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Schippers, A.

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THE GENITIVE-METAPHOR IN THE POETRY OF 'ABU TAMMÄM

A. SCHIPPERS

This paper deals with one of the figures of speech of the most known cultivator of Badi'i-style, the genitive metaphor in the poetry of 'Abu Tammâm. The appearance of Badi'i we could call one of the most important revolutions or moments tournants in Arabic poetry. It is closely connected with the new social role poetry came to fulfill. Let us briefly dwell on the social necessity which led to a change of function in Arabic poetry.

On the Arabian peninsula, in pre-islamic times, a poet had a political function within the tribe to which he belonged. His poetical production was part of its own identity. The honor and ideals of the group to which he belonged, were expressed in his poems. Hence he was motivated to produce war-poems, elegies,

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3 I can give here of course only a brief and simplified account of the development of the role of poetry in arabic society, mainly based on the remarks and conclusions of Blachère and Bencheikh (Cf. Blachère, Histoire de la littérature arabe, III, Paris, 1966, pp. 544-551 and Bencheikh, Poétique arabe, pp. 24 sqq.).
laudatory poems and whatever. In urban life the function of poetry becomes totally different. The poet is in the service of his master, often an influential politician, who needs to rally poets around him for his own political fame. The poet derives his pride no longer from his tribe, but rather from the success he has at the courts of governors and politicians.¹

The literary development which results in a reduction of the influence of the poetic tradition of the desert, coincides with a political change namely the establishment of Abbasid power with the support of arabo-iranian elements and the removal of the center of the Moslem empire to Iraq. With Baghdad as center of the caliphate the best possibility for a poet to make career was to acquire relationships in a group concentrated around a politician, Maecenas and to try to get entrance to his court. A poet frequented first local and lower authorities, but endeavoured then to get access to higher dignitaries, until he finally tried his luck at the court of the caliph himself.

At least that was the experience of a poet like 'Abu Tammām. Patrons who frequented and praised 'Abu Tammām, were for instance the Governor of Armenia, Khālid ibn Yazīd ash-Shaybānī (d. 230/844); Ṣ the Governor of Jabal Muḥammad ibn al-Haytham;⁶ the secretary of the Wazīr Muḥammad az-Zayyāt: al-Ḥasan ibn Wahb; Ṣ Iṣḥāq ibn 'Ībrāhīm al-Muṣʿabi, police chief of Baghdad;⁷ Generals like Abu Dulaf al-ʿIjli⁸ and ʿAbu Saʿīd ath-Thaghrī.⁹ By means of the famous muʿtazilite qāḍī Ibn Abī Duʿād,¹⁰ who had full access to the court of both caliphs, Al-Maʾmūn and al-Muʿtaṣim, he was introduced at the court of Al-Muʿtaṣim at Samarra in (223/838) when the caliph had just returned from the victory at

¹ One could argue that in pre-islamic times there were also courts (e.g. mainly at Ḥirah and Jābiyāh) and court-poets, such as Nāighbah adh-Dhubayānī but they were still involved in tribal politics see R. Jacobi, *Studien zur Poetik der altarabischen Qaside*, Wiesbaden 1971, p. 9). I agree with A. Kh. Kinany, *The Development of Ghazal in Arabic Literature*, Damascus, 1951, p. 51: “The pagan poets were so independent and so proud that they could not be good courtiers”.


³ Ibìd., p. 188.

⁴ Ibìd., p. 43.

⁵ Ibìd., p. 221.

⁶ Ibìd., p. 121.

⁷ Ibìd., p. 105.

⁸ Ibìd., p. 89, note 4.
Amorium, which gave Abu Tammam the opportunity to write a long poem in praise of the caliph.\(^12\) The chapter division in the biography of 'Abu Tammām by aş-Şūlī shows clearly the importance patrons have in the life of a poet; each chapter is dedicated to the relationship of 'Abu Tammām to one of his patrons. Thus poetry was merely an instrument of the ruling class; oppressed sections of the population, like the Zanj who revolted in Başra, has left us no poems.\(^13\) The poet conforms himself to the role which society imposes on him, a society, dominated by a Secretary class, which is conservative and does not go beyond the old themes, the old conventions. Thus the only revolution which is possible, is a revolution in style.\(^14\)

