

WHITE HAIR AND OLD AGE: MATURITY, HELPLESSNESS, AND FRUSTRATION IN ARABIC AND HEBREW POETRY

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the ages Hebrew literature was influenced by the literature of the surrounding cultures, and in the Age of Andalusia, by Arabic literature in particular. A pioneering comparative study is presented which sheds light on the motifs of white hair and old age which the Jewish poets used in their complaint and aesthetic poetry, under the influence of Arabic poetry.

The foremost two experts on the question of the connection between Arabic and Hebrew poetry, Yehuda Ratzhabi and Yisrael Levin, have mainly examined secular poetry.² In addition, Pagis sought to incorporate the new approach proposed by Shirman, who studied medieval Arabic and Hebrew poetry.³ Tobi discussed the link between the two poetry corpuses noting that although sacred Hebrew poetry was rooted in ancient Israelite *piyut* it was not impervious to Arabic influence, though to a lesser degree than secular poetry.⁴ In their studies, Ratzhabi and Levin provided many parallels showing that the Jewish poets of Andalusia⁵ were very familiar with Arabic poetry, not only borrowing its form and rhetoric but also themes and subject matter.⁶ The contact between the two poetries led to the influence of Arabic poetry on Hebrew poetry only after certain processes in the two societies, which brought them close together.⁷ It was no accident that Hebrew poetry imitated Arabic poetry; this was clearly intended by the poets.⁸ The Jews of Andalusia saw Arabic poetry as superior to all other forms of poetry and felt that they should copy their methods in their own writing.⁹

The study aims to fill the gap in Ratzhabi's last study which discusses borrowed motifs and parallels between the two poetries but misses (and short-changes) two great Muslim poets. The first of these is Ibn Ḥamdīs (1058–1137) and the second is Ibn Khafāja (1005–1133). There are

¹ The order of authors has no significance.

² Ratzhabi. 1995, 329; Levin 1995, b, 8;

³ Tobi. 1998, Introduction, 24–31.

⁴ Tobi. 1998, Introduction, 7.

⁵ Ratzhabi. 1997, 7–10; Ratzhabi. 2007, 8–9.

⁶ Tobi. 1998, 30; Tobi 1996, 43–44.

⁷ Levin. 1973, 178–179.

⁸ Ibn Ezra. 1975, 28–29. Tobi. 1998, 30; Levin 1939, 43–44.

⁹ Levin. 1978, 5; Levin. 1939, 167–180.

countless examples of parallels between these poets' writings and the writing of the Jewish poets discussed in Ratzhabi's book, R. Moshe Ibn Ezra (1055–1138) and R. Yehudah Halevi (1075–1141) in particular.

The motifs and images presented here have parallels in the poetry of these poets. All four poets have several things in common: all four lived in Andalusia during the same period and all four wandered from place to place, in other words, they shared a common fate. However, despite what they had in common they had different attitudes towards white hair and old age.

The motifs of old age, white hair, and fate belong to the same semantic field and concern a specific period along the axis of life. These motifs are found in the complaint, asceticism, nature, and nostalgic poetry of their autobiographical work in which they describe their suffering and frustration about their lives and their suffering due to wandering and exile against their will. Here, all the poets, apart from R. Yehudah Halevi, express a great longing for the golden days of their past and their youth which has been supplanted by old age.

In his group of poems, *Songs to Zion*, which are also considered his personal poetry, R. Yehuda Halevi expresses a terrible sense of longing and an urgent desire to realize a spiritual dream. The poems indicate that the poet's life changed at about the age of 50; they declare that the time has come to make the journey to the Holy Land, Zion, because the poet has reached the age of maturity and spiritual readiness, and urges him to turn his back on the material world (*galut* or exile) and undertake a quest spiritual for redemption (*geula*) which can only be achieved in the holy land of Zion.

Methodologically, the article contributes to the teaching of the general topic: "The linguistic contact between Hebrew and Arabic in the Age of Andalusia".

A. ATTITUDE TO FATE AND TIME

The human being's war against fate is a recurring motif in Arabic poetry since fate (time) is man's mortal enemy, harassing him throughout his life, and subjecting him to pains and sorrows. Life is full of difficulties and suffering which is beyond human endurance. This overwhelms and defeats man, and ends his life. The analogy used to compare hardships with life's scarce pleasures is that of poison and honey, a comparison from *Kalila wa Dimna*, which the Jewish scholars also knew. The ancient Persian philosopher who copied this book from the Sanskrit concluded that life's pleasures lead to pain and suffering.¹⁰

¹⁰ Ibn I-Muqaffa. 1934, b, 158.

Levin clearly described the anthropomorphic "Faces" of "time" and the "world" in Andalusian Hebrew poetry, with special emphasis on the "image of time" which portrays fate as wicked and blind and suddenly striking at man.¹¹ Numerous researchers have discussed the conflict between poems dealing with fate and those dealing with religious faith - religious poetry.¹²

In the Bible and Midrash, the transience and shortness of human life is like a fleeting shadow (Psalms 102, v. 12; 144, v. 4; Bereshit Rabbah 96, 2). In medieval literature, the metaphor of a dream was used to describe of life, with death as its resolution.¹³ In his confessions, R. Yehuda Halevi exhorts men to return to God because life is short and a person's lifespan is unknown. Ibn Ezra frequently used this motif as well:

שוב יום אֶחָד לַפְּנֵי מִיתָתְךָ / יָמֶיךָ חֲלָמוֹת שֶׁקָּרַח וְחִיֶּיךָ כַּעֲנַן בִּקְרֹחַ
חַיֵּי בְנֵי אִישׁ בְּעוֹלָם / בְּחָלוֹם, וּמָוֶת כְּשֶׁבֶרֶךְ¹⁴

'Return to God the day before you die / Your days are a deceitful dream and your life a morning mist'.

'Human life is but a dream shattered by death'.

In a similar kind of context, the Andalusian vizier Abu Abdallah Japar al Keisi (d. 1045) mourned the death of a religious sage:

الموتُ حَتْمٌ وَالنَّفُوسُ وَدَائِعُ / وَالْعِيشُ نَوْمٌ وَالْمَنَى تَضْلِيلُ¹⁵

'Death is unavoidable; we receive life in temporary trust / Life is sleep and ambitions are deceptions'.

Human existence is a kind of ongoing unbroken journey ending in death. This world, the world of action, is seen as a constant movement, and the world to come, the world of reward, as eternal rest. Louis Cheikho, in his book, quotes Al-Ghazali (1059–1111), "They said: This world may be compared to a person traveling along a road which starts at the cradle and ends at the grave. And in the middle there are different stopping places; each month is a parasang (ancient unit of length), each day is a mile, every breath is a step, and so it goes, on and on".¹⁷

White hairs are messengers sent by the Angel of Death, to inform man that his death approaches. We meet this idea for the first time in Andalusian Hebrew poetry, in Ibn Ezra's poems. In a short moral epigram called "On condemning the world" 'מעניין גינוי תבל', the poet writes:

יִזְכֹּר גִּבֹּר / בִּימֵי חַיָּו / כִּי לְמָוֶת / הוּא לְקוֹרֵחַ
וְלֹאט יָסַע / כָּל יוֹם מִסָּע / אֶכֶן יַחֲשֹׁב / כִּי יָנוּחַ

¹¹ Levin. 1962, e, 70.

