A STUDY OF "ELEGY FOR AL-HALLĀJ" BY ADÜNĪS

The poem Marthiyat al-Ḥallāj (Elegy for al-Ḥallāj) was published in the collection Aghānī Mihyār al-Dimashqī (Songs of Mihyār of Damascus) (1961) and was later incorporated by Adūnīs without any change in his Complete Works in both editions.¹ The poem appeared in the section al-Mawt al-Muʿadd in which all the titles of the nine poems contain the word marthiya.² The present reading of the poem includes a translation which closely follows the orginal, as do the verse divisions. The numbers given to the verses do not exist in the original. The translation is accompanied, where necessary, with notes regarding the denotative meanings of particular words. Following the translation is a line by line analysis based upon the poetic diction and the connotative meanings of the words, i.e., the possible responses which the words in the context disposes a reader to make beyond his recognition of their denotative meaning. It may be any sensory, emotional, or cognitive response which is a consequence of suggestion, association, or inference, or of the look, spelling, or sound of a word. These connotations are the means by which the poetic language achieves its depth, density and richness. The third part of the article is an attempt to present an interpretation of the poem as a whole.


² The titles are successively: Marthiyat bi-lā Maut; Marthiyat ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb; Marthiyat Abī Nuwās; Marthiyat al-Ḥallāj; Marthiyat Bashshār; Marthiya; Marthiya; Marthiyat al-Āyyām al-Ḥādirā; Marthiyat al-Qarn al-Awwal. The two last long poems were omitted from the collection in the 1983 edition of the Complete Works and appear elsewhere (I, pp. 220-235).
TRANSLATION

1. Your green poisonous quill.
2. Your quill whose veins swelled with flame.
3. With the star rising from Baghdad
4. Our history and our immediate resurrection
5. In our land— in our repeated death
6. Time lay down on your hands
7. And fire is in your eyes
8. Sweeping away and spreading up to the sky
9. O star rising from Baghdad
10. Loaded with poetry and birth
11. O green poisonous quill
12. Nothing is left for those who come from far
13. With thirst, death and ice
14. In this land of resurrection
15. Nothing is left but you—and Presence.
16. O Galilean language of thunder
17. In this land of peel
18. O poet, of secrets and roots.

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3. Risha signifies both the quill of a bird’s wing and a quill pen.
4. Wedaj is a jugular vein. The expression Intafakhat awd juhu (literally: his jugular veins swelled) means he flew into a rage. Schimmel translates into German: “Deine Feder, mit Ader, geschwellt von Flammen”.
5. Sada denotes also an echo. Schimmel translates: “Trotz Tod und trotz Eis und Echo bekomen”.
6. Hudur means also (as plural of hādir) “those present”. Schimmel translates: “die Präsenz”.

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8. Sweeping away and spreading up to the sky