The urban milieu was conscious of the difference between urban and Bedouin poetical style. Urban life had poetic forms which differed in style and language. One of the new genres which had a specific function in the court life was the khamriyyah, the wine-poem, in which drinking-companions of the caliph or the caliph himself distinguished themselves. However, our poet 'Abu Tammām clung to the old qaṣīda, the solemn ode. His wine-description in qaṣīda II is of a totally different character than the wine-poems of 'Abu Nuwās.\(^15\) Generally the opinion was held that a non-Bedouin poet should use only non-Bedouin words, a rule infringed by 'Abu Tammām who mixed Bedouin vocabulary with urban words.

It was in this urban milieu that the new Badi'-style appeared. The cultivators of Badi'-style employed the traditional poetic ma‘ānī but they gave it a new form because of their abundant use of figures of speech like antithesis, paronomasia, and metaphor. Heinrichs says: “Badi’ may be defined as rhetorical embellishment which is constantly sought after by the poets and thus gradually evolves as a principle of art rather than a mere instrument of


\(^{13}\) Bencheikh, \textit{Poétique arabe}, p. 27.

\(^{14}\) Almost certainly, the change of the role of the poet in society has resulted in an increasing number of passages in which the poet praises his capacities as a laudatory poet. This is clearly demonstrated in the poetry of 'Abu Tammām (cf. the passages mentioned in M. C. Lyons, “Notes on 'Abu Tammām's Concept of Poetry”, \textit{JAL} (1978), pp. 57 sqq.).

\(^{15}\) \textit{Diwān 'Abi Tammām}, ed. 'Azzām, I, pp. 26 sqq.; poem 2, lines 7-17.
'Abu Tammām, born in Syria of Christian descent, who considered 'Abu Nuwas and Muslim ibn Walid as his masters, was not the first to make use of the new style, but it was him, who attracted the most criticism and praise. The Kitāb al-Bādī' of Ibn al-Mu‘ta‘azz and other works were probably written to counter his extravagancies.

A whole theory about rhetorical figures arose. Some concepts about the creativity of the poet change meaning only because of him. For instance takalluf (the counterpart of natural endowment) which signified ‘great efforts’, has from then on the meaning ‘artificiality, mannerism’ with clear reference to 'Abu Tammām.

Mannerism appears in the poetry of 'Abu Tammām, but also in the later fantastic poetry of as-Sanaubāri, in which phantasmagoria and fantastic aetiology play an important part and also in descriptive poetry like the poetry of 'Abu Ṭālib al-Ma‘mūn. Mannerism, as European scholars borrowed this term from painting, denotes generally a greater preoccupation with form than with content, it is an academic form of creation. In literature we have other terms for the same sort artistic principle like: gongorism, alexandrinism, asianism, marinism and secentism. One of the concepts in this connection is the concetto, in Arabic ma‘nā ṣ-san‘ah, a poetic motive worked on by a figure of speech. Friedrich, in his book about periods of Italian poetry, has defined it as “an abnormal point, a risky and witty combination, which does not care about the reality of the motif: a compelled identity of diver-

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sity". Another concept is what Friedrich calls *Naturalisierung*: what first is intended to be metaphorical, now suddenly has a literal meaning, as if the poet does not remember the metaphor. Thus two levels of language are interwoven the literal and the metaphorical. By these concetti and this naturalisation we achieve an effect of alienation. This alienation is the *ighrāb*, which Marzuqi imputes to the artificial poets who practise *Bādiʾ*-style.

In this paper we want to make an effort to examine how this alienation takes shape by the use of genitive-metaphors in the poetry of ʿAbu Tammām.