¹² Elitzur. 1994, 27.

¹³ Levin. 1962, e, 70; Ratzhabi. 2007, 44–45.

¹⁴ Yehudah Halevi. 1946, 490.

¹⁵ Ibn Ezra. 1935, 201.

¹⁶ Shantīrī. 1939–1945, b, 312.

¹⁷ Cheikho. 1913, a, 12–13.

דומה אל איש / שקט על צי / אך ידא על- / כנפי רוח¹⁸

'A man should keep in mind / during his life / that to death he is taken'.

'And travel slowly / Each day a journey / Indeed he will think / that he will rest'.

'He is like someone / resting on a ship / But he will vanish on / the wings of the wind'.

According to Yehuda Halevi, who was a younger contemporary of Moshe Ibn Ezra, human beings do not feel the passage of time. The same description continues:

נחלה ולא נבין פרוכבי ים אשר / יחשבו חונים והם יסעו¹⁹

'They pass by and do not realize / like sailors who think they are moored but'.

In two epigrams and a poem, Ibn Ezra blames his travels and suffering over time for his white hair:

השחיר לבבי יד זמן, שמו / נעבד לכל מצוק ולפידים
אך שערות ראשי מאד שבו / מיקוד נדד-נער ולפידים²⁰

'The hand of time (fate) has wounded me so much that my heart is black, sad/ It (fate / time) made it a slave to every misfortune and tragedy'.

'How white are the hairs of my head / Caused by the wanderings of youth and my misfortunes'.

In the Hebrew sources, fifty is not considered old age and a time for withdrawal from the material pursuits of life. In Andalusian poetry, fifty and sixty are mentioned as the years of old age and repentance. In a poem about the ages of man, which he wrote following the Mishna (Avot, Ch. 5, v. 28) Rabbi Shmuel Hanagid (933–1056) said of this age:

ויקץ משנת ילדות ושהירות / בלבון ראש וזקן בן חמשים²¹

'And he will wake up from the sleep of childhood and youth / age fifty with white hair and a beard'.

In his book "Sefer Ha'anak", Ibn Ezra devoted a separate section with its own title to the subject of old age and youth – "a-shshayb wa-shshabāb – "الشيب والشباب -

בן החמשים אין בידך מ- / כח זמן נער לבד חמש
ולאחריהם תהליך נאסר / עד ראש יהי כפוף אלי חמש²²

'When you are fifty you have no strength / You can't be a youth of ten years

And you cannot ignore those years / Your head will be bent over'.

¹⁸ Ibn Ezra. 1935, 67, section 68.

¹⁹ Yehuda Halevi. 1945, 286.

²⁰ Ibn Ezra, 1935.. 357, Section 26

²¹ Schirrmann. 1955–1961. 132, Section 7.

²² Ibn Ezra 1935. 355, Section 19.

In the introduction to one of his poems about the sea, Yehuda Halevi reproaches himself thus:

הַתְּרַדְף בְּעֵרוֹת אַחֵר מִמֶּשִׁים / וְיִמֶּיךָ לְהִתְעוֹפֵף מִמּוֹשִׁים?²³

'Will you still chase girls after fifty / Are you strong and able to fly (like a young man)?'

Here, we bring the example of one of the Bedouin poets and his attitude to the age of fifty, which parallels what I found in the Hebrew poetry:

أَرَى الشَّيْبَ مِنْذُ جَاوَزْتُ خَمْسِينَ دَائِبًا / يَدْبُ دَبِيبُ الصُّبْحِ فِي غَسَقِ الظُّلَمِ²⁴

'Since I passed the age of fifty I see white hair spreading / like dawn across the darkness of the black'.

The Andalusian Jewish poets copied the idea of fifty being old age from Arabic poetry. In Spain, it was common for pleasure seeking poets to repent and seek to God in old age and they often wrote poetry preaching the virtues of an abstemious lifestyle in an attempt to atone for their youthful abandon. There is a surprising similarity between R. Yehuda Halevi's writing and the following two parallels. Approximately a century before R. Yehuda Halevi, the poet Al-Qassim ibn Al-Fath al-Andalusi (998-1059) exhorted himself in the following way:

أَبْعَدَ خَمْسِينَ قَدْ تَوَلَّتْ / تَطْلُبُ مَا قَدْ نَأَى وَوَلَّى
فِي الشَّيْبِ أَمَّا نَظَرْتُ وَعَظْ / قَدْ كَانَ بَعْضًا فَصَارَ كُلًّا²⁵

'After fifty years have gone by / Can one seek what is left behind'.

'Don't you see white hair as a reproach? / First it seized a small area, now it has occupied it all'.

Ibn l-Khatīb (1313–1374), another Andalusian poet writes:

أَتَلْهَوُ وَالشَّبَابُ قَدْ انْقَضَى / وَعَمْرُكَ قَدْ وَلَّى وَلَمْ يَبْقَ طَائِلٌ²⁶

'Nothing will entertain you, youth is gone / and your life has no purpose'.

The Korān describes the stages of a person's life from his birth. These stages are clearly described and every creature is aware of them:

اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ ضَعْفٍ ثُمَّ جَعَلَ مِنْ بَعْدِ ضَعْفٍ قُوَّةً ثُمَّ جَعَلَ مِنْ بَعْدِ قُوَّةٍ ضَعْفًا وَشَيْبَةً
يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ وَهُوَ الْعَلِيمُ الْقَدِيرُ (54)

'Allah is the one who created you from weakness, then made after weakness strength, then made after strength weakness and white hair. He creates what He wills, and He is the Knowing, the Competen'. (Korān, rom: 54)

Thus, when a person reaches old age he remembers the happiness he felt when he was young because he has no joy in the present.

²³ Schirrmann. 1955–1961. 494, Section 7.

²⁴ Ibn-Qutayba. 1930, b., 325.

²⁵ Ibn Bashkwal. 1955, 446.

²⁶ Ibn l-Khatīb. 1963, 68.

B. THE FOUR POETS' REFERENCES TO THEIR ACTUAL AGE

Ibn Khafāja tries to find a way to look back at the good days that have gone by like a dream. In his mind, the loss of youth creates an existential problem which exists side by side with the major misfortunes.²⁷ Almost all his poems mention the subject of old age and youth:

ودون الصبأ إحدى وخمسون حجة / كأني، وقد ولت، أريتُ بها حلمًا (ابن خفاجة، ص 226)

'Since my youth, fifty-one years (haja) have passed / They have vanished like a dream'.

