

## Hausa Literate Love Poetry

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**Abstract:** Literate love poetry in Hausa differs, in some respects, from other genres. In the first instance, it is not among the well recognised literate Hausa genres like *wa'azi* (exhortatory), *madahu* (praise) or even *siyasa* (political) ones that have been handed down since the 19<sup>th</sup> century [1]. Its themes are not aimed at conveying any important message to the audience. The message is targeted to an individual only rather than the society as a whole. Similarly, most writers of love poetry rarely reveal themselves to the general audience. It is the purpose of this paper to discuss the categories of this genre.

**Keywords:** Hausa genres, *wa'azi*, *madahu*, *siyasa*.

**INTRODUCTION**

Songs have continued to be composed on various themes of Hausa poetry including love. This is due to the influence of their era. In spite of this trend love poetry composers in the past were not often known nor did they make themselves known. Indeed, today's composers often do not expose themselves nor do they make their compositions public. The main reason for this is that love poetry is considered to be an obscene composition. Traditionally, a Hausa person feels ashamed if it is known that love exists between him and the opposite sex. He cannot tell her face to face that he loves her. In order to divulge this love he seeks the assistance of one of his friends who is eloquent, or one of her female friends to do so.

In the case of a girl or woman, it is almost impossible for her to tell a man that she loves him even if she recognises that he loves her, not even through her friends. However, she can notify him through her actions or if it is the man who first makes the approach. This type of relationship is portrayed in some genres of Hausa oral literature like the folktales (Hausa, *gatana/tatsuniya*)[2] and girls' songs[3].

It is the contact with foreigners like the Arabs and Europeans that brought about the existence of love poetry among the Hausa people in the twentieth century. This is why the Hausa composers of this type of poetry are youths who are enlightened in western education, familiar with European customs and have read its poetry and literature. There are also composers who have studied ancient Arab poetry called *gazal* [4] in which the poet praises the girl he loves. These modern day poets often do not hide their names. Some of them even reveal the names of the women on whom they compose.

**Divisions of Love Poetry**

Ni nufina son ki nake  
So na aure kar ki sake

Shi ko wancan san da yake  
Duk bi}ar za }inki yake

**Translation**

My desire is to love you  
Be assured this love is for marriage

The love offered by that person  
Is focussed just to taste your sweetness [5]  
(Muhammad Wada Hamza: Unrequited Love)

It is the view of this writer that love poetry can be divided into two types, just as love itself is in two forms viz, to love a lady in order to marry her and to love her with luscious intention. Conversely there is a love poem composed based on faith in God, where the poet praises her good character, her beauty and the love they have for each other. The entire poem is composed with decorum and respect. For instance, in respect of her character, one poet writes.

In na tuna han }urinki ko da }an }ani  
Sannan nake kuka wajen begena

Duka duniya na waiwaya na bincike  
Canjinki lalle zaiwuya a wajjena

Na tabbata ba za na samu kamarki ba  
Kuma sonki bai rasuwa cikin rayina

Da za na samu zama kamar }arni guda  
Wallahi sonki ba zai gushe ba a raina  
(Abdul }adir Othman Jelani: Bege)

### Translation

If I remember your patience no matter how casually,  
I at once break in tears in my eulogy

Howsoever I turn, look and check at every where in this world,  
Surely, to find your replacement for me would be difficult

I doubt not that I cannot obtain one like you,  
Nor would from my heart my love for you depart

If I would stay alive for a century,  
By God, my love for you would not depart from me [6].  
(Abdul }adir Othman Jelani: Eulogy)

In another poem full of an intense love which distresses the heart and distracts the mind, the poet says:

Ko da cikin sallar farilla ne nake  
Sai zuciyata ta raya wajjanki

Na bu }a shafin nan na babin zuciya  
Na bubbuga mai tambarin sunanki

Ga kyan tsayi ga kyan halitta ga kama  
Kowa yana }aunar ki in ya gan ki

Ga kyan hali ga kwarjini ga farra'a  
Sannan da kamun kai da halin kirki

Saurin fushi ko ko fa }a ko ja-in-ja  
Ba ko guda, ya za a sam mai }in ki?  
(Bello Sa'id: Tsarabar Masoyi)

### Translation

Even if I am saying my compulsory prayers  
My heart would of necessity turn towards you

For on the pages of the chapter of my heart  
I have imprinted your name

You have a good stature with a sublime physique and beauty  
Whoever beholds you will love you