Let us first briefly dwell on some characteristics of the poetry of ʿAbu Tammām. The figure of speech he abused most, is paronomasia to the great annoyance of many of his contemporaries. Two centuries later we find an echo of it in the severe judgment of Jurjānī in his *Mysteries of Eloquence*. When he comments on a verse in which the poet amuses himself with puns on place names, he says (I use the translation of Klein-Franke): “If he then comes upon a place name that he must mention or arrives at an event that he wishes to commemorate in a poem, he seems to believe that he is doing something wrong or is omitting a sacred duty if he does not produce some play of words or conjure up some other piece of artificiality.” The language of ʿAbu Tammām is unbalanced because he uses ḥadāri-words and Bedouin words together in his qaṣīda’s; sometimes the text becomes too difficult to interpret because of the application of archaisms and grammatical and

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philosophical terms. The commentators have endless discussions: some of them lack the courage to come to a correct understanding. That is for instance the case, when the poet uses the name of a sect, the Jahmiyyah, to describe wine (II l. 15): 28 'The wine has the attributes given by the Jahmites to God, save that they name her as the essence of things'.

\[(\text{Jahmiyyatu-l-'ausāfi 'illā 'anna-hum qad laqqabū-hā jauhara-l-'asyā'ī.)}\]

The commentators differ in interpretation: al-'Amidi 29 says: 'I heard very often the sheikhs saying that this verse is ravings and delirium, because poetry is only good, if it is understandable and these things that he says here are closed, hermetic (munghaliqah), not according to the school of the former poets nor according to the school of the later poets.' In another line the poet describes the wine by means of grammatical terms (II l. 13). He says: 30 'Although she is a stupid woman, her bubbles play with the intellect as verbs play with nouns.'

\[(\text{Kharqā'u yal'abu bi-l-'uqūli ḥabábū-hā ka-l-tala'ubi-l-'asmd'i.)}\]

Two centuries later Ibn Sinān (d. 466/1074) al-Khafājī expresses in this context his displeasure at the use of grammatical and philosophical terms in poems. He also mentions two passages from al-Mutanabbi and al-Ma'arri who have followed 'Abū Tammām in using grammatical terms in poetry. 31 Ibn al-‘Athīr (d. 1239), two centuries later still, defends the poet: as wine brings the intellect into another condition, so the verbs bring the nouns into another condition. 32 The criticism against the artificialities of 'Abū Tammām began already in his own time. This is how Bencheikh describes

\[\text{32 Ibn al-'Athīr, Mathal as-Sā'ir, Cairo, 1939, II, pp. 354-358.}\]
the criticism of his fellow poets in his *Poétique Arabe* (p. 63): ^33^ ‘In the eyes of Di’bil, ‘Abu-l-‘Amaythal, Ibn al-‘Arrābī, he distends in an exaggerated manner the tie that links reality with expression; the speech is not established in an immediate limpidity; the distance between object and means of expression grows; the imagery contains only a far remembrance of the thing that made it appear; the pertinence is no longer the central aim of creation; indeed, people reproach him, he goes so far in his farfetchedness in the field of language, that he is the only one to be able to comprehend his poems.’

After these introductory remarks about the characteristics of the poetry of ‘Abu Tammām, we shall occupy ourselves with the genitive-metaphor. ‘Genitive-metaphor’ is a somewhat inaccurate term, for not the metaphor, but the thing itself is in the genitive. Besides there are two kinds of genitive-metaphor. ^34^ Friedrich, in his book about the structure of modern lyric, considers the genitive-metaphor as relatively most occurring in modern European lyric poetry: but not only there. He says: ‘It is one of the oldest schemes of metaphors. Because the weakening of the genitive makes it possible to use it in many different ways, possibilities exists of taking extraordinary liberties with it. This old type is often used to bring about an effect of alienation.’ ^35^ The two kinds, which he distin-

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[^33]: Bencheikh, *Poétique arabe*, p. 63: “A leur yeux, le lien qui relie la réalité et l’expression se distend; son discours ne s’établit pas dans une immédiate limpidity; l’écart se creuse chez lui entre objet et signifiant, l’image ne contient plus qu’un souvenir lointain de la chose qui la fit naître, la pertinence n’est plus au coeur de la création. Bien plus, on le lui reproche d’avoir poussé si loin ses recherches dans le domaine de la langue, qu’il est seul à pouvoir maîtriser la compréhension de ses poèmes.”