Despite the difficult situation he finds himself in, the poet does not surrender to old age and wandering but fights it by talking about his nostalgia for youth. It is important to explain the link between the complaints of the poets discussed here, regarding the ravages of time, and their nostalgia for the past. The verses of the poem relating to Ibn Khafāja's age should be regarded as one link in a poem that is full of passionate yearning for the stylized nature where he spent time at the funeral of Ofira, the young servant girl. In contrast, Ibn Ezra speaks of his age in order to voice his clear complaint about the ravages of time and the weariness of old age, without mentioning nature. However, the poets' complaints because they are far away from the landscapes of their motherland. There are four instances where Ibn Khafāja speaks of his age, and in the same context he talks about his pain and suffering at being in strange lands. Ibn Ḥamdīs also mentions his age to convey a certain mood. And in one of his poems of Zion Yehuda Halevi says that he is fifty. In the next quotation, Ibn Khafāja complains about fate and time—that fifty years have passed so quickly:

فقلت وقد خلفتُ خمسين حجةً ورائي لقد أعجلت طي / المراحل (ابن خفاجة، 1961، ص 211)

'I said after I rested after fifty years / Yes, I was in a hurry to end my travels'. (Ibn Khafāja, 1961, 211)

In those days, fifty signaled the approach of the end and the final countdown. It is a critical age, which frustrated and frightened the poets of that period, who often expressed their complaints about their lives. I deal with this in the section which examines common themes in the work of the Arab and Jewish poets:

הַחֲמִישִׁים אֵין בְּיָדָהּ מֶ- / כֹּחַ זְמַן נֶעַר לְבַד חֲמֵשׁ (ריה"ל, ב, 927)

'Man of fifty you do not possess the strength of a young man in his prime,

just a tenth (of it)'. (Moshe ibn Ezra, 355, Section 19).

הַתְּרִדָּה נֶעְרוֹת אַחֵר חֲמִישִׁים / וְיָמֶיהָ לְהַתְּעוֹפֶה חֲמוּשִׁים? (רמב"ע, 355)

²⁷ Taḥṭah 1993. 211.

'Will you still chase girls after fifty /Are you strong and able to fly (like a young man)'? (Yehuda Halevi, 1978–1986, 4, 927)

In the third example, the poet is sixty, and he addresses his homeland, which he feels he might never see:

فقد وفيتها ستين حولاً / ونادتني ورأي هل أمأ ؟ (ابن خفاجة، 1961، ص 238)

'I have reached the age of sixty / And they (the years) called from behind me "Are there more (years) left?''. (Ibn Khafāja, 1961, 238)

And in the last example, the speaker is eighty and refers to his inability to eat and sleep:

أي عيشٍ أو غذاءٍ أو سنةٍ / لابن إحدى وثمانين سنة (ابن خفاجة، 1961، ص 269)
أيلو حיים , أو موزן أو שינה / [יוסיפן] לכן שמונים ואחת שנים? (אבן כפאג'ה.
1961, 269)

'What can life, food, or drink [add] / to a man of eighty-one years?'²⁸
(Ibn Khafāja, 1961, 269)

Ibn Ḥamdīs also expresses his view in the same tone of complaint and despair, in three places where he mentions his age where he describes his feelings and his nostalgia for his youth:

إلى العشرين عاماً وبيننا / ثلاثون يمشي المرء فيها إلى خلف (ابن حمديس، 1960، ص 320)

'I miss my twenties which I left thirty years ago / And a man looks back on them'. (Ibn Ḥamdīs, 1960, 320)

ضحكتُ ابنَ عشرين من صبوّةٍ / بكيتُ ابنَ ستين أوزارُهُ (ابن حمديس، 1960، ص 320)
'I laughed when I was twenty, when I was young, / I cried when I was sixty because of my terrible misfortune'. (Ibn Ḥamdīs, 1960, 320)

ست وستون عاماً كيف تدرك بي / من عمرها ينتهي منها إلى السدس (ابن حمديس، 1960، ص 285)

'Sixty-six-year-old man, / how can someone who is just a sixth of my age?' (eleven-year-old girl) catch up with me. (Ibn Ḥamdīs, 1960, 285)

The above examples are laments about Time, which is pitiless to those who are forcibly separated from their birthplace and brothers. Time treats them cruelly and torments them from youth to old age. The suffering caused by their wanderings and the sorrows of old age combine with feelings of alienation caused by their exile, producing an outburst of longing for their birthplace – the only place where they can find rest and peace. Ibn Ezra only mentions his age and the anguish of old age, in the last twenty years of his life, for example, in the poem "על מעצבי יהמה לבי", ("Do not be sad and yearn my Heart") where he compares age and the swift passage of time to a horse race:

²⁸ The idea of eighty years is the period Hg'ahilit words of Zuhair bin Abi Salma
سَيَمُتُ تَكَالِيفَ الْحَيَاةِ وَمَنْ يَعِشُ / ثَمَانِينَ حَوْلًا لَا أَبَا لَكَ يَسَامُ

עָבְרוּ שְׁשִׁים / מֵצִלַּת חַשְׁמַיִם / אִזְּסִים שְׁוִיטָה בְּמִרוּצָתוֹ (אבן עזרא, 1935, 197)
'Sixty years have passed / Which felt like a shadow / or a galloping horse in a race'. (Ibn Ezra, 1935, 197)

There are many instances where Ibn Ezra laments that the pleasant days and nights spent with friends have passed like a shadow or a dream. Of all the poets R. Yehuda Halevi refers to his age the least. In my view, the other three poets probably went through terrible experiences during their wanderings when they were harassed, and their starting premise is a feeling of regret at the loss of the material life they once knew. But, R. Yehuda Halevi, who has lived a spiritual life, refers to his age (fifty) once, to stress that it is a critical age for a Man of Faith which he can utilize in preparing to meet his God.

C. NOSTALGIA FOR YOUTH AND LAMENTS ABOUT OLD AGE

In many of their poems, Ibn Ḥamdīs, Ibn Khafāja, and Ibn Ezra lament old age, contrasting it with the days of their youth. The white hair, which appears during their exile kindles the flame of nostalgia for their birthplace, which remains only in their memory. If the motif of white hair is common in the poetry of lament and nostalgia for youth, its presence is even stronger in poems linking old age and time to feelings of nostalgia for certain places. Longing for happier times, youth, is linked inextricably to the nostalgia for a specific place and the poet's homeland.

The poet associates happier days with youth, with times and places when he experienced pleasure and satisfaction. Their hardship and frustration due to old age with its associated suffering heighten their feelings of nostalgia.