You possess good characters and aura with a pleasing composure  
And added to these you are very responsible and kind

Anger, prone to fight or to squabbles  
None is found in you; how then could one be found to dislike you? [7]  
(Bello Sa'id: The Lover's Souvenir)

The early Hausa poets rarely wrote this poetry, and where they did compose they would not give anybody access to such compositions. This might explain why they composed *gazal* only in their Arabic *qasidah* as argued by Yahya in his seminal paper. In fact, even some of the contemporary poets do not give access to their love poems. However one of these poets, Haliru Wurno, composed the following on his beloved divorced wife:

15. Niy yi A'i da 'Yar Fulani  
Na yi amre da tsakani  
Na yi Hausawa Fulani  
Gobirawa har na {wanni  
Na yi sunka shigo gidana.
16. Nit tuno Mairi ganin su  
Kyansu ko halin zamansu  
Ba su kai Mairi halinsu  
Ko turare na jikinsu  
Sunka sa in za mu kwana.
17. Na fi son warin jikinta  
Binta Sudan bai kamatta  
Na fi son warin hamutta  
Nata ban son [an liwanta  
Dud da mai Askar ga jina  
(Alhaji Haliru Wurno: Soyayya Ruwan Zuma)

#### Translation

15. I married A'i and 'Yar Fulani  
I married legally (with a guardian)  
I married from among Hausa and Fulani tribes  
And from the Gobir of Kwanni  
They lived in my house for I married them.
16. Seeing them reminded me of Mairi  
For neither their beauty nor social living  
They are far below Mairi even in good character  
Comparing the perfume on their bodies  
On which they spray before we go to bed-
17. I prefer the bad smell of her body  
For the perfume, Binta Sudan, does not match hers  
I prefer the odour of her armpit  
I dislike Jan-liwanta perfume  
Not even the mai-askar perfume in my sense of smell. [8]  
(Alhaji Haliru Wurno: Water of Love)

In the above poem Haliru Wurno departs from the habit of his predecessors of non exposure of beloved's name. Nonetheless he refrains from use of obscene and vulgar statements. In this respect the poem falls into our first division of Hausa love poetry.

Decorum is absent in the second type of Hausa love poetry. Here the sole concern of the poet is eulogising his loved one and her ability in satisfying him in bed. Absent also in this poetry is the praise of her good character or expressing pure love which touches the heart. It contains obscenity and vulgarity only.

From among the compositions in this type of poetry that of Malam Muhammadu Gi[a]o (popularly known as Mr. G), is outstanding. This poem is undoubtedly replete with vulgarity including the description of the expertise in

sexual intercourse of the praised lady. It describes her beauty and how she lures men. For an example, in the poem he says:

13. Jikinki har abada ba a ga danshin gumi  
Yawan wanka da wanki ga iya kwanciya
25. [uwawunki ya isa daidai yanda du ake so  
Du a jikinki ba kuskure ba inda ya tawaye
26. Mamanki mai gindin tasa da kyan juwawu  
Ga ki da jakalaken ciki kyakkyawar cibiya
31. Jikin maza sai ya motsa kadan kin wuce  
Kuma su biya bukata cikin wando ba dauriya  
(Muhammadu Gi[a]o: Wa }ar Soyayya)

#### Translation

13. Never on your body will the moisture of sweatiness be felt  
You take bath and do washing many times; you are an expert in bed
25. Your buttocks are well set to liking  
There is not a deficiency anywhere on your body
26. Breasts are (set) like the (flattened) bottom of a bowl, beautiful buttocks  
You have a well shaped abdomen and nice (looking) navel
31. The bodies of men will be tickled if you pass by  
Then within their trousers perforce they release (the outcome of their desire). [9]  
(Muhammadu Gi[a]o: A Love Poem)

The stanzas above are but a few examples of obscenity and vulgarity in the poem. On reading them one will unarguably sense that the poem is one of obscenity, not of true and sincere love. The stanzas portray vulgarity devoid of a stint of bashfulness and decency whatsoever. They suffice to illustrate this second type of Hausa love poetry. Nonetheless, let us further illustrate our point on this type of love poetry of obscenity with the following,

Ma`u kullum ina yin tunanin ki  
In mafarkin ki sai in ga na gan ki  
Na matso gunki na kama hannunki  
Har ina ludda baya da }irjinki  
Runguma ba irin wadda ban sha ba

Nai zala }a tsakanin }afafunki  
Nai hawa ba kwana babu jan birki  
Ba rashin mai zama na ciko tanki  
Ba ragewa zama na }ule maki  
Tu }a Balbo ka san ta fi Lanroba

Na yi sabis ga bodinta har inji  
Baturi ga shi sabo yana caji  
Ban kulawa da in duba maleji  
Sai giya nai ta sawa ina canji  
Har na sha gangara ban yi hutu ba  
(Yaro B/K: Ma`u)

#### Translation

I think of you every day, Ma`u  
I see you once I dream about you,  
Moving close to you holding your hand,

And even caressing your back and front,  
Indeed I experienced every kind embrace.