[^35]: *Loc. cit.:* “Es ist eines der ältesten Schemata der Metaphorik. Ingefolge der geschwächten und daher zu vielerlei dienlichen Funktion des Genitivs erlaubt dieser Typus jedoch auszerordentliche Gewagtheiten. Dieser alte Typus wird am häufigsten zu Verfremdungswirkungen gebraucht.” *Verfremdung or alienation* is here used of course in the rhetorical sense, not in the Kafkian or Brechtian sense. W. Heinrichs already identified the Arabic *‘ighrāb* with the classical and western alienation. He says (Arabische Dichtung, p. 55, note 2): ‘Die Verfremdung — genau im Sinne von *‘ighrāb* — hat ihren angestammten Platz auch in der abendländischen Rhetorik.” He mentions in this connection Lausberg, *Elemente der literarischen Rhetorik*, München, 1963^4^, pp. 41-43. The equivalent classical terms are *alienatio* and *xenikon*. The arabic term which corresponds with *Verfremdung, ‘ighrāb*, occurs in the introduction to the *Sharh Hamāsah* by Marzūqī, p. 12 (see our note 15). Another term which occurs there, *ta’fīb*, reminds us of the *secentista* Marino’s far meraviglia.
guishes, are the attributive and the identifying genitive-metaphor. As examples of attributive genitive-metaphors he gives "mute cries of mirrors" from the Italian poet Ungaretti and 36 "incisors of the eyes cut up the melody" from Éluard. As examples of identifying genitive-metaphors "the straw of the water" and "the seas of chance" both from Éluard. Here one can substitute: the water is straw, the chance is seas; the metaphorical is explained by the literal. In Arabic poetry a well-known example of identifying genitive-metaphor is: "The eyes of the flowers", in which the flowers are equated with eyes. To which category a metaphor belongs, depends of course on interpretation. With some of the genitive-metaphors Friedrich does not know what to do. Of some identifying genitive-metaphors he thinks, that the word-combination as such is important rather than the meaning. The examples given here, are from Éluard 41 and Montale: 42 "the fruits of the wind", "the pebbles of the noise", "the ashes of the stars". Here we are concerned rather with word combinations than metaphors: one can better speak here of identification of two levels of language: the alternation of literal and metaphorical meanings. This kind is difficult to classify in one of the usual categories. Although modern European poetry has an inspiration quite different from Arabic poetry, it is true of both that the genitive-metaphor opens the way to extraordinarily risky expressions; in both the effect of alienation is achieved and in both the combination is more important than the metaphor itself. 43

38 Ibid., p. 196, 249; I found only: la paille des astres, les cloches du hasard.
39 Cf. W. Heinrichs, The Hand of the Northwind, Wiesbaden (Steiner), 1977, p. 10 note 20 sub 2): "The genitive metaphor in which the muḍāf ʿilāyah explains the meaning of the metaphor represented by the muḍāf, e.g. 'the eyes of the flowers' (eyes = flowers)." "The hand of the Northwind" itself (line 62 of the muʿallaqah of Labīd) is no genitive metaphor, but a hidden or implicite metaphor (in the terminology of Heinrichs: an "ancient metaphor"): the northwind is here a rider who has in his hand the rein of the morning (the morning = a horse).
40 Friedrich, Struktur, p. 211.
42 Eugenio Montale, Poesie I (Ossi di Seppia), Mondadori, 1963, pp. 131 sqq. in Arsenio line 59: la cenere degli astri.
43 Friedrich, loc. cit.
We will see now how far 'Abu Tammām goes in using genitive metaphors and discuss especially the extreme cases, dealt with by his contemporaries and later critics. In the second poem of the Diwān of 'Abu Tammām we find many genitive-metaphors, for instance in the description of the garden which precedes the above-mentioned wine description. Flashes of lightnings are called "banners of the dark rainclouds". The garden which begins to grow luxuriant is called "a permanent abode for the miracles of the rain-stars" (with 'the miracles of the rain-stars' are intended the flowers of the garden). Other genitive-metaphors are: to describe the cool of the east wind as "the camphor of the east wind"; to describe the morning mist as "the musk of the dew"; however "the thread of every sky" to describe the sky full of rain is only apparently a genitive-metaphor: because the sky is here compared to a water bag, which is loosened in order to pour out water from it. It is rather an implicit metaphor. In the wine description that follows then, he mentions the hands which carry the cups of wine as "pack-animals of the wine" and the cups become "pack-animals of desire in the intestines." In the passage of praise which follows then he mentions "the bird of my hope", and "the seas of my misery", into which his patron has to throw his wealth.