Despite the differences between the poetry of Ibn Ḥamdīs and Ibn Khafāja in the end, both meet at the same point, which is a common denominator. As they reach old age, at the end of their lives, they express pain at their old age and grey hair which cause them terrible feelings of hopelessness. These two poets and Moshe ibn Ezra feel grief and sorrow because of their life of wandering and their physical and emotional exile. Ibn Ezra's feelings of strangeness and alienation due to his exile from Grenada to Christian Spain deepens his sense of frustration and helplessness. All three poets expressed anguish and fear at the prospect of dying in a strange country, far from their families and the city of their birth.

It was their physical frailty due to their lengthy travels and their helplessness that fanned the flames of their nostalgia for their youth and glory days.

Ibn Bashkwal testified that when Ibn Khafāja reached his eightieth year and when he approached this age, he was assailed by despair and could not

accept the prospect of his death.²⁹ In contrast, when R. Yehuda Halevi reached fifty, he did not fear of death at all. He set himself just one goal – to undertake the long journey to Zion, involving a lengthy and dangerous voyage by sea.

In his latter days, Ibn Khafāja felt that his end was approaching and focused on describing the mountain in the city of Valencia, the moon, and the night. These elements represent a source of peace, mental repose, continuity, and the mystery of everlasting life.

The medieval poetry scholar Iḥsan Abbās explains the connection between Ibn Khafāja and nature in his introductions. Most scholars of his poetry note that his mental state due to his final illness) is reflected in his famous poem about the mountain³⁰ which continues the theme of his longing for the past, for his youth, and his complaint against old age and the fact that he is a foreigner.

One type of suffering that Time causes is that it separates friends, and both the Arab and Andalusian poets discuss this. Ibn Ezra describes the separation from his friends and his longing for friendship:

אָהָה לְזָמַן אֲשֶׁר יָזַם לְהַפְרִיד / אֲחֵי לְבִי וְתוֹגֹתָיו לְהִתְאַיֵּם³¹ (רמב"ע, 19)

'Oh cursed Time / Fate which has separated me from / Those I love and caused me pain and sorrow'. (Ibn Ezra, 19.)

The poetry which laments the passage of time and the poetry that laments the betrayal by brothers and friends are both aspects of Arabic rebuke poetry.³²

Nostalgia for the past, and for lost youth when the poet knew happy times before leaving his country, and the motif of weeping for those places and the good times past, are considered one aspect of nostalgia. At a certain age, especially when they are old, the poets felt sadness and yearning for the past and youth. This is a common motif among the Muslim poets:³³

אֲבָקָה יָמֵי חֲבֵרָה אֲשֶׁר מֵהוּד זָמַן / נָעַר יָמֵי הַשְּׁחָרוּת קָצְבוּ

וְגַם עָבַר זָמַן עֲדֻנָּה וְקִפְצָ / זָמַן זָקָה וּבַחֲרָה שְׁפֹכָ³⁴ (רמב"ע, 25)

'I will cry for the days of friendships, / the glorious days of my youth which were given (to me)'.

'The days of pleasure and happiness have also passed / And Time / Fate has withered the body like burned flowers'. (Ibn Ezra, 25)

Ibn Khafāja talks about how his youth has passed without being felt and that the time he has left to live has decreased:

وَيَا رَبِّ ذِيْلَ الشَّبَابِ سَحْبَتُهُ / وَمَا كُنْتُ أُدْرِي أَنَّهُ سَيَتَقَلَّصُ (ابن خفاجة، 1961، ص 156)

²⁹ Ibn Bashkwal. 1955, 165.

³⁰ Abbās. 1987, 208.

³¹ Ibn Ezra. 1935, 19.

³² Ratzhaby. 2007, 184; Yellin. 1978, 41.

³³ Tarabieh. 2009, 161.

³⁴ Ibn Ezra. 1935, 25.

'Alas oh my Youth that is left behind me / And did not understand that it would vanish'. (Ibn Khafāja, 1961, 156)

In Ibn Khafāja's poetry, he is clearly expressing the sorrows and sufferings caused by old age, which for him has been a time of exile, wandering, and sleeplessness. Many poets have employed this motif, which is in fact typical of love and separation poetry, and used it in poems, which lament old age. In the next verse, Ibn Khafāja depicts his physical and mental state, mourning the transience of youth:

أقلب جفنًا لا يجفُّ فكلما تأوهتُ / من شكوى تألمت عن شكري (ابن خفاجة، 1961، ص 121)

'My eyes weep constantly and I sigh because of the pain and wandering'. (Ibn Khafāja 1961, 121)

In a lament poem Ibn Khafāja mourns a death, which he links with his own pain at the passage of his youth:

حتام أندب صاحباً وشبيبة / فتقيض عين أو يحن فؤاد؟ (ابن خفاجة، 1961، ص 91)
'Is it a duty to mourn for a friend and for youth, / the eye weeps and the heart yearns?' (Ibn Khafāja 1961, 91)

In Ibn Ḥamdīs' poetry white hair and the fear of old age are a recurring motif. The poet attempts to escape reality in his quest for a cure for the disease of old age. He finds this cure in coloring white hair black, which shows how hard he is holding on to youth. Living in a state of conflict between past and present, he tries to confront the glaring fact that he is indeed aging, that there is no escape, and that what remains is to simply admit that this is his situation. This he expresses in the first verse, where he talks about the treachery of the transient nature of youth:

أأكسو المشيب سواد الخضاب / فأجعل للصبح ليلاً غطاءً؟
وكيف أرجي وفاء الخضاب / إذا لم أجد لشبابي وفاء؟ (ابن حمديس، 1960، ص 3)
'Should I cover the white hair with black dye / and transform the dawn into dark night?'

'How can I expect loyalty from black / when I had no loyalty from youth?'. (Ibn Ḥamdīs 1960, 3)

Ibn Ezra asks how can a person pretend to himself that if he colors his hair he can hide the marks of time.

עצמו יפתה כל אנוש בפרש / צבע עלי ראשו כמספחת
איך יוכלה גבר להסתיר על / מצחו שתמחיהו מספחת³⁵
'A person is tempted / when the (white) / color covers his head like sapahat (white biblical skin symptom).'
'How can a man hide the white signs on / his head of se'etmihya and sapahat (white biblical skin symptoms).'

In the case of Ibn Ḥamdīs, in the two verses I quoted earlier, the poet talks about the weakness and infirmity that typify old age. In the next verse, the

³⁵ Ibn Ezra. 1935, Ha-'anak, 357, Section 29.

poet's physical infirmity is described and his astonishment that it has come so soon:

تَخَذْتُ الْعَصَا قَبْلَ وَقْتِ الْعَصَا / لَكِي مَا أَوْطَىءَ نَفْسِي عَلَيْهَا (ابن حمديس، 1960، ص 518)

'I carried the stick early / in order to lean on it'. (Ibn Ḥamdīs 1960, 518)

R. Yehuda Halevi suffered the hardships of exile and wandering and he laments how time and age have made his journey harder:

בְּטֶרֶם יוֹם אָדָּהִי לְמִשָּׁא / וַיּוֹם יִכְבֹּד קִצְתִּי עַל קִצְתִּי³⁶
'As time has passed on the journey (of life towards old age) / Each day makes my steps heavier'.