I twiddled between your legs,  
I climbed without obstacles and no brakes,  
No running out of fuel for I filled my tank,  
There was no slowing down the speed for I reached the limit,  
Driving a Volvo car, as you surely know, surpasses that of a Landrover.

I serviced its body as well as its engine,  
Its battery is new and charging,  
I care not to check the speedometer,  
I only change the gears one after the other,  
Till I went down the hill without any rest.[10]  
(Yaro B/K: Ma'u)

Here, the poet describes a dream he always have. He gives a vivid picture of himself moving close to his beloved (presumably, girlfriend), holding her hand, caressing her and eventually embracing her. He then goes on with an even more vivid and vulgar description of his dream. Thus in the last two stanzas he uses imagery to describe his sexual activity, his body being a Volvo car the engine of which and battery are new. He made sure that this car has been serviced. For this reason he drives it with all his ability with no hesitation (the brakes) and the road, the girl (very vulgar to explain), being very smooth.

### Style in Love Poetry

The noticeable beauty in love poetry is that the poets are very skilful in their choice of techniques to convey their message to their loved ones.

There are stylistic features with which they give beauty to the form of the poems, particularly the use of imagery (Hausa, siffantawa) and its varieties. For an example, in his effort to express his love to his beloved, one poet says,

Kin bugan sar}a a wuya  
Kodayaushe bin ki nake  
  
Na riga na mi}a wuya  
Rayuwata son ki take  
  
In na yo carar zakara  
Kyarkyarata gunki take  
(Muhammad Wada Hamza: Son Maso Wani)

### Translation

3. You chained my neck,  
I follow you every time.
4. I have already surrendered,  
  
My life loves you.
5. If I cock-like cack,   
All my cackle is towards you.[5]  
(Muhammadu Wada Hamza: Unrequited Love)

In the above stanzas Wada Hamza personified himself like a dog or donkey (v.1) which are normally chained on the neck to be dragged. In verse 3 the poet again personified himself as a cock which is known to cackle trying to woo a hen.

It is not himself alone that the poet personifies but even his rival is not spared. However, while he positively personified self he expectedly negatively does so to the rival,

Ni nake naman jimina  
Shi kitsen kolo ko yake

Mujiya ce shi a dawa  
Ni ko alhuduhuda nake

Kin ga ragon Makka nake  
Bodarin daji ko yake

Ni turaren jubda nake  
Shi ko ja~a kar ki sake  
(Muhammad Wada Hamza: Son Maso Wani)

### Translation

I am the meat of ostrich,  
While he is the fat of a vulture

He is an owl in the forest,  
While I am a Cameroon hoopoe

See, I am a Makkan ram,  
As for him, he is the bush zorilla.

Note that I am the civet-cat musk,  
While he is a stinking shrew rat, take care.[5]  
(Muhammad Wada Hamza: Son Maso Wani/ Unrequited Love)

While in the above stanzas the poet uses personification to describe himself as either being the meat of an ostrich or a hoopoe or a holy ram (being from Makkah) and a perfume, he describes his rival with detested things like a vulture's fat, an owl, bush zorilla and shrew mouse the last two which stink.

In a love poem, this time of a pure love not one of obscenity, the poet describes his beloved as follows:

5. Ke ce farar tauraruwa mai haskaka  
Sassa da annuri, taho Gamzaki
6. Haskenki ya zo ya rufe min zuciya  
Har ban ganin kowa fa in baicin ki
7. Ya mamaye birninta duk ya kankane  
Har ban tunani ko ka]an sai naki  
(Bello Sa'id: Tsarabar Masoyi)

### Translation

5. You are the bright star that brings light  
All sections, O Rising Star come to me
6. Your light has enveloped my heart  
So much so that I none other than you
7. It has taken over all of its (heart's) city,  
So that I think of none but you [7]  
(Bello Sa'id: The Lover's Souvenir)

