

From Maqatil Literature Till Drama

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Al-Serat Vol. 12 - 1986

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Al-Serat Vol 12, Spring & Autumn 1986

The passion, courage, and tragic death of the Imam Husayn, his relatives and followers, on the plain of Karbala', became the subject of a literary genre, known in Arabic as maqtal. The maqtal literature has flourished in the Muslim world during the last thirteen centuries first in Arabic and then in Persian, to be followed by Turkish and Urdu.

Only that in the Persian language, however, inspired the dramatic representations known as ta'ziyeh-khani or shabih-khani². Although ta'ziyeh is occasionally performed in such Arab countries as Iraq and Lebanon, this must be considered as an importation from Iran rather than as an indigenous modality. The modern Arabic dramatic literature is influenced to a degree by both maqtal literature and the ta'ziyeh-khani.

The favourite theme among modern and contemporary Arab playwrights is the paradigm of the Imam Husayn. Though in most cases the plays had not been intended for theatrical production, but rather for

silent reading, nevertheless they represent a very potent and powerful dramatic literary genre. The Iranian ta'ziyeh plays on the contrary are intended for stage representation only.

They are written not in the form of a complete script or libretto, in which scenes follow one another in an established order, but as separate parts for each character, written on loose sheets of paper held in the hand of the actors. For this reason, it is in a sense an anti-literary form, although the ta'ziyeh performances are often noted for their poetic and literary merits. It is interesting therefore to see how an 'acted out version' could influence a 'reading form'. This can be observed in the development of the plot of the literary version.

Contemporary Arab plays about Husayn do not differ greatly from ta'ziyeh. The main difference between them lies in the fact that the Arabs use the Husayn paradigm for reflection upon current political situations in their own countries, particularly after the humiliating defeat at the hands of the Israelis in the 1967 war.

The Egyptian playwright 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sharqawi should be especially mentioned in this connection as well as an Iraqi dramatist Muhammad Ali al-Hafaji. In the case of al-Sharqawi the play in two parts, called *Tha'r Allah* (God's Revenge)³, starts in Medina where Husayn is pressured by the Umayyad political apparatus to pledge formal allegiance to Yazid after Yazid's father's death. Al-Sharqawi shows corruption and abuse of power which lead to lawlessness. The parallels between the state of affairs in the Caliphate at the time of Yazid and in Egypt just before and after the 1967 war, though allegorical, are not merely implied but obvious. In this play Husayn is not only a symbol of good but becomes the conscience of Muslims for all time.

Al-Sharqawi's play is the finest example of Husayn being utilized as an embodiment of the revolutionary spirit in the modern Islamic world. Husayn is simultaneously the symbol of gallantry along the lines of ancient Arabic standards of manliness (*muruwwa*) and the classic ideal of Islamic perfection. At present, in some of the Muslim countries, the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' is widening, the rich are no longer satisfied with wealth and power alone but expect flattery from the poor. Those who do not toe the line are severely punished.

In the eyes of the Muslims, Husayn did not fight for wealth, power, or political ambition, but for the Islamic ideal of social and political justice. Most particularly he fought and sacrificed his life for the underdog, the unprivileged, the oppressed, and the humiliated. The first part of the play, which is called *Al-Husayn tha'ir* (Husayn, the Rebel), could be described as a modern passion play.

It is the second part of the play, entitled *Al-Husayn shahid* (Husayn, the Martyr), that underlines the universal and timeless qualities of Husayn's martyrdom. Husayn's death is not a useless sacrifice but a turning point in human history, which has been, and always will be, avenged by God. Towards the end of the drama, Husayn's ghostly apparition addresses the audience in a revolutionary manifesto:

Husayn: Remember me by rescuing truth from the tyranny of falsehood, by struggling on the path, so

that justice may prevail.... Remember me when virtues become homeless and vices alone become the favourite beloved.... If you acquiesce to deception, if man accepts humiliation, I will be massacred anew, I will be killed every day a thousand times,... and a new Yazid will rule over you.[4](#)

In the ta'ziyeh repertory, the passage of Husayn from Medina to his death at Karbala is represented in ten or more plays, usually starting on the first day of the month of Muharram with a play devoted to Husayn's emissary to Kufa, his cousin Muslim b. 'Aqil. This is followed in a daily sequence by the martyrdom of two of Muslim's children, and then by the death of various members of Husayn's family, such as 'Abbas, 'Ali Akbar, and Qasim.

One ta'ziyeh play is devoted to a commander of the opposing army, Hurr, who deserts Yazid's forces, joins Husayn's and is martyred together with Husayn and his supporters. The final play is set for the day of 'Ashura', the 10th of Muharram, when the death of Husayn himself takes place. All these tragic events were telescoped by al-Sharqawi into one play in two parts.

In the Iranian ta'ziyeh plays the paramount message is the intercession of Husayn, and the spiritual mobilization of the Shi'a. In the Arabic drama, al-Sharqawi deals with the revolutionary preparedness in the face of the internal and external forces of evil.

The Iraqi playwright Muhammad 'Ali al-Hafaji, in his drama Husayn will Come One More Time, tries likewise to show the similarity of the circumstances which led to the killing of the Imam Husayn and the Arab defeat in the 1967 war[5](#). His main stress is on internal conflicts, lack of leadership, class divisiveness, and national differences among the Arabs.

In addition, there was the moral decline and corruption among the politicians and the well-to-do. In this concept, Husayn becomes the major revolutionary figure, fighting for justice, equality, and freedom. The religious dimension, and especially the difference between the Shi'a and the Sunni, is de-emphasized.

In The Suffering of Husayn by Muhammad Aziza, the Tunisian playwright, Husayn is not so much a revolutionary as a natural Arab hero. This play is very close to the Iranian ta'ziyeh, as the author used the ta'ziyeh play manuscripts which were collected by Alexander Chodzko in the nineteenth century[6](#). The main innovation is the employment by the dramatist of a chorus.

The action starts with a messenger who tells Husayn how his envoy, Muslim, was murdered and how Husayn is being betrayed by the people of Kufa. Husayn is shown as a very human, kind and peace-loving man who becomes a 'lion' when the defence of justice is involved. The long soliloquies and the speeches about parting and farewells are extremely moving and resemble very closely those in Iranian ta'ziyeh. They also have a strong cathartic impact upon the reader or the audience.

The corpus of the ta'ziyeh plays is enormous. Since ta'ziyeh is a living tradition, new plays and local variations on the traditional themes are still being composed. The Cerulli collection alone—1,055 ta'ziyeh manuscripts housed at the Vatican Library is ample evidence of this. Enrico Cerulli collected those

manuscripts in various localities of Iran when he served as the Italian ambassador to Iran from 1950 to 1955⁷.

The Iranian ta'ziyeh can be divided into two broad categories: those belonging to the Muharram cycle, and those outside it. Even those belonging to the non-Muharram group are connected with the Karbala tragedy through the employment of guriz (comparative reference or digression) to the suffering of Husayn and his followers.

These plays concern Qur'anic stories, hadith, legends, and even current events occurring in various localities. Although a story may have taken place in the more remote past—for example Cain's murder of Abel or the suffering of Jacob it can still be brought into the context of the Karbala' tragedy because of the common denominator of the suffering and martyrdom at Karbala', which exceeds all previous and following calamities. The process in the play includes either a direct verbal reference, or the staging of a scene from Husayn's passion, or both⁸.

The following ta'ziyeh play, with 'Abbas⁹ as the protagonist, belongs to the Muharram cycle. Although this publication is devoted to the Imam Husayn himself, the play about 'Abbas has been chosen deliberately in order to show that whatever the subject may be, the focus is always on Husayn.

In this play the death of Husayn is postponed and heightened by the pain of participating in the suffering and death of his immediate family and followers. This is the first English translation of the text which comes from Kashan, and is listed under no. 513 in the Cerulli Collection, where it appears as separately written parts for each actor. It has been arranged in the form of a 'libretto'.

