jesus appears as it were as the leader of the opposite attitude to satire. G. quotes two stories from Jahîz, one from his "Rhetoric", where Jesus refuses to answer foul language by saying: "Everybody gives from what he has!" and one from Jahiz' "Book of Animals", where, "when his disciples, seeing a dead dog, say: 'How it stinks', Jesus says: 'How white are its teeth!' " (46) Incidentally, the latter story became part and parcel of Persian as well as of German literature, occupying a prominent place in both, for it was used by Nizâmî in his Makhtzan al-Asrâr and from there, via J. von Hammer's translation, passed into Goethe's "West-östlicher Divan".

The two stories are a fine example of the influence of Christian thought in Islam. On the other hand, it does not seem that in Christian history satire was mitigated through the spirit of Jesus.

Furthermore, obscenity is not a necessary ingredient of Islamic hija, even though one sometimes gets this impression while reading another nasty quotation or another protest against it in this book. Regrettably, G. has little to say about non-obscene satire. None of the often really witty, even delightful verses e.g. on the niggardliness of rich persons, their unwillingness to receive guests, their tricks to serve them as little bread as possible, the small size of their cauldrons etc. is quoted.