Here the poet personifies his beloved as a bright, shining star full of awry and surpassing the dawn and sunrise. Similarly, in verse 18 the poet personifies himself as a book which contains chapters, wherein he opens the chapter of the heart and stamped the name of his beloved. This is how he displays the imagery:

18. Na bu]a shafin nan na babin zuciya  
Na bubbuga mai tambarin sunanki  
(Bello Sa'id: Tsarabar Masoyi)

**Translation**

18. For on the pages of the chapter of my heart  
I have imprinted your name.[7]  
(Bello Sa'id: The Lover's Souvenir)

It is to be noted that even the obscene love poets do employ imagery and other attractive stylistic techniques. For example, one poet says,

42. Kadan ana son za}I sai a nemi zuma  
Ko a cikin zumar ke farar sa}a ce na jiya
43. A mai da mata taurarin cikin duniya  
Du a cikin dare sun yi haske ya game duniya
44. Naki hasken rana ne wajen gwadawa  
In kin fito babu tauraron da yake tsaya  
(Muhammad Gi}a}o: Wa}ar Soyayya)

**Translation**

42. Honey is sought if it is sweetness that is desired  
You are the white honey, for I heard of its varieties that is the best
43. Were the women of the world be turned into stars  
And they all brighten the whole world
44. Then if (they were) compared, your brightness would be the sun  
For no star would be seen if you appear. [9]  
(Muhammad Gi}a}o: A Love Poem)

In verse 42 the poet compares the sexual pleasure from his beloved to the sweetness of the best honey, and in verses 43 and 44 he personifies all the women of the world as star while his beloved as the sun, all in terms of brightness.

Similarly, another poet in the same genre as the one just quoted, employs personification to describe his loved one:

- Tun da na gane kwana cikin taska  
Ban zuwa in yi bo}o cikin bukka  
Na taho gunki in samu albarka  
Kai ni birnin ma}I mai kashe lakka  
Gimbiya Ma'u dube ni na tuba  
(Yaro B/K: Ma'u)

**Translation**

- Since I am used to sleeping in a mansion  
I won't go for a hut to squat  
Here I come to you to be blessed  
Take me to the sugar city that weakens the body  
O Queen Ma'u! Please cast your glance at me, forgive me [10].  
(Yaro B/K: Ma'u)

It is to be noted at this juncture that the use of the techniques discussed so far, is not the exclusive preserve of literate love poetry. The techniques are equally found in the compositions of oral poets in order to draw the attention of the audience. Notice the following as an example,

- Ke ce fitila,      Mai haske duhu  
Ko lantarki,      Mai haske} aka  
(Haruna Oji:Mun Yi Haske)

### Translation

You are the lamp that brings light in the darkness,  
Or an electric bulb that brightens the room[11].  
(Haruna Oji: We are brightened)

In yet another love poem to his beloved the poet uses hyperbolism to describe her thus,

Abin da ya gyaran raina  
Duk tsuntsu na cikin Kano  
Shi ma ro}on Allah yake  
Allah bai wa Haruna Balaraba

Ko kifi na cikin Kano  
Wanda yake ruwa sai ro}o yake  
Allah bai wa Haruna Balaraba

Su jama'a na cikin Kano  
Ko su ro}on Allah suke  
Allah bai wa Haruna Balaraba  
(Haruna Oji: Bankwana da Balaraba)

### Translation

What has pleased me is this,  
That the birds in Kano,  
All pray to Allah,  
May Allah bless Haruna with Balaraba.

Even the fishes in Kano,  
Swimming do pray,  
O Allah bless Haruna with Balaraba.

As for the people in Kano,  
They too pray to Allah,  
O Allah bless Haruna with Balaraba.[11]  
(Haruna Oji: Farewell to Balaraba)

### CONCLUSION

In this paper it has been pointed out that being shy to be seen as vulgar is responsible for dearth of love poetry in Hausa. It is the contention of this writer that there are two kinds of love poetry in Hausa and are largely composed based on the sensibilities of the individual, whether moulded by religious teachings (Islamic) or secularism (Western or Eastern). The themes are further moulded by the way Hausa society views beauty in women as well as its expectations of a woman's intimate actions towards her opposite sex and vice versa. The paper demonstrates the style of Hausa love poetry of both pure and vulgar compositions, is characterised by the use of such techniques that convey superlative meanings. These include the imageries of simile, personification, symbolism and hyperbole.

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