'Abbas was Husayn's half-brother and his standard-bearer. If Husayn is the supreme martyr, 'Abbas is regarded as the supreme fighter. Traditionally the play devoted to 'Abbas is enacted on the 9th of Muharram known as Tasu'a. The strong personality of 'Abbas is very much admired and venerated in Iran and in Shi communities in other countries.

There are many shrines devoted to his name. Many saqqa-khaneh, water cisterns and fountains in towns and villages, are dedicated to his bravery on the plain of Karbala when he tried to fetch water for the thirsty family of the Prophet, and had his hands cut off before being killed by Yazid's men.

Swearing on 'Abbas is the only truly dependable oath in daily life, whereas in contracts his name is added to those of the partners, 'in absentia, to safeguard against the trespassing of anyone's rights. He is also admired by the women for his particular powers. In Iran a feast, sufreh hazrat-e 'Abbas, may be prepared in his honour, as a vowed thanksgiving for a favour received, at which food is distributed to the people¹⁰.

Most ta'ziyeh texts are anonymous since the composition is regarded as an act of piety. The Cerulli 513 manuscript is signed by the scribe, Gholam Husayn Saberi, and dated 1331; both the dating and the signing are rather unusual. The text seems to be a mixture of at least two plays on the same subject,

which is a very common phenomenon. Most of the *taziyeh* manuscripts are collections of pieces of paper, some two inches wide and about eight inches long. written separately for each character in the play.

The actors hold these scraps in their palms and read their lines. When the actors from various locations merge in order to perform together, the scripts may also merge. Although the play is devoted to 'Abbas, it gives an overall picture of the suffering and the death of Husayn, his sons and followers on the plain of Karbala'. In the *taziyeh* plays all the characters discuss their pre-determined fate.

Despite the fact that the death of Abbas took place before that of Husayn and some other members of his family, on the stage 'Abbas describes the death of Husayn and his relatives vividly before the fact, thus arousing the emotions of the audience. Both the actors and the spectators know the totality of the tragedy, and therefore they do not need to keep it secret for the sake of suspense, as is the case in Western theatre.

The bulk of the play deals with the attempt by Shimr, the villain, to seduce 'Abbas away from Husayn in order to become the commander of the enemy's army. This is a potent bribe which 'Abbas sturdily and repeatedly refuses to accept. Temptation is a device frequently used in the drama of both the East and the West.

A second dramatic device is that of deception, questioning the courage of the hero. In this case Abbas covers his face and intercepts 'Ali Akbar who is bringing water, to test him. The unknown author or authors of this play were quite familiar with these devices. Although long soliloquies are customary in the early *ta'ziyeh* plays, in this instance a rapid dialogue becomes the main mode of personal interaction.

The language, which is in poetry of varied rhythmic patterns, presents an interesting modification of the Western recitative and musical interpretation, in that the good characters sing their lines and the villains recite them. As for the poetic expression, there is a considerable variation of quality which is not unusual in the *ta'ziyeh* repertory.

The several references in the text to the sins of the Shi'a and the redemptive character of Husayn's death bring the tragedy of Karbala from the historical time to the present. The actors and spectators feel just as responsible for Husayn's death as those who betrayed and abandoned him in the year 61/680.

1. Thanks must be given to Dr M. Yadegari, I. Anvar, and De B. Warburg for their assistance in preparing this article.

2. Peter Chelkowski, "Dramatic and Literary Aspects of Taziyeh-Khan-Iranian Passion Play", in *Review of National Literatures* (New York, Spring 1971), 11, 121-138.

3. 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sharqawi, born in 1920. Port, novelist and playwright. The second part of *Tha'r Allah*, called *Al-Husayn Shahid*, was published in Cairo in 1388/1969; the first part, called *Al-Ihaaye tha'ir*, was published in 1971.

4. Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* (The Hague, 1978). pp. 233-234. See also J. Altoma, 'Martyrdom in Arabic Literature, in Cyriac K. Pullapilly (ed.), *Islam in the Contemporary World* (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1980), p. 63.

5. This three-act play, under the title *Tuni Yaji al-Husayn*, was published in 1972. Here two other Iraqi playwrights must be

mentioned: Muhammad Rida Sharaf al-Din, who published in 1933 a long poetic drama (eight acts) under the title *Al-Husayn*, and Al-Afifi with his play *So Said Husayn*. In neighbouring Syria, 'Adnan Mardam Bek must be mentioned for his play, *Masra' Husayn*,

[6.](#) Alexander Chodzko, a scholar and diplomat, and the author of books on popular Persian poetry. Persian grammar and customs, was greatly impressed with the *ta'ziyeh* during his stay in Iran in the 1830s. He bought a manuscript consisting of thirty-three plays from the director of the court theatre. The manuscript was later deposited by Chodzko in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (Blochet, 1928, *Catalogue des manuscrites persans*). Chodzko edited two of the plays, and published them in Paris in 1852 under the title *Djungi Chehadat*. M. Aziza was very much under the influence of this collection—he mentions that in an unpublished article under the title '*Le Tazie Aujourd'hui*'.

[7.](#) Ettore Rossi and Alessio Rombaci, *Elenco Di Drammi Religiosi Persiani* (Città Del Vaticano, 1969).

[8.](#) See pp. 207–226 of this volume: P. Chelkowski, “Popular Shi'i Mourning Rituals”.

[9.](#) The Persian edited text of this *taziyeh* is published in the Persian language volume of papers presented at this conference.

[10.](#) See pp. 207–226 of this volume: P. Chelkowski, “Popular Shi'i Mourning Rituals”.

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SHARES

The Martyrdom Of The Luminous Leader Of The Bani Hashim, Hazrat Abo 'L-Fazl Al-'Abbas

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- The Imam Husayn
- Abbas
- Zaynab
- Ali Akbar
- Qasim
- Sakina

- Amir
- Shahrbanu
- Shimr
- Ibn Sa'd

(At the perimeter of Husayn's encampment on the plain of Karbala'. The night before 'Ashura.)

Ibn Sa'd: O King of a small army, look toward the battlefield and observe the strength of a great army. O Commander of the Faith, turn away for a moment from your noble family and count the stars if you want to know the number of Yazid's army. Arise! Destiny has chosen you for martyrdom.

[In the encampment of Husayn on the plain of Karbala']

Imam: O Fate, though you may cast upon me, Husayn, immeasurable injustice, load me with oppression, bare me naked, and cast me down in the dust, I will not complain, and my lips will be tightly closed like a flower bud. But you, O Fate, must look at the beautiful image of 'Abbas and regret his imminent loss.

Abbas: O sky, look at Husayn, the Moon of the two Easts. Fill your eyes with tears. O sky, because the king of one small army is forlorn, rip your blue garment of patience to shreds. On the day of battle, if you wish respite from the roaring of 'Abbas, take refuge in some faraway niche of the universe.

'Ali Akbar: O Merciful God, I am 'Ali Akbar. I am distraught, mourning for my father's grief. Kindly grant me the pride and happiness of sacrificing myself so that I may be honoured in front of my uncle.

Zaynab: O Creator, have mercy upon Husayn, show me kindness and relieve my pain. My brother is alone in this strange land. There is no remedy for this affliction. O God, the cure lies in your hands.

Imam: O Brother 'Abbas, O Commander of the Faith, listen for a moment to this forlorn one. Use this opportunity to dig a ditch around the tents.

'Abbas: O King of the Lands and the Seas, I will obey your command if you will accept me as your servant. 'Ali Akbar, the light of my Eyes, come here with your followers, companions and Qasim, and all our righteous friends. Ja'far, go to the left flank to assist the north. I will go to the south with illustrious friends.

Ali Akbar: O Imam of the Heavens and Earth, Husayn, let me sacrifice myself for you. I am going to aid my uncle, 'Abbas. O Crowned Uncle, may I be thy ransom, Leave the digging to me.

'Abbas: I am digging this ditch, dear God, so that my sisters will not be afflicted and dishonoured.

'Ali Akbar: I am digging this ditch, dear God, so that Umm Layla will not be afflicted and dishonoured.