All the above-mentioned examples can be allotted to one of the two categories: attributive and identifying genitive-metaphor. "The camphor of the east wind", "the musk of the dew" for instance are attributive genitive-metaphors, and "the bird of my hope", who flies around above his prey the patron, is an identifying genitive-metaphor. But there are also some examples for which classification is too difficult and which aroused astonishment. For

44 For instance as-Sūlī (d. 946); Diyyā' al-Dīn ibn al-Āthīr (d. 1239); Ibn Sinān al-Khafājī (d. 1073); Di'bil (d. 860); other critics are al-Āmīdī (d. 981), Kitāb al-Muwāzahah, Cairo, 1968, I, pp. 245 sqq.; Marzubānī (d. 990), Muwashshah, Cairo, 1933, pp. 303; 'Abdal-'Azīz al-Jurjānī (d. 976), al-Wasā'īh bayna-l-Mutanabbi wa-khusūnī-h, pp. 67 sqq.; 'Abdal-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 1079), 'Asrār al-Balāghah, passim; and Ibn al-Mu'tazz (d. 1008), Kitāb al-Badi', passim; and many others.


46 Poem II, line 3, 4.

47 Poem II, line 5; an implicit metaphor in the sense of our note 30.

48 Poem II, line 9.

49 Poem II, line 25.

50 Here the verb "flying" is also involved.
instance "the wine of the departure" in which wine denotes probably the fire of the passion. Further: "the dense wood of generosity", "the jugular veins of Time", "the eye of religion", "the eyes of polytheism" and from the second poem a specially obscure one: "the water of reproach". This "water of reproach" is mentioned in the beginning of the second poem: the first two lines deal with a motif taken from the traditional nasib. The poet addresses his two friends who reproach for him his wailing on the traces of an encampment that the tribe of the beloved has left. But the traces are not mentioned, nor the beloved: we know it implicitly because of our knowledge of the motives of the nasib. The poet says to his friends: "Do not pour for me the water of reproach, because I am a lover, who found the water of my wailing sweet." The last expression he imitates from 'Abu Nuwas, who said to 'Abdal-Wahhāb al-Ḥalabi: "You have found the water of my speech sweet." That also is erudition: we have to know it because of our knowledge of 'Abu Nuwas.

The biographer of 'Abu Tammām, as-Ṣūlī has tried to restrain


52 The dense wood of generosity" (aykatu-l-jādi, cf. Diwān A.T., II, p. 87; poem 51, line 21), "the alchemy of glory" (kimiyā'ul-majdi, Diwān A.T., III, p. 254; poem 148, line 28); also accurs "the alchemy of power" (bi-kimiyā'i-s-su'dudi, cf. Diwān A.T., II, p. 50; poem 48, line 25).

53 "The jugular veins of Time" (akhddiH-d-dahri; Diwān A.T., III, p. 354; poem 175, line 9; Diwān A.T., II, p. 405; poem 102, line 3; Diwān A.T., I, p. 166; poem 12, line 33; see al-'Amyidi, Kitāb al-Muwāzanah, ed. Ahmad Saqr, Cairo, 1961, Vol. I, pp. 245 sqq. and pp. 253-255; see also Sirr al-Fasāḥah, pp. 117, 118; the combinations with time are endless, for instance "Time's slumbers" (sindtu-d-dakri; Diwān A.T., II, p. 154; poem 65, line 9).

54 "The eye of religion" (aynu-d-dīnī; Diwān A.T., III, p. 169; poem 155, line 12); see Muwāzanah, p. 268; see also our note 17).

55 "The eyes of polytheism" (wyūnu-sh-shirkī; Diwān A.T., loc. cit.)

56 "The water of reproach" (mā'ud-l-malāmati; Diwān A.T., I, p. 22; poem 2, line 2).

