

cohesion. In the closing years of the century, the movement still aspires to achieve for its followers the same degree of political rights and social acceptance that the democratic countries have gradually accorded to other minorities in their midst.

Stephen Donaldson

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MUJUN

This Arabic word denotes frivolous and humorous descriptions of indecent and obscene matters in stories and poems, what is sometimes called **pornography**. It is an important theme in Arabic literature, appearing often in combination with *sukhf*, scurrilousness and shamelessness. The most famous example of mujun is the stories of the *Thousand and One Nights*, in which the story-teller saves herself through the power of her imagination. Mujun can be considered as a verbal liberation from the shackles of decency, a kind of literary protest against social, and therefore also Islamic, norms and values.

With its obscenity, slander, and blasphemy, it meant to shock society. It stood for enjoyment of pleasure, drinking of wine, and spending the night with wide-buttocked beardless youths or licentious women—not secretively as Islamic morals required, but openly, ignoring blame which would arise from behaving in such a sinful and shameful way. In principle it ought not to go beyond words, but of course it did. Nonetheless, mujun texts undoubtedly went far beyond practice and therefore have to be used very carefully when drawing conclusions about reality. But fantasies, especially when they are popular, give us insight into a social reality which exists next to official Islamic morals.

For the most part, sexual and scatological humor of this kind would be covered only in the language of the people, and not in literature. Only in periods of cultural bloom and a high level of social tolerance did it acquire a place in literature.

In the ninth and tenth centuries mujun was highly popular with the ruling elite of the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad. Learned and religious people became fascinated by it, as for example the vizier Ibn 'Abbad (ca. 936-95). The most popular mujun writer of that time was Ibn al-Hajjaj (ca. 941-1001), whose work consisted of obscenity and scatology in its purest form. He compared his poetry with a sewer and with an involuntary emission from the anus: "When I speak the stench of the privy rises up towards you." Ironically, he himself served for some time in Baghdad as the official in charge of public morals!

Mujun was also used in an educational sense, rationalized by the idea that humor would stimulate and refresh the mind. Highly learned and respectable theologians and lawyers suddenly diverted their readers by digressions of mujun. Shaykh Salah ad-din as-Safadi for example wrote an essay about the size of the body-openings of women and boys in the middle of a very serious juridical work. Probably the best mujun, written with style and

wit, can be found in the work of Abu Nuwas. One also finds mujun in Arab erotic works like Al-Tifashi's *Les délices des coeurs* (thirteenth-century Egypt) and Al-Nafzawi's *The Perfumed Garden* (fifteenth-century Tunisia). Most mujun, however, is not yet translated, which is most regrettable, because it would provide a major source of information, especially in regard to homosexual behavior.

Maarten Schild

MUKHANNATH

This Arabic and Persian word (plural *mukhannathūn*) denotes boys or men who dress and behave effeminately. In particular, the term refers to those who work as homosexual prostitutes, and who combine this trade with singing, dancing, or domestic chores. Mukhannathun imitate women in their movements and voice, and also in their use of perfume, make-up, and ornamentation. While their hair-style and clothing are effeminate, differing from the male's, they are also distinct from female styles: this differentiates the mukhannathūn from both sexes and symbolizes their social position. Socially, they are neither men nor women. Mukhannathūn are not regarded as men, because their appearance is not manly. Moreover, their unmanly occupations (particularly homosexual prostitution, in which they take the passive, female role) make them even less suitable for a man's position in society. Because they are "inferior" to men and have renounced their manhood through their behavior, they are allowed to associate openly with women (Koran 24:31), and women treat them practically as equals. However, the mukhannathun have more freedom than the traditional Islamic woman, not being hindered by the female role. They are not accepted as women because of their provocative behavior, and their occupations are just as unsuitable for virtuous women as for men. As a result, they find themselves in a position which might be called intermedi-

ate, outside of the male/female dichotomy. Neither the prescribed role behavior of men or women is applicable to them, and sanctions against them are not necessary because they are not judged as men or women. Since they have no social role at all, they are regarded as "outsiders."