Qasim: [Text missing, begins 'I am digging....

Abbas: O God, when will this night become dawn? I await tomorrow, when my hands will be cut from my body.

"Ali Akbar: O God, when will this night become dawn? I await tomorrow when Umm Layla will mourn my death.

Qasim: (Text missing, begins 'O God, when will...".]

Imam: O God, when will this night become dawn? I await tomorrow when I will fulfil my covenant.

Zaynab: O God, when will this night become dawn? I await tomorrow when I will sacrifice my children for Husayn.

'Abbas: O brother, O Magnificent King, your holy command is fulfilled. The trench is dug.

[In the enemies' encampment.]

Ibn Sa'd: According to the order of unjust Ibn Ziyad, the children of the Prophet should burn with thirst.

[In the encampment of Husayn.]

Imam: Our enemies know no decency or shame. They have no respect for the Prophet. Full charge ahead, O good brothers. Forward to fight the wicked.

[In the enemies' encampment.]

Ibn Sa'd [addressing his army]: O wicked, rebellious, sinister group, set fires around the tents of Husayn.

[In the encampment of Husayn.]

Zaynab: O God, I am distressed and fearful. They have set fire around the tents. Why is Husayn's encampment on fire? O my hopeless Husayn. O my brave brother 'Abbas.

Imam: O distressed sister with dishevelled hair, why are you crying so loudly? The enemy has not yet removed your veil. By God, your Husayn is still alive.

Shahrbanu: O small flower bud from my garden, why do you look withered? You do not sleep in the

cradle, and set fire to my soul. Though you are uncomfortable with the heat and the fever, sleep, my beloved child. O soother of my soul, you are so restless because of thirst.

'Ali Akbar: O God, why is Shahrbanu wailing tonight? Her cries reach the skies searing my soul. O sad mother, why are you weeping or mourning? Your Akbar has not yet died.

Shahrbanu: "Ali Akbar, you know our circumstances and the feeling of the homeless. It is kind of you to visit with the afflicted. O son, 'Ali Asghar has fainted. He may die from thirst. Call in the others.

'Ali Akbar: Do not worry, mother, I shall fetch water for him. That

will bring his strength back. Taking courage from his need, I will bring the sweet water for the dear, miserable baby boy.

Shahrbanu: Dear 'Ali, do not venture on to this dangerous and frightful plain. May a thousand Asghars be thy ransom, O handsome boy. I do not want you to go, my dear stalwart boy, I am afraid something may happen to you.

'Ali Akbar: Don't cry, don't wail, don't tear thy ringlets. Dishevel not thy hair. With God's help, I shall bring water presently.

Shahrbanu: O God! Protect my 'Ali Akbar tonight. He is the happiness of my heart and the tranquillity of my soul. O Karbala, you destroyed my life, and bestowed great oppression and tyranny on your guest.

"Abbas: O Lord, why is Shahrbanu weeping tonight? Her anguish has quickened the heart of men and jinns. O Lady of the Camp, what troubles you tonight? It seems from your anguish that our fate is already sealed.

Shahrbanu: May I be thy ransom, 'Abbas, O Commander of Just People. Why should I not cry? The infant Asghar has no milk and 'Ali Akbar has gone to fetch water. Alas, I am worried that some evil may come upon my darling of Egypt and Canaan [–Joseph].

'Abbas: Do not grieve. Lions' cubs do not fear jackals. I shall go to bring the Moon of Canaan back to you.'

Ali Akbar: O Lord, may I have the luck to bring water for Husayn's children. O garrison guarding the water, disperse, or else I shall send you all to hell. Now 'Ali Akbar has come to fetch water from the Euphrates for the thirsty.

[At the Euphrates embankment.]

Ibn Sa'd: Akbar, O King of the deserted ones. Seek no water! This water for you is a rare gem, Tell Husayn the price of this water is to swear allegiance to Yazid.

Ali Akbar: God is great! With the help of my grandfather, I shall
make tonight the day of judgement for this infidel group.

Ibn Sa'd: [Text missing: begins "O group...."]

Ali Akbar: O water of the Euphrates, have you not a grain of shame? On the day of retribution, Zahra will be weary of you. It is not right; it is not fair for me to drink water while my father thirsts.

Ibn Sa'd: Soldiers, stop this young man from carrying water with him to the tents of Husayn.

[They fight.]

'Ali Akbar: A thousand thanks, O Lord, for helping me to exit safely. I am not going to be embarrassed in the presence of Shahrbanu, nor will I be ashamed before Asghar.

[In the encampment of Husayn.]

'Abbas: Thank God, 'Ali Akbar is safely returning with water. He fought with the charisma of Haydar. I shall intercept him on the way, and conceal myself under a veil in order to test him.

[Between the two encampments.]

Ali Akbar: Who are you who blocks the path of the hunting lions?

"Abbas: On whose order have you come to the Euphrates at night?

All Akbar: I have come to fetch water for the thirsty.

"Abbas: Let the thirsty drink blood.

'Ali Akbar: Young man, Asghar has no milk to drink and is dying from thirst.

Abbas: Let thirst wither his glowing face.

'Ali Akbar: Out of pity I shall not kill you tonight.

Abbas: I have compassion for that water which you are carrying tonight.

[They fight.]

'Ali Akbar: Young man, you possess the same strength as I.

'Abbas: May I be your ransom; you have such strong arms.

'Ali Akbar: Your voice sounds familiar to me, Beloved of the universe.

'Abbas: I know you. May the world be your ransom.

'Ali Akbar: I am Akbar, the son of the King of the people.

'Abbas: May my soul be your sacrifice. I am your uncle, Abbas.

'Ali Akbar: I beg your forgiveness, for I did not know it was you.

'Abbas: Young man, may I be your ransom, for I blocked your way in order to test you. Wait a moment, O Light of my tearful eyes, for I shall take the news of your coming back to the tents. Glad tidings, O people of the camp, young and old. Happy 'Ali Akbar has brought water with him.

[In Husayn's encampment.]

Ali Akbar: O mother of Asghar, come and take water to the milkless babe. Take water for the weak infant child.

Imam: 'Abbas, go and rest. Rest from the trouble of the day. Gabriel will be watching over me tonight more than even. O sister, go spread bedding for my pure brother. I am overcome with desire to meet my celebrated grandfather.

Abbas: Brother Husayn, my heart flutters and sleep has escaped my eyes. I shall put my sharp sword and my shield under my head lest the wretched enemy should surprise me.

Imam: Ali Akbar, this night, take off the armour of trouble and pain, take off the sheath of martyrdom. Go to sleep, O Tranquillity of Thy Father's Soul, for tomorrow you shall roll in a sea of blood.

'Ali Akbar: O God, how can sleep enter my tearful eyes tonight? I shall put my sharp sword and my shield under my head. O wind, blow a breeze upon my sister Sughra tomorrow, carrying the fragrance of my ringlets, which drip deer musk tonight.

Imam: Come, Qasim, my precious nephew, tonight I am planning a feast for tomorrow. Sakina, spread open the bridegroom's bedding like a flower, for tonight I want to keep the image of a groom in my mind.

Qasim: O God, why is the bride of death my companion tonight? Isn't she aware of the bridegroom's despondent heart? On the wedding night the bridegroom eats sweets, yet tonight sugar tastes bitter in my mouth like snake's venom.

Imam: Zaynab, the enemy seeks war and a crying loneliness is our condition tonight.

Zaynab: Tonight is the night of farewell. O, what loneliness, and the enemy approaches.

Imam: Tonight, 'Abbas' hands are folded beneath his head. O, what loneliness. Tomorrow, they will be cut off like branches from the tree in paradise.

Zaynab: Tonight, I can look at ['Ali] Akbar's body. Yet tomorrow I will see this flower chopped into a thousand pieces.

Imam: Tonight, Qasim is asleep in his bridal chamber, as elegant as a cedar tree. Tomorrow, the hands of injustice and oppression shall turn this chamber black.

Zaynah: Qasim is sleeping in a sea of light tonight. Tomorrow he'll be wedded to his dark grave.