For Ibn Ḥamdīs, white hair causes trouble and frustration. White hair impoverishes, and he likens it to tyranny since white hair has occupied the place of youth.

In the poem *The Poet and the Mountain*, Ibn Khafāja expresses his tremendous longing for the past and talks about the torment and cruelty of the present. The poet laments his fate and shares with the inanimate and static nature his pain and feeling about old age and loneliness which have overtaken him in exile. In his address to the mountain, he describes his personal experiences and mental anguish, in a poem full of wisdom and philosophy. In addition to these sorrows, man also struggle with Fate, the fate that awaits him at every turn and tries to ensnare him.³⁷ The poet tries to imagine what the future will bring but finally sees that he cannot fight fate and accepts it.³⁸

Ibn Khafāja feels the tragic passage of time and transience of youth; time is associated with love and beauty, wine and banquets, nights of pleasure, but suddenly he finds that he is old, and that this period of his life is full of pain and suffering. And although old age lights the fires of nostalgia for youth within him, he realizes that his time is over, never to return, and that his days are numbered. He feels death hovering around him, and his lamentation for himself and his youth are an expression of his actual mood. His poetry erupts from deep in his soul, revealing his deepest sorrow and sadness.³⁹

The poem, which was written towards the end of the poet's life, when he was eighty-two,⁴⁰ was inspired by Ibn Ḥamdīs (*Diwan*, 28).⁴¹ The poem is a monolog expressing the deep sorrow, pain, and anguish that tormented the poet towards the end of his days. The poet turns to the mountain, identifying with its loneliness. He expresses his alienation and distance

³⁶ Yehudah Halevi. 1978–1986.

³⁷ Ibn Khafāja. 1961, 43.

³⁸ Ṭaḥṭaḥ. 1993, 52.

³⁹ Khaḍrā. 1988, 562–563.

⁴⁰ Muḥammad. 2001, 364.

⁴¹ Muḥammad. 2001, 382.

from his relatives who do not understand him and pours out his laments about old age to the mountain.

The motif in Ibn Ezra laments on old age, "שְׁבִתִי וְתַלְתַּלִּי זְמַן לֹא שָׁבוּ"⁴² [šavti ve-taltalay zman lo šavu], is man's struggle against fate. Time is man's enemy, harassing him throughout his life, and bringing him trouble and torment.⁴³ While my analysis of the main issues in this poem follows⁴⁴ Pagis' interpretation, I would also like to stress how its motifs are connected with our theme of nostalgia.⁴⁵ I have dealt extensively with this motif in my previous work.⁴⁶

In the poem, white hair stands for the forlorn present and old age, which cannot cope with White hair and old age have caused him hardship and torment and he has continued to wander even though he is old. Underlying the poem is a yearning for youth and the glorious past:

שְׁבִתִי וְתַלְתַּלִּי זְמַן לֹא שָׁבוּ / יָמֵי נְדָדִים לְעֵלּוּמִים שָׁבוּ
 אַחֲרֵי בְּלוּתָהּ הִיטָה עֲדָנָהּ / לֹאִם פָּרוּד, וְיִלְדֵי תַאֲוָה יַעֲגִבוּ
 יוֹם צַעֲדִי שְׁנֵי מָאֵד צָרוּ-יָדֵי / מַעֲגָל תְּלֹאֲוֹתֵי כָּיִם רָחֲבוּ,
 גַּם מִשְׁבְּרֵי שִׁיכָה אֶפְפוּנֵי וַיִּמִּי / עֵינֹת יָמֵי הַשְׁחָרוֹת חָרְבוּ...
 מֶה יִקְרֹוּ עֲבָרֵי קִצּוֹת מְזֻרָח בְּעֵת / זִכְרֵי עֲלִילוֹתָם, וַמֶּה יִּטְבּוּ⁴⁷

First the poem describes the white hair and old age that have subdued the poet. The verb "אֶסְפֹּד"—"I will eulogize", and the line "My heart will bow and my tears have dried up on their own: "לִבִּי יִקּוּד וַיִּיבֹשׁ עֵינַי לְבַד חָרְבוּ" and others show a sad, heartsick mood.⁴⁸ Ibn Ezra uses very typical desert tale motifs, but not in the normal way found in introductions, nor does he sprinkle desert motifs throughout the poem.

The poem first presents an antithetical parallel between "שְׁבִתִי ו"לא" בין "שְׁבִתִי ו"לא" "my white hair" and "they will not be restored". He starts with a personal lament about white hair, symbolizing old age. We can paraphrase the theme of the last quote in a few simple words, expressing a forlorn mood: He is already old but suffering in many ways not just loneliness. His loneliness has also deepened: as time runs out, hardships increase, old age has arrived and youth has ended.⁴⁹

The fabric of the borrowed language is interwoven in the poem. In the one verse quoted above we find that the metaphors follow each other rapidly in quick succession. In the poetry of Ibn Ezra, who was a scholar

⁴² This poem influence by Abu Alatahia.

قد شاب رأسي ورأس الدهر لم يشب إن الحريص على الدنيا لفي تعب

⁴³ Ratzhaby. 2007, 187, see On the war of age against youth: Ratzhaby 2007, 436.

⁴⁴ Pagis. 1970, 35

⁴⁵ I do not intend to deal with the subject of old age, this is a broad topic which has been dealt with extensively by Ratzhaby. See: Ratzhaby 2007, 436–437.

⁴⁶ Tarabieh. 2009, 209–222.

⁴⁷ Ibn Ezra. 1935, 24.

⁴⁸ Ibn Ezra. 1935, 24.

⁴⁹ Pagis. 1970, 37.

of Arabic poetics, and was certainly familiar with these tensions, we find clear evidence of his expertise in the use of the *badiya* (rhetorical) metaphoric style.⁵⁰ Here the poet describes a real situation: Towards the end of his life he wandered through Christian Spain far away from his friends and the culture of his youth, in Muslim Grenada. In the first line, we see "Time" as a man with curly hair and learn that the poet also has curly hair. But the curls of Time have not grown white like the poet's. "The days of wandering" have regained their youth, and their power to harm the poet has grown, reminding us of a common motif in medieval poetry: that days are the messengers / sons of time, namely, its tragedies.⁵¹ But, to understand this verse we must analyze the picturesque language more closely. The first line speaks of how Time is growing stronger than the poet, establishing the antagonism between the poet's old age, and Time which remains powerful. This also applies to Wandering, which has regained its youth as it were, and controls the poet. In the second line, which is entirely metaphoric, Ibn Ezra addresses loneliness, "separation", as a mother who has regained her youth, like Sarah Abraham's wife. This is analogous to the mother of the separation, which has already become old after the years of tormenting the poet. But she has regained her youth and is being wooed by "the children of ילדי תאוה" passion" thus giving birth to new separation.⁵²

