

PREFACE

That poetry which deals with bad or ugly things is not necessarily itself bad or ugly may seem a truism. Nevertheless, numerous literary critics and theorists have found it difficult, or indeed undesirable, to make a rigorous distinction between the quality of a poem and that of its subject matter.

If the subject taints the poetry, then the poetry in its turn may taint its criticism. At one more remove, then, even this monograph, which studies this criticism, may receive the odium of the puritans. I am looking forward to any invective this study should provoke. However, my object has not been to provoke, nor to defend a general thesis on invective poetry, but merely to present the ideas of the Arabic writers of the past; a presentation that is basically chronological, although a strictly chronological sequence is often interrupted for the sake of a more systematical approach. The result is, inevitably, a compromise.

In the translations I decided to render the register of the original with some fidelity; thus I do not translate, e.g., *ayr* as *membrum virile*. Occasionally I have preferred transliteration to translation.

The system of transliteration employed should be obvious to the specialists.

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