Imam: Tonight, 'Ali Akbar is in a deep slumber. Tomorrow, he'll be swimming in his blood because of the tyranny of the enemy.

Zaynab: Asghar sleeps in his cradle tonight. Tomorrow he'll rest forever, on his father's shoulders.

Imam: Tonight, Sakina sleeps next to her father. Tomorrow she will be captive and numb in the hands of the enemy.

Zaynab: [Text missing, begins "Next to....."]

Imam: Go to sleep, dear sister. I bear witness by the Essence of God that all of us, the male members of the Prophet's household, save the sickly 'Abid, will be put to death at the hands of the oppressors.

Zaynab [to herself]: Use the opportunity, Zaynab, to pour out that which is in your heart. Sit alone and wail over your luck. O depressed Zaynab, be ready for catastrophe and think some-times about Damascus and sometimes about Kufa, and sometimes about Karbala. O Morning Wind, my patience is finished. O breeze, blow to Najaf and to Medina. Tell Zahra of our misfortunes. O Zaynab, omit these long complaints.

'Abbas: Arise, 'Abbas. Keep watch over the women's quarters. This is no time for sleep for Zaynab's heart is heavy with pain, Husayn is asleep, and the enemy lurks in the dark. It is time to keep watch. It is the final sleep. O God, grant respite for Zaynab, respite for the helpless, homeless Zaynab. She will ride dishevelled and the sound of music will rise in the air. In her forlornness, no hand will stretch toward her. 'Abbas should die for you. O Father, O 'Ali, we have come from Medina to your neighbourhood and this is only a short distance from your grave [Najaf]. O my crowned Father, Ali, conqueror of Khaybar, come to Karbala' and look upon us, forlorn ones.

The Veiled Amir: I am here; I am here. I have just arrived. My dear, I heard your call in paradise.

Abbas: I smell the pleasant perfume of ambergris. Is this Jacob leading the lost Joseph or is it a harbinger of good news arriving from Canaan? I cannot take my eyes away from him, although a shaft of light penetrates my eyes from him. Who are you, o Unparalleled Apparition?

The Veiled Amir: God created me, yet I am Lord of the universe.

'Abbas: Do not advance any further.

The Veiled Amir: How will you stop me, O lion?

Abbas: Fear my sword and remain where you are.

The Veiled Amir: I fear no one save my Creator.

Abbas: My sharp sword will knock your head off.

The Veiled Amir: Bravo to you, O One of good repute.

'Abbas: For what reason, O Illustrious One?

The Veiled Amir: For your loyalty to your brother.

'Abbas: How do you know that I have a brother?

The Veiled Amir: I know you, O Splendid Bird of Paradise.

"Abhar: Your voice is familiar to me.

The Veiled Amir: Yes, and I am disturbed over your becoming marked for death.

Abbas: What brings you to do this blood-thirsty desert?

The Veiled Amir: I am concerned about six of my brave sons.

'Abbas; Name them with dignity.

The Veiled Amir: One looks like you.

Abbas: Cite his name. O King of the People.

The Veiled Amir: Know that his good name is 'Abbas.

'Abbas: And tell me the name of that one who is the Light of my eyes.

The Veiled Amir: He is the leader and the elder. He is Husayn.

"Abbas: Are you the King of the two worlds?

The Veiled Amir; And are you Husayn's standard-bearer?

Abbas: I am the servant of the King of religion.

The Veiled Amir: I am Amir al-Mu'minin [the Prince of the Faithful, Ali].

Abbas: Greetings, O afflicted Crowned Father.

The Veiled Amir: Greetings to you, memory of my youth.

'Abbas: Where have you been, dear Father, in this dark night?

The Veiled Amir: Coming to you in suffering from Najaf to Karbala

'Abbas: Why is your back, which was straight as an elegant cypress, bent now?

The Veiled Amir: From the sorrow for you who are marked for death.

'Abbas: Why have you fallen into such suffering?

The Veiled Amir: From my separation from Kulthum and Zaynab.

'Abbas: What do you carry beneath your robe, O Unparalleled One?

The Veiled Amir: There is water here for Sakina.

'Abbas: Have you an order for your son, 'Abbas?

The Veiled Amir: Go and rest. Sleep in your bed.

"Abbas: I shall obey your orders, but I shall sleep with tearful eyes.

[In the enemies' encampment.]

Ibn Sa'd: It is spring and the flowers are blossoming. Be happy and cheerful for a while, Ibn Sa'd. O Lord, make this royal appointment arrive as soon as possible.

Shimr: I have just arrived from Kufa with a large army. I have come with a royal appointment for Ibn Sa'd. Woe to the sleepers of the Azure Valley who are unaware of the injustices of Fate. How scented is this land, how great is the feast in the desert. Has the navel-pouch of the musk-deer fallen on this plain? Has Solomon spread a feast in this land? Shimr, beware, you are crossing the lion's lair.

The fierceness of the lions will shake your being. Are you not aware that 'Abbas is the hand of the Hand of God? Who can tie God's Hands? Where are you going to hide when the son of Haydar mounts his swift horse? I will tie the graceful hands and feet of the unfortunate Qasim. When 'Ali Akbar wakes up the hearts of all the warriors will tremble but I shall attack and send smoke from Husayn's tent to the planet Saturn. Hark, I hear sounds coming from Ibn Sa'd's encampment.

The sound of a flute mixed with that of a lute. Sweet singing voices are rising toward Saturn from the tents of Ibn Sa'd. Well, well, what is the cause of your celebration? Have you defeated the brave enemy? Has the Prophet's progeny been killed? Tell the cup-bearer not to deny wine to the drunkards. Unless a good Fate assists you, you will be foolishly pounding on an anvil with your hands.

Ibn Sa'd: O Shimr, be not so hot-headed, listen with your heart and soul to my advice, Husayn, the son of Zahra is the righteous Imam. Why must you stab him with your sharp dagger? You think that after killing Husayn, the son of 'Ali, you will receive the governorship of Ray and Gurgan. After Husayn's death you will have not a single grain from Ray, and your body will be burned in hot fire. The feast has been prepared for us, so let's enjoy the musicians' music.

Shimr: O commander, your words have touched me, penetrating my heart like small arrows. Setting foot upon this earth is like giving up my life. How can one chain the hand of God? If I destroy the house of my endurance, even a hundred Abu Turabs could not rebuild it.

Ibn Sa'd: O Shimr, the royal edicts have been issued in your name, and the Ruler has empowered you to govern the Arabs and the Persians. Your service must be superb or else there will be no gold, no silver, and no money. O you infidel, why did the evil infidel send you to the battlefield? Do not trespass the line of justice and do not kill the sacred prey. I do not advise you to go to war. Do not fight but make peace, do not harm the King of the people. The world became a flower garden by their blessed coming and made the life of friends joyful. Now I am speaking to the owner of the coffee house—give sweet tea to Shimr Zul Jawshan¹.

Shimr: Why are you so lax, Ibn Sa'd?

Ibn Sa'd: Patience is necessary in this affair.

Shimr: How long must we be patient? Power and position are at stake.

Ibn Sa'd: Well said. It is time to think about victory and defeat.

Shimr: Men must be guided by sages. You give the orders.

[Ibn Sa'd gestures without answering.]

Shimr: The love for the world fills my heart with infidelity to my faith.

Ibn Sa'd: What should be done? Say it, thinking of the day of retribution.

Shimr: Why did you come to Karbala' with horses and an army?

Ibn Sa'd: Why did you come with sword, dagger and spear?

Shimr: You signed the order to kill 'Alf's household.

Ibn Sa'd: You light the fire of fighting and war.

Shimr: You heard the name Ray and said, 'I have got my wish.'

Ibn Sa'd: Why did you accept the robe of honour from Ibn Ziyad?

Shimr: I wear the robe of honour, and I take the consequences.

Ibn Sa'd: Like you, I have given up my conscience and my religion.

Shine: This futile talk stems from fear.