Ibn Ezra's borrowings in this verse are a good example of "image attribution and *astaratehila* (borrowed imagery), because there is no equivalent in real life to: the curls of time and the mother of separation.⁵³ In line 3 we find the following metaphors: "צעדי שני, יד מעגל תלאותיי" "the steps I took during my years of life, יד מעגל the circle of my suffering" which form an antithetical parallel with: "crises of white hair surround me" (like high waves) and the image of "מי עינות ימי השחרות הרבו" 'the waters of the spring of youth have dried up'.⁵⁴ The parallelism switches from complementary to antithetical parallelism. When we examine these lines closely we can also see many embellishments, for example, the juxtaposition of words with letter change "שבו- שבו, ומי- ימי" and juxtaposed semi-palindromes that also rhyme. The third line establishes an antithesis between "צרו" ו"רחבו" (its narrowness and its breadth, which links old age and the passage of time to the hardship and misfortune which have increased the poet's burden in old age.

⁵⁰ Pagis. 38.

⁵¹ Pagis. 1970, 36.

⁵² Pagis. 1970, 36.

⁵³ Cohen. 2004, 452.

⁵⁴ This is an allusion to Samuel II, 22, v.5 "The waves of death swirled about me; the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me".

The Muslim poets similarly expressed their fear. When white hair appears, Ibn Ḥamdīs indicates signs of frustration, despair, and fear concerning the outward changes to his body, thus:⁵⁵

فهل حال من شكلي عليه فلم يزرر / قضاة جسمي، وابيضاض ذوائبي؟ (ابن حمديس، 1960، ص 30)

'Has it left me because of my appearance / or because of my physical infirmity and my white hair'? (Ibn Ḥamdīs 1960, 30).

In his lament about old age, Ibn Khafāja expresses his fear regarding the white hair on his head:

فما راعني إلا وميض لشبية / توقد في قطع من الليل فاحم (ابن خفاجة، 1961، ص 254)
'Nothing frightens me except the shining of white hair / which will shine in parts of the coal black night'. (Ibn Khafāja 1961, 254)

In poems about old age, we find that the Spanish Jewish poets borrowed descriptions and images from Arabic poetry. Although white hair symbolizes majesty and reverence in both cultures it also signifies the approach of the end. We see this in the poetry lamenting that Time and Fate have robbed the poets of their happy life.

D. MOTIF OF THE WAR OF WHITE HAIR AGAINST YOUTH

יִאָבְקוּ נֶעֶר וְשִׁיב אָךְ זֶה / יִחַלֵּשׁ וְיִאֲלִיוּ זֶה מֵאֵד יִשׁוּר⁵⁶
לֵיל יוֹם עָלִי שְׁתֵּי מַחֲנוֹת, וְאֵין / מְנוֹס אֶבֶל מִמִּלְתְּעוֹת דָּב לְאָרִי⁵⁷

'There will be a struggle between youth / and white hair but youth will become weaker and fall'.

'Night and day, there are two camps on me / with no escape except from the bear's jaws into the lion's mouth'.

Although Ibn Ezra and many poets talk about their despair and abhorrence of white hair and old age, Ibn Ḥamdīs talks about his suffering at the hands of Fate-Time and his battle against old age / white hair. Fate has brought him many torments in his old age because he blames Fate for his exile and wandering:

إن الزمان بما قاسيتُ شيبني / ولم أشيبهُ، هذا والزمانُ أباي (ابن حمديس، 1960، ص 17)

'Time has tortured me with white hair and / I don't torture it because it is stronger than me'. (Ibn Ḥamdīs 1960, 17).

In his poem "The Mountain" Ibn Khafāja is at peace with the heartbreak of old age and realizes that the time which man lives is fluid and unstoppable. He therefore turns to the mountain with a rhetorical question, expressing his wonderment at still being alive:

⁵⁵ On the subject of white hair and old age see: Ibn Ḥamdīs. 1960, 81, 107, 143, 144, etc.

⁵⁶ Ibn Ezra. 1935, Ha-'anak, 356.

⁵⁷ Yehuda Halevi. (a) 1978–1986, 273.

فحتى متى أبقى، ويظعنُ صاحبٌ، / أودعُ منه راحلاً غير آيبٍ؟ (ابن خفاجة، 1961، ص 43)

'How long will I stay and my friends are / going on their way, I say goodbye to them and there is no way back to them'. (Ibn Ḥamdīs 1960, 17)

E. COMPARISON OF WHITE HAIR TO SHINING STARS

In his lament regarding white hair, separation, and hardships "as wide as the sea", Ibn Ezra compares shining white hair to stars. White hairs are "the stars of old age", their appearance on the head is likened to the dawn. And Ibn Khafāja says the same thing in this context. Ibn Ezra refers to black hair and white hair as "the stars of old age", and the motif of the uselessness of coloring grey hair appears in his writing:

יִרְחוּ כְכֹכְבִּים וְלֹא בָאוּ עָדֵי / בֹקֶר וְלֹא עָבִים עָלֵיהֶם עָדוּ⁵⁸

'They (the white hairs) shone like stars and did not disappear in the light of the morning and the clouds (black hair) did not cover them'.

Ibn Ḥamdīs and Ibn Khafāja describe the same thing in the following lines:

تقولُ وقد لاحت لها في مفارقي / كواكبٌ، يخفى غيرها، وهي لائحة (ابن حمديس، 1960، ص 81)

'It (what hair) says: (White hair) is clearly seen on the head (between the other hair), / it is like stars which cover everything and gradually turn the whole head white'. (Ibn Ḥamdīs 1960, 81)

نفى هم شيبتي سرور الشباب / لقد اظلم الشيبُ لما أضاء (ابن خفاجة، 1961، ص 3)

'The suffering of old age has banished the joy of youth, / old age has darkened what youth illuminate'. (Ibn Khafāja 1961, 3).

وقد طلعت، الشيب، بيض كواكب / أقلب فيها ناظري، اتخرصُ (ابن خفاجة، 1961، ص 157)

'They shone, white hairs, white stars, / I gaze on them and ponder' (Ibn Khafāja 1961, 157)

F. IMAGE OF THE RAVEN–YOUTH / DOVE–OLD AGE

The blackness of a young person's hair is compared to a raven and an old person's white hair to a dove, this imagery is common in nature poetry.⁵⁹ The dove symbolizes purity and innocence, and it is a nice comparison to make to compare it to old age, which is the time of repentance and withdrawal from a material attitude to life. In Arab tradition, the raven has negative connotations and its appearance on a house heralds wandering

⁵⁸ Ibn Ezra. 1935, 39. See also 99, 199,

⁵⁹ Ratzhaby. 2007, 430.

and separation for the residents, just like a person is separated and distanced from his youth.⁶⁰

This image occurs in both Hebrew and Arabic poetry. Ibn Ezra mourns the loss of youth thus:

עֵרֶב אֲשֶׁר קָנַן עָלַי שְׁעָרַי / עַל מָה כָּצַל בְּרַח וְעוֹף דָּאָה⁶¹
 יוֹם קָנְנָה יוֹנָה בְּקֶן עֵרֶב / שִׁחֲתִי אֶהְיֶה חַיָּה בְּמוֹ אֶרֶב
 טוֹב שְׁחֲרוֹת עֵרֶב לַעֲת בְּקָר / מִזֵּהָרִי יוֹנָה לַעֲת עֵרֶב⁶²

'The raven which nested in my hair / It fled like a shadow and became white'.