57 See Diwān 'Abi Nuwās, ed. Ghazālī, Beyrouch, s.d., p. 501, line 3; see also E. Wagner, Abu Nuwās, Wiesbaden, 1965, p. 334.
the strong protest provoked by "the water of reproach". One of his arguments is *iqhām* that is insertion of a word for the second time; the repetition of a word, but now in a figurative sense, while the first word was in the literal sense. He adduces many examples from the Qur'ān. For instance "the retribution of an evil is an evil equal to it." So the first evil is literal, the second figurative. Besides the argument of *iqhām* as-Sūlī also uses the argument of the metaphor in the Qur'ān, in this case a genitive-metaphor. He says: 'God has said *(Iṣrāʾ* XVII:24): "Lower the wing of humility out of charity." This is the most elevated and most beautiful metaphor. It is used frequently by the Arabs as an expression. What does it matter, that 'Abu Tammām has said: "Do not pour out for me the water of reproach"?

The anecdote which Ibn al-'Aṭhir mentions in his *Mathal as-Sāʾir* hints at this argument of as-Sūlī. He says: 'It has come down to us, that one of his mockers sent to him a bottle and said: "Put herein some water of reproach." 'Abu Tammām answered him: 'If you send me a feather of the wing of humility, then I will send you some water of reproach". Ibn al-'Aṭhir does not agree with the answer laid in the mouth of 'Abu Tammām. 'Because humility is not given wings in the same manner as one gives reproach water.' A wing has kinship with humility, but water has nothing to do with reproach. An implicit comparison of the gullet with the sense of hearing, that swallows up the reproach, he judges too far-fetched. Ibn Sinān al-Khafājī considers the metaphor 'water of reproach' *dhāhib min-al-wajh* that is 'going away from the point of similarity'. He tries to find out how the poet has come to this expression. There is anyhow an expression "to give someone to drink something more bitter than a coloquint." But then you cannot substitute coloquint for water because water is sweet. What he condemns is building up a metaphor on a metaphor: *al-istiʿārah*

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59 *Akhbār*, pp. 36 sqq.; *Qurʾān, Shūrā*: 40; see also the comment on poem 2, line 2.
60 *Akhbār*, p. 37; *Qurʾān, ʿIṣrāʾ*: 24.
al-mabniyyah 'alâ ghayri-hâ. For the poet uses a petrified metaphorical expression which is common to every-day speech ‘someone who has to drink a cup of bitterness’, and then he takes some elements of it to build up another metaphor. The audience now forgets what the poet is going to say, because it cannot connect it properly. ‘If one builds up a metaphor on another metaphor,’ he says, ‘then it becomes improbable and ugly.’

A similar case is to pick up two petrified metaphors from daily speech and to construct a new metaphor with the omission of a crucial element. This case we see in “the jugular veins of Time”. Well, it is popular use to say about someone who is stubborn, that he is “shâdi‘ al-akhdâ” “strong in the jugular veins”. Another petrified metaphor is the personification of Time. Thus the poet provides the Time and also the winter with jugular veins, but he omits the element ‘strong’ from the expression. Sometimes he speaks about ‘the clemency of the jugular veins of the stubborn Time.’ (III 354 vs 9) We cannot always find an old expression on which the poet builds up his new metaphor. The critic confines himself to remarking that this is an ugly metaphor, li-‘adami-l-wajh; because of failing a point of similarity! That is the case in the line in which the poet speaks about “the eye of religion” and “the eyes of polytheism”.

Concluding we can say that the critics condemned the bizarre genitive-metaphors of ’Abu Tammâm not only because of strange combinations, but specially because he made use of existing idiomatic expressions, from which he omitted some element. ’Abu Tammâm knew very well that he was offending his audience and his fellow poets like Di‘bil. Maybe it is for that reason that he used such strange combinations not once only, but again and again. The jugular veins of Time occurs four times in his poetry.

65 See our note 45, 46; Sirr al-Fasâhah, p. 116.
66 See Reinert, loc. cit.
68 See our note 44.
and the combinations with water are endless. Thus the suggestion of a modern Syrian author, who wrote a book called *The Genius of 'Abu Tammām*, may be true, when he says: ‘Hardly there were enemies who reproached him for the water of reproach (because it does not exist), but he sprinkled them with a rain of impossible waters: he went so far that he compared it to everything that has nothing to do with water: thus only in his *qaṣīda*’s which ends in *hamza* he comes to speak about “the water of reproach”, “the water of advice,” “the water of the rendez-vous”, “the water of poetry”, “the water of love”, “the water of the morning”.

69 See our note 49, 61.