Ibn Sa'd: Do you know that our opponent is 'Ali's 'Abbas?

Shimr: And do you know that our army consists of lion hunters?

Ibn Sa'd: Do you realize that the Bani Hashim are very brave and strong?

Shimr: Do you know that 'Abbas is related to me?

Ibn Sa'd: So what! You should know that 'Abbas will not befriend US.

Shimr: I'll deceive him, I'll make him desert Husayn.

Ibn Sa'd: It cannot be so; he is a lion and he is loyal.

Shimr: Then what can we do about Yazid's command and decree?

Ibn Sa'd: I am in despair and pessimistic concerning anything in the world.

Shimr: I will have to tie their hands, or else they will tie mine.

Ibn Sa'd: I will have to break hearts or else my own heart will be broken.

Shimr: I will have to set heads upon spears or lose my own.

Ibn Sa'd: I will have to face the battle or else I shall have to run away in disgrace.

Shimr; Go, rest, and be aware of what goes on.

Ibn Sa'd: Go, brief the army and strengthen their morale.

Shimr; You go and order them to beat the drums of war.

Ibn Sa'd: Drummers, beat the drums till the sound of drums reaches the ninth heaven. And you, Shimr, go and talk to 'Abbas.

Shimr: O Ibn Sa'd, I am going to talk to brave Abbas, to make peace tonight. Or else in the morning I'll make him swim in his blood. What's the hurry, damned Shimr? Is my luck sleeping? Why is my mind and heart so tense and disturbed tonight? I need wine to soothe my nerves. Don't go, there is danger on the way. Turn around for the province of Ray is what counts.

[At the perimeter of Husayn's encampment.]

Shimr: For God's sake, answer me, 'Abbas. Either give me the answer or be ready for the battle. Nights like these are not for sleeping. He is not visible to me even as the sun in the night. The darkness of the night brings my love to the surface; Love induces different aims in each person. As for me, I am captured by the promise of the prince of darkness.

[to his Damascene dagger]

It is time for you to spill blood. Come out of thy scabbard, O crescent moon! If my sword fails to conquer during the battle, and my dagger fails to cut the throat of the Imam, the son of the Imam, then let us have peace, and I am for war. If you want peace I am for war, if you seek it I see a holy ghost standing guard. Whose tent is that? My humble intelligence cannot describe his attributes, and how could I? Can an ant describe the attributes of the kingly Imam? O King of the universe, sublime Prince 'Abbas, come out of your royal camp.

[In the encampment of Husayn.]

Abbas: Someone has been calling me from the left and from the right. He calls my name and by this name he seeks to disgrace himself and achieve fame: People have forsaken Husayn for Yazid I am afraid they will all become idolators. Why does this upside-down world not come to an end?

The exalted are cursed and the mean are revered. Arise! The earth is filled with calamity and sedition. Straighten your back and observe the tumult behind the tents. O 'Ali Akbar, the beautiful cypress of Husayn, and Qasim, the candle in his gloomy nights, rise up and hold your swords to watch over his camp for the breeze wafts the smell of blood from the plain.

Shimr: Greetings to you, who are praised by God, day and night.

Abbas: Someone has called me by name from a distance. What is your auspicious command, O Exalted One? Who are you who has been calling my name from afar? Who are you who is thundering behind the tents?

[At the perimeter.]

Shimr: O standard-bearer of Husayn, King of Karbala, be well. + Salutations! O Commander of the opposing army, be well! I am eagerly awaiting you. Welcome and be merry for a feast has been prepared in your honour. The golden torches were set up in your honour. It is light from the earth to the sky. I am at your service, O 'Abbas. Give orders to this worthless servant of yours.

[In the encampment of Husayn.]

"Abbas: Who is it that is praising me? Who is it that pretends to guide me? And who is the man who is

trying to trick me? How can I welcome the standard-bearer of the villain? If you want to approach the tent of 'Abbas, then you want to be cloven in half—so come forward.

Shimr: O beautiful and radiant Prince, for me you hold the rank of a King and the Ruler of the Earth. You are as magnificent as

Solomon! I am only a weak ant. The learned and the laymen both call me Shimr, but I am only a beggar at your court.

Abbas: O filthy, ugly, atheistic oppressor, I do not wish to see your sinister face. Robber of faith, outcast of the faithful, I have no business with you. I serve the people and the religion. You are the enemy of Husayn; I am the slave in his service. It is clear what you are. It is clear what I am.

Shimr: O King, my head and soul are under your feet: so much so that I am ready to fight for you. I carry an order from Yazid appointing you commander of the army. Let me fight at your side.

Abbar: Do not abuse my name in front of my noblemen, for as long as I have my head and soul, I shall sacrifice myself for the beloved together with many of my companions.

Shimr: Why do you cast aside the generous decree of the King of Syria? One who walks should look in front lest he fall into a hole. O semblance of 'Ali, haven't you heard that a tiny mosquito can kill an elephant? You boast, saying that you are Husayn's servant. But remember how much Joseph suffered at the hands of his brothers, and that the villain Cain killed his brother because he had a grudge. Moses was a righteous prophet but he let his people suffer thirst. Desert thy brother so that pain and sorrow will desert you. Come to our army, and accept its command.

Abbas: O Disgraced One, you know nothing of Abel's status. You are trying to make me look like Cain. Haven't you heard the Qur'anic verse about sacrifice? Can you not distinguish between that and the story of Cain? If you are not aware of the high rank of the descendants of 'Ali, then read the revelations of the Qur'an. The Creator out of his munificence has bestowed upon us Salsabil, Kawthar, the Euphrates, and the Nile as a dowry. Stop this nonsense, O Rude One, for I cannot forsake [Husayn]. Your attempt to mislead me is like Satan's attempt to deceive Ishmael inside the Ka'ba.

Shimr: It is not without reason that I, Shimr, came on such a dark night. Otherwise, it is not a good time to visit a friend. The love for a kinsman stirred my heart. The one who does not fall in love in spring is not a man. A plant that does not sprout at Nowruz is nothing by firewood.

"Abbas: It is the insult to Husayn in your talk and not the affront to politeness that shocks me. The sacrifice of Ali Akbar makes me hot with anger at you. This is a great and serious matter.

Shimr; Pledge allegiance to Yazid and rescue yourself from death. Better to be a commander than to die in your own blood. Listen to my advice, my words are as precious as pearls. One should not tell the words reserved for a friend to a stranger. Nor should one complain about a friend to an enemy.

"Abbas: Look at Husayn. Destiny is pulling him towards his end and he cannot hide his feelings. He laments the forthcoming captivity of his loved ones; he grieves the imminent death of 'Ali Akbar.

Shimr: Let me give you a word of advice, don't consider it wrong. The flower's freshness lies in the Zephyr wind. Caging nightingales in the season of roses and tulips is nothing but persecution. No one loves you as much as I do. You are like the sun.

'Abbas: Listen to the children, to their burning, torrid groans. Turmoil rules this plain. What religion allows such oppression. upon Husayn's children? Do not think that Husayn, the Cypress, is trembling because of a Zephyr wind, but because he hears the nightingales [=his children] moan.

Shimr: Be Yazid's ally from the bottom of your heart and take command of the Syrian army. Save me from turbulent fear for you. Following Husayn is a hope built on credit. Do not exchange cash for credit. Forget the promise of paradise. Fight not, make peace, save your life; one should not let an opportunity go by.

Abbas: I have taken an eternal oath to submit my life, to set my body upon the edge of a sword and a spear. This blaze is like

that set upon Abraham. The love of God permeates me so give me no advice. No physician has a remedy for love. Your path is a dead end, a path full of sin. May arrows pierce me if I close my eyes on Husayn. Keep away, for your words have boiled my blood. Your malicious company sets a terrible torture upon my soul.

Shimr: We came to this plain upon the King's orders with the army and its commanders. By God, there are no virtuous men in the army. We rested during the day while the sun was up. We have come at night to see the Moon ['Abbas]. Join us and become the commander of our army. We have come a long way to see you.