'Then came the dove and nested in the raven's place / I said to myself it is like a wild animal waiting for its prey'.

'The raven's blackness in morning (youth) / Is better than the glowing of the dove at night (old age)'.

In Ibn Khafāja's writing, the raven, known for its black color, is white, although it still retains its negative association:

كَأَنِّي وَقَدْ طَارَ الصَّبَاحُ حَمَامَةً / يَمْدُ جَنَاحِيهِ عَلَيَّ غَرَابٍ (ابن خفاجة، 1961، ص 53)
'It is like the morning (youth) has flown away like a dove / and been replaced by a raven (night) which has spread its wings over me'.
 (Ibn Khafāja 1961, 53)

فَعَفْتُ غَرَابًا، يَصْدَعُ الشَّمْلُ، أَيْضًا / وَكَانَ عَلَى عَهْدِ الشَّبَابِ أَسْحَمًا (ابن خفاجة، 1961، ص 234)

'I drove away the raven which separated the friends, / in youth it was black and now it is white'. (Ibn Khafāja 1961, 234)

The dove identifies with the grief of the Arab poets at the death of their loved ones or their separation from them. This idea preceded the genre we are examining here.

In his poem, Ibn Khafāja cries out against old age and "שְׂרָאָב אֶלְאֻמָּאִי"⁶³ weeps for his youth. Daily he comes closer to the house of sorrows, which cause him to lose sleep. Ibn Ḥamdīs also makes several references to white hair and old age in his *dīwān*.⁶⁴

When Ibn Ḥamdīs seeks to escape from reality and find a cure for his old age he finds it in dying his hair black. This shows how strongly the poet is attached to his youth and that he lives in a state of conflict, between past and present. The conflict is expressed in the rhetorical question posed in the last line – "How shall I wish?". This question shows the poet that old age and white hair are an inescapable fact, ruled by fate, and the only thing he can do is weep for his lost youth which is gone, and never to return. Tears over the past are expressed strongest in the lines below:

⁶⁰ Yellin. 1939, 143.

⁶¹ Ibn Ezra. 1935, Ha-'anak, 354, see also 356.

⁶² Yehuda Halevi. 1946, f, 272.

⁶³ Ibn Khafāja. 1961, 53.

⁶⁴ Ibn Ḥamdīs. 1960, 3.

تخذت العصا قبل وقت العصا / لكيما اوطىء نفسي عليها (ابن حمديس، 1961، ص 519)

'I carried the stick early / in order to lean on it'. (Ibn Ḥamdīs 1960, 519)

The verses above show a man who is debilitated and unhappy. Sorrow and sadness prevent him from living a normal life without leaning on the stick and depending on it. The question in the second line reveals his state of despair and sense of helplessness.

The poet expresses his sadness and wretchedness more strongly in other verses where the torment and pain is heart rending. He weeps over his youth, the loss of youth – "השבאב", which causes him grief and great anguish.⁶⁵

The same poem shows Ibn Ḥamdīs as a man who is frustrated, his life worthless, like a dead person in the society of the living because he is old and weak in the company of vital youngsters. He is wracked with pain and sorrow because the good people have ignored him because of the visible marks of time on his face and head.

The poet is in exile, which caused his pessimism about life; he weeps for the years that have passed and misses his youth, when he was in his prime. The theme of sadness over lost youth is a central theme in Ibn Khafāja's poetry. This feeling is expressed at the end of the poet's life:

وعز شباب كان قد هان برهة / ألا أنها الأعلق تغلو وترخص
فمن مبلغ تلك الليالي تحية / نعم بها طوراً طوراً تخصص
على حين لا ذاك الغمام يظلني / ولا برد تلك الرياح يسري ويخلص
وقد طلعت للشيب بيض كواكب / اقلب فيها ناظري اتخرص (ابن خفاجة، 1961، ص 157–156)

'Youth is short but it can be longer or shorter / the way that goods can increase and decrease in value'.

'Can anyone send my good wishes / to the nights that gave me pleasure?'

'When I did not worry about falling / rain or cold wind blowing'.

'They shone–white hairs, white stars / I turn my gaze on them and ponder'. (Ibn Khafāja 1961, 156–157)

G. COLORING WHITE HAIR TO HIDE OLD AGE

The poets are worried about imminent old age. White hair signifies the end and extinction. Some saw it as an inescapable fact, others sought to deny it.⁶⁶ Many poets saw the positive side of old age, for example the respect that comes with old age.⁶⁷ R. Yehuda Halevi did not relate to old age as

⁶⁵ Ibn Ḥamdīs. 1960, 519.

⁶⁶ Levin. 1935, a, 210–220.

⁶⁷ Ratzhaby. 2007, 218–219.

negative, he made it his mission to fulfill his dream of reaching the Holy Land and to visit the graves of saints before he died and writes that he wants to be buried there. Ibn Ḥamdīs is at peace with his old age and rejects the idea of coloring the white hair and trying to cover it up. He devotes a whole poem to the issue of hair coloring.⁶⁸ The poets dyed their hair was to hide the fact that they were old, I think that they dyed their hair because they wanted to be young, but we know that this is self-deceptive and impossible:

שָׁוֵא דָּבְרוּ הָאֲמָרִים שִׁיבָה תִּכְבֵּד / אֶת פְּנֵי עָלָם וְלִחְיוֹ פְּאָרָה⁶⁹

'Those who said that there is respect / for old age were wrong'.

In the epigram below, the poet fully accepts old age and concludes that at this age it is futile to color the hair of a person whose life is racing forward, the same way that a sheep cannot prey on a lion:

אֵין לְאֲנוֹשׁ מוֹעִיל בְּעֵת יְרוּץ / שְׁנוֹת שְׁעָר רֹאשׁוֹ וְצִבּוֹעַ
כִּי לֹא-יִהְיֶה עָלָם עֲדֵי יִטְרֹף / כֶּכֶשׁ כְּפִיר-יַעַר וְצִבּוֹעַ⁷⁰

'It will not help a man while he is running / to change his hair and color it'.

'Because it will no more bring youth than / a sheep will prey on a lion and a hyena'.