The mukhannath can be viewed as a socially acknowledged form of effeminate behavior, and, in particular, passive homosexual behavior. Although the occupation of prostitute is considered shameful, the mukhannathun fulfil a social need by indirectly protecting the honor of women; because they do not have a defined social role, their behavior can be generally accepted. The reasons for becoming a mukhannath are not clear, but probably result from a refusal of the masculine role or an inability to perform it, which may stem from a preference for passive homosexual behavior and/or a sort of psychological effeminacy which can result in transvestism or, in the extreme case, transsexualism. Economic motives can also play an important role in this process.

In former times, the mukhannathun had a bad reputation, probably as a result of their provocative behavior as singers and dancers, and, of course, their sexual behavior, which was no secret. From time to time, harsh action was taken against them, ranging from banishment to castration. Often they were the victims of mockery. In Sufism, the mystic current of Shi'ite Islam, mukhannathun were sometimes considered as symbols of unreliability, since they alternately presented themselves as men and women. The noted Sufi poet Rumi described them as ridiculous creatures, who thought like women and who were attached to worldly pleasures; he regarded them as caught up in "forms" and not in "meanings," the latter being the province of the truly masculine.

Western observers have traditionally been mystified by the phenomenon of the mukhannath, which they tried to define as hermaphroditism or transsexual-

ity; both terms are oversimplifications of a social role they clearly did not understand.

Contemporary examples can be found in Turkey (*köçek*) and in Oman (*khanith*), and probably throughout the entire Middle East. Other societies of the past and present have presented similar phenomena: the constellation of homosexual prostitution, cross-dressing, singing and dancing is reported from Greece and China, and the hijra in India also appear similar. These transcultural similarities should be carefully studied, for the presence of general similarities may conceal more important differences.

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Maarten Schild

MUNRO, HECTOR HUGH
(PSEUDONYM SAKI;
1870-1916)

British fiction writer, playwright, and journalist. Saki is best known for his witty and exquisitely crafted short stories, which often satirize the mores of Edwardian society, or describe a world of supernatural horror underlying the tranquil English countryside.

Munro was born in Burma, the son of a career officer in the British military police. Following the death of his mother when he was two, he and his older siblings, Ethel Mary and Charles Arthur, were sent to live with his grandmother and two aunts in western England. Though an old Scottish family with aristocratic pretensions, the Munros had only a modest income. Nevertheless, the boys were raised to be gentlemen, and throughout his life Munro thought and wrote as a Tory. The despotism and intolerance of the aunts informed a recurrent theme of his fiction:

the tyranny of dullards over their natural superiors, and the eventual revenge and triumph of the latter.

Munro was educated at Exmouth and at Bedford grammar school. In 1887 his father retired from the military, returned to England, and took his three children on a series of travels throughout Europe. In Davos, Switzerland, Hector Hugh, then eighteen years old and uncommonly attractive, was a frequent visitor at the home of John Addington Symonds, a prominent British writer who was the foremost authority on "masculine love" among the ancient Greeks. Munro appears to have accepted Symonds as his mentor in matters of literary style as well as sexual philosophy.

In 1893 Munro joined the military police in Burma. Here he observed the exotic customs of the inhabitants, and acquired a collection of animals, including a tiger cub. He discovered the advantages of having a houseboy, and throughout the rest of his life was seldom without one. Contracting malaria, he was invalided out of the service. He then turned to journalism, writing satirical pieces for the *Westminster Gazette*. He adopted the pen name, Saki, a word with esoteric homoerotic connotations. (Poems by Hafiz and other Sufi writers, as well as by Goethe in his collection, *West-östlicher Diwan*, are addressed to the "saki" or cupbearer, a beautiful boy, the object of male desire.)

After a number of years as a foreign correspondent for *The Morning Post*, Munro settled in London. Here he wrote a series of short stories: *Reginald* (1904), *Reginald in Russia* (1910), *The Chronicles of Clovis* (1912), and *Beasts and Super-Beasts* (1914). The stories are in turn playful, cynical, uncanny, and hilariously funny—a singular blend of urbanity and paganism. At their best, they represent the highest of high camp.

Though Munro's penchant for young men was well known, he was neither secretive nor blatant. The short stories contain numerous sly allusions to the