"Abbas: We are here on this plain not to seek glory. We have been forced to take refuge here. We are here neither to fight nor to make peace. We are servants and lovers of the King, Husayn. We have come from Hijaz to the banks of the Euphrates standing firmly beside Husayn. We are here to enforce our rights.

Shimr: O excellent one, I am disappointed in you. I am Shimr with a thousand things on my mind. If Husayn is right and born right then I have a quarrel with truth itself. From dusk to dawn, from Kufa to Damascus, I am being endlessly taunted. How much patience do you think I have? Don't fight against me.

'Abbas: I am a lion, and my neck is chained by love. I am firm in my love for my beloved. I am a lion and the heir of the Lion of God ['Ali]. I have no dispute with foxes like you. Get away, O chosen disciple of Satan. I have no desire to carry on a discussion with you.

Shimr: A wise man would not touch a lancet. You are walking into a ditch of trouble. Being on the opposite side from you breaks my back, although I am as strong as a mountain. Have mercy upon Sakina's thirsty lips. She will die of thirst on the banks of the Euphrates.

'Abbas; Sakina's thirst breaks my heart and your futile speech sets fire to my mind. O impudent oppressor, depart. or else I shall break your ugly mouth with a punch and cover your body with blood and dust.

Shimr: We are related on my mother's side. Let the Eternal Judge be my witness. As a fasting man awaits a signal of the end of the fast, I am awaiting your expression of allegiance to Yazid.

Abbas: On this journey, the only thing on my mind is Husayn. I am among people, but my mind is somewhere else. I cannot stop frequenting the court of the king of the universe, Husayn. There is fortune in his service and salvation at his door. O bastard, what is your religion that our blood is sweeter to you than the milk of your mother?

Shimr: Are you not withdrawing from the prime of your life? Do not give up the riches of the world for the sake of one brother. A man's life is short. Come with me and I shall show you a carefree life full of pleasure and luxury. O Lord, I am your slave—be my master.

"Abbas: When I ride my horse on the day of battle, I shall smash the warriors' heads and I shall paint the sharp side of my Haydari sword purple with blood, get away or your body will become the target of my sword.

Shimr: Do not be perturbed, O son of the Arab Amir, whale of the Red Sea, warrior of all the Arab territories. Look at my sword. It has defeated Kurds and Zabulis, yet I stand before you obsequiously.

"Abbas: Talk nonsense no more, rude, damned one. Do not count yourself equal among us. Your father is a Syrian and mine is Arab. You have no status. Get away or you'll be the target of my sword.

Shimr: You are the flame of the tribe's candle for you are related to me through your beautiful mother. Do not pride yourself on being Husayn's water-carrier. I have got for you a letter to glory. Your humiliation is my disgrace and your suffering is my shame.

'Abbas: How could there be another Murteza? The sky would never dream of another woman such as Fatima. I live in the shadow of my brother, the King of religion. Shame upon me if I desert Husayn. Get away or else your body will be the target of my sword”.

Shimr: Do not be perturbed, do not kick thy servant from your door.

"Abbas: This is all deceit, this is all a trick, I know it.

Shimr: I am Shimr; I have come to make you aware of what is good and what is bad for you.

'Abbas: What is the enemy preparing? I shall take out my spear.

Shimr: Do not boil with rage. I am your guest and my heart palpitates.

'Abbas: Isn't it Husayn who is your guest, whose wife sleeps thirsty?

Shimr: Greetings to you from Kuli b. Sa'd Azraq.

'Abbas: What do they have to say to Abbas, o persecutor?

Shimr: They offer you lands in Ray, Rûm, Farang and China.

'Abbas: For what purpose? For what reason? Say, infidel.

Shimr: To forsake Husayn, and become the commander of his enemies.

'Abbas: God forbid; God forbid. Shut your mouth, O cruel oppressor.

Shimr: You are alone and Husayn is alone. One flower does not make a spring.

'Abbas: The love of Husayn, the son of the Prophet, is priceless to me.

Shimr: Sit happily on the throne and I shall stand guard.

'Abbas: Seeing handsome Qasim makes me happy.

Shimr: Come to my side and become the leader.

'Abbas: I feel ashamed for Sakina's thirst.

Shimr: Come to my side and I'll fill your saddle with gold.

'Abbas: I'd rather die than see my sister, Zaynab, handcuffed.

Shimr: Are you willing to see Kulthum held in disrespect and homeless?

'Abbas: I am willing to see her weep upon my grave.

Shimr: I'll give you so much gold and gems, you won't be able to count them.

'Abbas: And what shall I answer my father, "Ali!

Shimr: Say, "I am sorry, it was for law and order.'

'Abbas: I'll be ashamed in front of Fatima on the Day of Judgement.

Shimr: You do not appreciate the monarchy, my dear.

‘Abbas: A sage man does not do something that he will regret.

Shimr: Listen carefully, peace is better than war.

‘Abbas: For me, life is a disgrace without the Prince of Religion.

Shimr: You cannot rival such an army, O second Haydar.

‘Abbas: I shall destroy Kufa as easily as Khaybar.

Shimr: Innumerable soldiers will come from Kufa, Syria, and Aleppo.

‘Abbas: And 'Abbas will face them all like a formidable lion.

Shimr: Your scimitar shakes the skies. Angels are the slaves of your court. I pray that nothing wrong comes to you. I owe so much to your old mother. I can't be ungrateful to her. For the last time I say come to us or you shall be killed. Your end will come soon.

‘Abbas: Shame be on you, ungrateful one. Why have you obliterated all respect for 'Ali's household? We don't need your kindness, O impudent snob. On the day of war, I will not ask for your help. Let your army roll in today until the end of the world. Let them fill the space from east to west, from the sky to the fish [the fish which holds the earth]. They will all be broken like a small bristle by the scimitar of 'Abbas.

Shimr: I am your slave, ready to sacrifice myself. I have a command from Yazid, my lord. I am the son of Zal, Rustam. I am the warrior Afrasiyab. Like Faramarz, I am the champion of the army. I am a temple, I am a convent, a priest, a monk, a Zangi. I closed the book on 'Uthman, I am a wall of iron. Woe to the time when my horse is saddled and I enter the stage of war. Neither the enemy's horse nor the rider shall last long fighting me. Now, hear more: I am a rogue and a thief. I steal people's collyrium from their eyes.

I am Satan's guide and preceptor. I am the teacher of that wicked creature. Seven hundred and seventy followers learned from me. I know the mysteries of all nations. Only one equals me in knowledge, I am the mufti, I am graceful, I am a sage; I may be doomed to burn in hell, but I can raise hell in Karbala'. I am an old dragon, a scorpion, a goat, a snake. Sometimes I am thunder, sometimes lightning, sometimes fire, sometimes soft, sometimes cold, sometimes burning like fire, sometimes fast, sometimes slow, sometimes as black as a snake. At times I am sweet as sugar and at times I am bitter as venom.

I am the enemy of God, His Prophet, and Murteza. I am not the victim of oppression in the catastrophe at Karbala. I am the oppressor. You may think I am a grocer from Damascus or a haberdasher from Zangibar or India or one of those filthy mouse-eating Arabs. I am your enemy, the seed of menses, traitors and adulterers. I have seven breasts just like a dog.

[The actor tries to protect himself against the audience to prove that he himself is not Shimr, whom he hates.]

I am the role-carrier of Shimr and the invoker of the King of religion, Husayn. I hate Shimr, that son of a bitch.

'Abbas: shameless bastard and impudent son of damned Zul Jawshan, I swear by the great God, His prophet, and by the broken heart of the pure Zahra that no matter what their number, no matter where they come from, even if the sand of the desert or the leaves of the trees turn into armies of the foe, I will not be afraid or alarmed. I will draw my sword, call Haydar's name and attack your armies. O outcast on the Day of Judgement, I swear by the hands of Husayn's standard-bearer, which are the hands of 'Ali. Who can equal God's hands? O damned people.