In the next line, Ibn Ḥamdīs rejects the idea of coloring hair completely:

وخضاب الشيب لا أقبله / انه في شعري شاهد زور (ابن حمديس، 1960، ص 198)

I completely disagree with coloring white hair / because it bears false witness to my deeds. (Ibn Ḥamdīs 1960, 198)

Weeping over the loss of youth and separation from friends is a key theme in the poet's writing. This view is expressed very emotively: that a friend in old age is no substitute for a friend in youth, just an artificial hair color is no substitute for the original black hair:

فما ناب عن خل الصبا خل شيبية / ولا عاض من شرخ الشباب خضاب (ابن خفاجة، 1960، ص 53)

We should not see a friend of old age / as a substitute for a friend from youth, the same way that artificial color should not be seen as a substitute for the natural black color. (Ibn Khafaja 1960, 53)

עֲצָמוֹ יִפְתָּה כָּל אֲנוֹשׁ בְּכֹרֶשׁ / צִבֵּעַ עָלֵי רֹאשׁוֹ כְּמִסְפַּחַת⁷¹

A man will be tempted when his hair is white as mispahat.

According to the idea referred to earlier the poet is in a depressed and pessimistic mood, he sees nothing but a long black night and morning which hides its face under a cover of darkness. This image refers to the poet's exile, the mysteries of life, and the unknown fate that awaits him.

⁶⁸ Ibn Ḥamdīs. 1960, 107.

⁶⁹ Ibn Ezra. 1935, HaAnak, 359.

⁷⁰ Ibn Ezra. 1935, HaAnak, 354.

⁷¹ Ibn Ezra. 1935, Ha-ʿanak, 357.

Such allusions are typical of Ibn Khafāja's poetry and the identifying marks of his work, and not mere poetic devices and rhetoric.

Despite the disadvantages and negative images used to portray old age they also finalize the picture of completing the circle of life. (the darkness of old age, the darkness of the mysterious fate, the darkness of the grave, the darkness of the raven, the darkness of night, etc.). Together these images create a full imaginary unity reflecting the poet's whole world.⁷²

H. THE MOTIF OF NOSTALGIA FOR YOUTH AND FRIENDS

One of the worst hardships which time causes is the loss of friends. Both the Arab and Andalusian poets addressed this. Ibn Ezra describes the feeling of being separated from his friends and his nostalgia for the past when he had friendship:

אָהָה לְזָמַן אֲשֶׁר יָזַם לְהַפְרִיד / אֲחֵי לִבִּי וְתוֹגֹתָיו לְהִתְאַיֵּם⁷³
*'Oh cursed Time / Fate which has separated me from / Those I love
 and caused me pain and sorrow'.*

Arabic rebuke poetry contains both poetry of complaint about time and lament poems about the treachery of brothers and friends.⁷⁴

Nostalgia for the past and lost youth which signifies the happiness in the days before the poet left his country, and the motif of weeping for those places and good times, is considered one of the elements of nostalgia. At a certain age, and especially when they were old, the poets were sorrowful about the past and the passage of their youth. This is a common motif among the Muslim poets.⁷⁵

אֲבָכָה יָמֵי חֲבֵרָה אֲשֶׁר מֵהוּד זָמַן / נָעַר יָמֵי הַשְּׁחָרוּת קִצְבוֹ⁷⁶
 וְגַם עָבַר זָמַן עֲדֻנָּה וְקִפְצָ / זָמַן זָקָף וּבַחֲרָתָר שִׁדְפוֹ
*'I will cry for the days of friendships, / the glorious days of my youth
 which were given (to me)'.*
*'The days of pleasure and happiness have also passed / And Time /
 Fate has withered the body like baked flowers'.*

Ibn Khafāja talks about how youth has passed without him feeling it and that not much time is left:

وَيَا رَبِّ ذَيْلَ لِلشَّبَابِ سَحْبَتَهُ / وَمَا كُنْتُ أَدْرِي أَنَّهُ سَيَتَقَلَّصُ⁷⁷
*'The end of youth is behind me and / I did not realize that it would
 disappear'.*

In many of their poems, Ibn Ḥamdīs, Ibn Khafāja, and Ibn Ezra complain about old age and compare it to youth. The white hair which grew during

⁷² Ibn Khafāja. 1961, 53

⁷³ Ibn Ezra. 1935, 19.

⁷⁴ Ratzhaby. 2007, 184; yellin 1978, 41.

⁷⁵ Tarabieh. 2009, 161.

⁷⁶ Ibn Ezra. 1935, 25.

⁷⁷ Ibn Khafāja. 1961, 156.

their exile kindles the fire of longing for their birthplace which is just a memory. While the white hair motif is a common motif in complaint poetry and poetry of longing for lost youth, old age and time are an even stronger trigger of the poets' wistful yearning for youth which is associated with specific places. The poets' sadness and nostalgia for better days, their youth, is linked inextricably to their sadness at the loss of their home with its comforting ties and their own familiar country.

SUMMARY

Elements and motifs borrowed from the nostalgia genre in Arabic poetry are conspicuous in the personal complaint poetry of Ibn Ezra. His nature poetry is not inferior to that of Ibn Khafāja, who shares his complaints against old age and white hair with nature.⁷⁸ We can assume that Ibn Ezra's personal complaint poetry expresses his yearning for his birthplace of Grenada and its landscapes where he spent a happy youth and the best years of his life.⁷⁹ Most scholars see the poetry describing his complaints and personal nostalgia as autobiographical. According to Pagis, "When he tried to write about his wanderings and suffering he produced a kind of complaint poetry".⁸⁰ Pagis maintained that Ibn Ezra's "complaint poetry" is flexible and contains elements and motifs which place it in the genre of independent poetry.⁸¹

It should be noted that the Muslim poets and Ibn Ezra have a very similar way of expressing their feelings and mood about their bygone years and lost youth and their bewilderment that no one responds to their weeping for those times, signifying an ongoing silence and indicating their frustration and helplessness as a result of the present.

Ibn Ezra laments his old age, which makes him yearn for better days which he enjoyed in the past, and for his youth, and Ibn Ḥamdīs and Ibn Khafāja in their poetry also describe the suffering of age and grey hair. They refer to their actual age, which they note with great sadness in their secular poetry. However, R. Yehuda Halevi deals with it differently. He saw his maturation and the fact that he was becoming an old man as a stage of maturity which prompted him to think about the next world and the future. The attitude he describes is a kind of exhortation to Jewish poets living in exile to undertake something great and follow him to the Holy Land, where they can fulfill their spiritual yearnings.

⁷⁸ Tobi. 1998, 163; Tarabieh 1994, 20–23.

⁷⁹ Levin. 1966, 67–68.

⁸⁰ Pagis. 1970, 286 (in this same context Pagis writes that R. Yehuda Halevi wrote the Zion poem series as an expression of his mood and personal longings and sadness.

⁸¹ Pagis. 1970, 282.

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