When I put my feet in the stirrups and mount my horse, I will not take off my boots nor shall I remove the helmet of bravery and zeal. I shall not unfasten the lion's armour from my back until I have had justice from the people of oppression and evil. Then I shall ride to Syria where I shall unseat the damnable adulterer, the cruel, oppressive son of the cannibal Hind, from his throne. I shall lead him on a leash in public and make him run after a horse.

I shall humiliate him to the fullest and bring him to the bench of the honourable judge Husayn b. 'Ali Abi Talib. All the people shall know that courage such as this is not characteristic of ordinary men except for Abu 'l-Faḡl, the standard-bearer, who is the water-carrier of Husayn's orphans.

I will be proud of myself before the jinn and angels because of this great achievement. If the purpose were not Husayn's martyrdom I would get permission from him to use my sharp sword to strike terror in Karbala in such a way that nothing would grow from now to eternity for a friend or foe. But what can I do?

If I do not immolate myself for the followers of my father, who will become the intercessor for this poor nation of sinners? I swear by God that I have accepted to die, and have my head raised upon spears, I shall be grateful for God's mercy. Go, O son of Satan. Boasting to 'Abbas, from now until the day of judgement, will do you no good.

Shimr: [Text missing, begins 'From what...']

Abbas: I am a pearl from the sea of wilayat. I am a lion and the son of the Lion of God. O inferior oppressor, Karbala' alone can not frighten me. Even if you fill the universe with soldiers, I will not fear them. I will fight all of them and corner them. I will erase the name of Yazid, that infidel dog, from the face of the earth. I will throw him in the dust and humiliate him! But what can I do? The Shi'a are sinners and need Husayn's intercession. O friends of Husayn, cry out 'O 'Ali!'

Shimr: [Text missing, begins 'O friends...']

[In the encampment of Husayn.]

Ali Akbar: O God, what is happening on this plain of calamity? There is turmoil on the plain of Karbala'. This night, the spiteful enemy has launched a surprise attack on us. With no water in my throat, I am going to fight the deceitful foe on this miserable plain. Bless me, should I die, my dear father Husayn.

Qasim: O God, what is happening on this plain of calamity? There is turmoil on the plain of Karbala'. This night the spiteful enemy has launched a surprise attack on us. With no water in my throat, I am going to fight the deceitful foe on this miserable plain. Bless me, should I die, my dear uncle Husayn.

Sakina: O Lord, has the world come to an end? Have the wheels of the universe stopped turning? O uncle, standard-bearer of Karbala, get up and take a look at us. I see the standard but not the standard-bearer. Aunt Zaynab, homeless Zaynab, wake up, wake up, wake up. The cruel enemy surrounds the camp. Wake up, wake up.

Zaynab: O, sweet singing nightingale, why are you wailing in the middle of the night? Why are you sighing so desperately from your heart? Has fire kindled your soul? Why are you wailing in the middle of the night?

Sakina: Come, O aunt, observe the turmoil and listen to the enemy's drums beating. I have no desire to live. Wake up my father.

Zaynab: Zaynab is distressed. Has her luck turned away from her? Prepare yourself for captivity. The confusion and uproar is coming from the enemy. Zaynab will certainly be taken prisoner. Wake up brother. Wake from your restful sleep and look into Zaynab's tearful eyes.

Imam: You interrupted my dream of a musk-scented paradise. You interrupted my conversation with my father and grandfather. I heard my mother's voice saying, 'Husayn will be our guest tomorrow night. You interrupted my dream about my brother.

Zaynab: O companion of my sad heart, the enemy has penetrated

the camp. You can hear the beating of the drums of war by the despicable enemy. Listen, O brother, for I am going to be taken into captivity.

"Abbas: I call upon you, Qasim and Akbar. Roar the thunderous cry Allahu Akbar.

Imam: Call 'Abbas, my close companion and great and gallant warrior.

Zaynab (entering the tent of 'Abbas): 'Abbas, O brother, light of Haydar's eyes, the dearest offspring of the Prophet is calling you. I see the standard, but I do not see the standard-bearer. Maybe he has deserted us.

Imam: Do not wail, dear sister. Hurry, and send "Ali Akbar to me.

Zaynab [entering the tent of Ali Akbar]: Akbar, my darling, open your eyes. Fear makes my bones tremble. Open your eyes. Alas, o brother, there is no sign of Ali Akbar. Where has he gone? My sweet 'Ali Akbar?

Imam: Do not wail, do not weep, do not groan. Go, call the light of Hassan's eyes to my presence.

Zaynab [entering the tent of Qasim]: O tranquillity of my soul, O sweet Qasim, wake up. Alas, O my brother Qasim is not in his bed either. Fate has turned against us.

Imam: O sister, gather all the children and sit in the tents. I shall look for 'Abbas and Akbar so that I can thwart the army of darkness. O brave brother 'Abbas, standard-bearer of my army, and 'Ali Akbar, my son, where have you gone?

[sees 'Abbas]

O' Abbas, where have you been? Without you I am helpless.

'Abbas: O mighty King, joy of Fatima, greetings to you. Why do you hang your head? Why are you so sad? Are you thinking about martyrdom?

Imam: O light of my tearful eyes, greetings to you. Joy of my heart and my soul, greetings. Your absence in the encampment distressed me. I had to guard it alone against the infidel villain.

'Abbas: Know, dear Brother, that in the middle of the night Shimr Zul Jawshan came to my tent. His words set fire to my heart and finally I chased him away with my sword.

Imam: I have heard that the commander of the enemy gave a written decree of amnesty to Shimr to deliver it to you. Go ahead, deny your brotherhood with the prophet's heir. Tell that helpless Zaynab she is not your sister. You need not help me. the forlorn one, 'Ali Akbar suffices for martyrdom with us. Go and save yourself, and God be with you.

'Abbas: O friends, what should I do with my shame? Husayn has discharged me from his service. My sword and dagger are useless except in the service of my brother. If you, Husayn, are not my protector I have no use for my helmet. I shall go barefoot to do homage to my father's grave². Where shall I turn for friends? O people, I am abandoned! Husayn had discharged me from his service I am abandoned. O cruel Karbala', where is thy hospitality? O earth, I shall bury my head in your bosom for I have no mother to lean on.

O Zephyr wind, blow on Medina and tell my mother that I have been abandoned. I am without friends or family. The forlorn are buried without a shroud or camphor, and they take their dreams and hopes to their graves with them. How awful it is to die in a strange land. O dear Sakina, my niece, be my intercessor with Husayn. Go to your father and implore him on my behalf and tell him, 'O father, my uncle seems abandoned by family and friends. He is alone.'

Sakina: O matchless uncle, why are you crying? May Sakina be your sacrifice. O uncle, do you want Husayn's head mounted upon a spear? I am distraught. Do you know what you have done? Uncle, you broke your promise to my father. You conversed with the damnable Shimr. You broke my father's back,

"Abbas: Come here, dear niece. Come close, O broken-hearted one. Sit on my lap like a flower. Your sorrow has set me on fire. Your face is pale as the moon from thirst and there are fever blisters upon your lips, I am the water-carrier and it shames me. There is nothing I can do. Blood runs down my eyes from sorrow. Husayn is friendless and weary, a stranger in a sea of infidels.

His young men will all die and Qasim shall wear a shroud instead of wedding garments. After I die the spring of our lives will dry up as in autumn and the world will succumb to the terror of our enemies. They will show their wickedness and set fire to our tents. I grieve for you, for they will burn your clothes and chain your arms and laugh at your cries and slap your beautiful face. Where will I be at that hour, to take revenge upon these infidels, to save you from evil?

[There is a pause.]

O Husayn, to whose court angels come in need, no one has ever dismissed a servant such as 'Abbas from his court. If you are ashamed of me as a brother, take me as a servant, do not think that I am the darling of Medina. Don't send me away from your blessed presence. It would be the greatest disloyalty to leave you. Take the standard away from me and give it to 'Ali Akbar and let him be your standard-bearer instead of me.

Imam: Don't say these words, O 'Abbas. You are my most respected brother, O 'Abbas. Do you want to make me sad? Go say farewell to the distressed Zaynab,

'Abbas: For the sake of the martyrs. I beg forgiveness from whomever I made unhappy or injured on this journey. Pretend it never happened.

Zaynab: O joy of my youth and the cane of my old age. You're going now, and by God my captivity will come true. My humiliation will be a guarantee of your eternal life.

'Abbas: Alas, from now on it will not be possible for us any more to go from Hijaz to Medina, in glorious grandeur, so that I could carry the flag in front of your camel all the way to the Prophet's grave.

Zaynab: I swear by my mother's and father's graves that you and Husayn are one and the same to me. Don't think, O brother, that I consider myself your equal. I am your servant. I swear it on Zahra's grave.

"Abbas: Please do not say these words. You are the lady of Husayn's camp and I am his obedient servant. I, the despondent one, am not your brother but the humblest of your slaves.

Zaynab: From the Prophet I heard that you would die as a martyr in Karbala'. Now that I shall not be permitted to see your noble face again, allow me to kiss your hand.

"Abbas: Lucky is he who has a mother in a strange land—if not a mother, at least a sister. Come, sister, hear my last will. Let me tell you my last wishes. Take care of Umm Kulthum. Wherever there is a mourning ceremony take her along. If by chance you journey to your home town, tell my old lonely mother that if she has not been pleased with her 'Abbas up to his time, she should not be sad, since he has redeemed himself; she should be proud.

If you see the bride-to-be of the martyr Akbar, my little daughter Sughayra, tell her I am sorry I did not arrange and see her wedding to Akbar. There will be three signs of my bitter death. Hear them from me, mournful sister. The first one is when the flag falls and the enemy shall sigh with relief. They will say, 'Husayn has lost his brother. The second is when the oppressors cut off my hands from both arms. The third is when you hear my cry.

Then cry out, O God, save him! Then, my despondent sister, you must drag my body away, for I have a countless number of enemies. My pure body will be covered by myriads of wounds. When they take you to Damascus, they'll show you the martyrs first. Prince Akbar's mother will embrace her son's corpse. Sakina will cry for her father until she loses her mind. Don't leave me alone in the midst of the martyrs.

Tell [Umm] Kulthum to dishevel her hair and wail for me. O sister of the King of Martyrs, wrap me in a shroud with your own hands. I do not want the enemy to see my defiled and camphorless body. The enemy may think I am an orphan who has nothing but tears in his eyes. There is no more time, sister, forgive me, forgive me. Farewell.

Zaynab: O God, O Just One, I wish that no sister would ever witness her brother's death. Your departure, O brother, breaks my back and ties me in chains of distress. O Just Once, who has seen a sister wrap a shroud around her brother? One who has no brother is like a bird with no wings.

Sakina [hallucinating]: O Commander-in-chief of this meagre army, o Crowned uncle, Standard-bearer of the King of the universe, my Prince, do you remember when your daughter, my rose-cheeked cousin, became the betrothed of 'Ali Akbar? What a splendid wedding, what a magnificent celebration. Medina was lit with the flames of my sigh. Let me kiss your hand and be your sacrifice. I am thirsty, uncle, very thirsty. I am dying from thirst; my mournful soul is leaving me. [she faints.]

'Abbas: O, Sakina, why have you fainted? I am ashamed to look at your beautiful face. Let me be your sacrifice. I nurtured you and fostered you and worried about you. O Light of my eyes, I shall get permission from Husayn to fight. Either I lose my hands and die or I will fetch water for you. Brother Husayn, how long should I witness so much pain and sorrow? How long should I stand ashamed before your daughter? Sakina needs water. Give me permission to go and fight and challenge the swords of the enemy. O dear brother, may God protect you and keep all calamities away from you.

Imam: It is very hot, O 'Abbas, as on the Day of Resurrection. You are the water-carrier. Go find water for the orphans.

'Abbas: Tell that rancorous Shimr, that Godless man, that 'Abbas, Husayn's servant, is calling him.

Shimr: [Text missing, begins 'What....']

[On the battlefield.]

"Abbas: The children are crying from thirst. I have come to fetch water for them.

Shimr: [Text missing, starts 'If...'.]

Abbas: O possessor of Zulfaqr, it is time for help. O father of the eleven imams, it is the time for help.

Shimr: [Text missing, begins 'Friends....']

"Abbas: O Euphrates, thou art pleasant but unfaithful. Why art thou distant from the thirsty lips of Husayn?

[In Husayn's encampment.]

Sakina: Come, uncle, hurry up! Fill your water pouch with water! Help us! Come, uncle! Bring water!

[On the battlefield.]

'Abbas: Go to the tents, to the king of Karbala'. Arrange for my mourning. Go to the tents.

[In Husayn's encampment.]

Sakina: I do not need water, uncle, I need you. I must talk to you. Come, uncle, come!

[On the battlefield.]

Shimr: O soldiers, do not allow 'Abbas to take water to the tents of the King of the Universe.

[They fight.]

O Husayn, I have cut off your standard-bearer's hand. O Husayn, I have finished him on the battleground.

'Abbas [to the audience]: When you are powerless then invoke 'Ali. My right hand has fallen from my body. O God, let my left hand be at Husayn's service: I have yet a left hand. What a pity, one hand cannot clap.

[In Husayn's encampment.]

Imam: I hear a thunderous wailing, 'I lost my hand. It comes from my water-carrier.

[On the battlefield.]

Shimr: Weep and mourn in Karbala', for I have cut off Abbas's left hand. O standard-bearer of the believers, 'Abbas, remember when I asked you to forsake Husayn. You said, 'God forbid.'" Tell Sakina that water is on its way so that she will stop her wailing.

Zaynab: [Text missing, begins 'Your hand...']

Shimr [to Abbas]: Come, O infidel army, gather around the standard-bearer of the Lonely King. My name is Hakam,

Abbas's murderer, I shall smash his brain with my club. 'Abbas, profess your faith before I cut off your head and separate it from your body

Abbas: Alas, my two hands fell from my body; they were my wings. Alas, Husayn has lost his standard-bearer. Alas, Zaynab will be humiliated by scornful people. She'll be tormented by my death. Alas, my mother does not know that my two hands have been severed from my body. No one could equal me in strength if my hands were still on my arms. In the midst of this tumult and confusion I hope only to get a glimpse of Husayn's face once more. O Husayn, lonely am I. May I be your sacrifice, you are so kind and generous.

[To Shimr, not noted in index.]

O cowardly oppressor, accursed one. Where is justice, where is humanity? As long as my hands were mine, you did not speak of taking out my brain. Luck is on your side. Otherwise, I would have clawed your heart out like a lion.

Shimr: [Text missing, begins 'Give.....']

Abbas: O God, Hakam's blow has knocked me out. O Husayn, come to my aid, O hope of the Faithful, come and rescue your brother who is soaked in blood.

[Husayn rushes towards Abbas.]

Imam: O brother 'Abbas, O brother 'Abbas, O brother, put your head in my lap.

'Abbas [hallucinating]: Young man, leave me alone, for God's sake.

Imam: Do not grieve, it is I, Husayn, who has come to your side.

'Abbas [to Shimr]: Do not cut off my head. Let me see my brother at my side. I am ashamed before Sakina; do not take me to the tents as long as I am conscious. Sakina had wanted water. I cannot bring her even a drop.

Imam: O 'Abbas, my brother and the backbone of my army, my friend and the strength of my arms, where is your flag? Where are your hands? O strength of my arms, who has cast an arrow into your eyes? O afflicted one, you are shutting your eyes upon this world and are breaking my heart. My friend, my brother. the strength of my arm, Sakina is restless, sitting and waiting. She said, "My uncle, bring water. O God, for the sake of young 'Abbas, I ask you to forgive the sins of all the Shi'a.

1. The play must have been performed in a coffee-house, and the actor playing the role of Ibn Sa'd makes this remark on purpose so that the audience will remember that they are only actors, not real villains.

2. i.e., to 'Ali's grave, so that his spirit might mollify Husayn.

[1] [1]

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