

The textual thresholds in works of forbidden discourse in the Arab heritage

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Abstract :

This study examines the evolution of taboo discourse in classical Arabic literature, analyzing how pre-modern religious scholars systematically transformed this sensitive subject into legitimate scientific knowledge. Employing Gérard Genette's theory of paratexts, the research investigates three key approaches used to codify sexual discourse: religious justification, linguistic documentation, medical framing as therapeutic science, and humorous literature. The study shows how these religious scholars reconciled ethical considerations and scientific approaches, exploiting paratextual thresholds to render sexual knowledge accessible in a respectful framework. The findings highlight the complex interplay between censorship and knowledge production in medieval Islamic culture, offering more profound insight into how societies navigate taboo subjects through nuanced textual strategies.

Key Words: Textual Thresholds – Taboo Discourse - Arab Heritage –Genette Gérard –Silenced Discourse.

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Introduction:

Textual thresholds are a fundamental element in literary criticism, offering interpretative possibilities illuminating various obscure aspects of literary and creative texts. They enable readers to uncover multiple layers of content and textual significances through the close relationship between a text's thresholds as an applied critical tool and the text itself as the subject of critique.

Although the concept of textual thresholds is relatively modern, this does not preclude the application of its critical and analytical mechanisms to classical Arabic texts. Our aim is to explore the various meanings associated with these texts, particularly since the chosen subject matter pertains to the science of coitus (Ilm Al-Bah), which constitutes a distinct discourse belonging to the category of forbidden speech. Historically, this discourse manifests in two forms: scattered fragments in classical texts and specialized works on the science of coitus. The first form consists of general contributions by various writers preserved in classical works such as Kitab Al-Aghani by Al-Faraj Al-Iṣfahani and Al-Iqd Al-Farid by Ibn Abd Rabbih Al-Andalussi. While, in the second form, scholars authored specialized books on the science of coitus, drawing our attention to the apparent contradiction between the forbidden nature of these works and the religious, literary, and social standing of their authors. Such contradiction leads us to ask the following research questions:

1. What motivated these esteemed scholars to delve into such a subject?
2. What were their intended objectives in addressing it?

To answer these questions, we adopted a descriptive-analytical approach, supplemented in the applied section by semiotic and textual thresholds techniques to study the following selection of classical works specializing in the science of coitus, listed in chronological order:

- Nuzhat Al-Albab Fima La Yujad fi Kitab by Shihab Eddine Ahmad Al-Tifashi (d. 651 AH)
- Al-Wishah fi Fawa'id Al-Nikah by Al-Hafed Jalal Eddine Al-Suyuti (d. 911 AH)
- Rojoua Al-Cheikh Ila Sibah fi Alkowa ala Albah by Ahmad Ben Suleiman Ibn Kamal Pasha (d. 940 AH).

1. Textual Thresholds in Gérard Genette

The concept of textual thresholds revolves around the meanings accompanying the text and contributing to clarifying and elucidating its meaning. The text rarely appears naked without companions that help produce its meaning and significance, such as the book's name, titles, dedications....These textual companions guide and accompany readers into the various worlds of the text, and their importance lies in their ability to encompass the surrounding atmosphere of the

text, in addition to the stimulation they exert on the readers through this encompassing. Therefore, these thresholds can be considered as a set of texts that stimulate and surround the body of the text (Bilal, 2000) through a series of practical actions that manifest in two main functions:

- The first function is an aesthetic one, concerned with the external form of the book.
- The second function is a pragmatic one, approaching the text through reading and interpretation.

It is well known that the concept of textual thresholds matured through the work of the French critic Gerard Genette, especially through his two books (Genette, 1997).

Palimpsestes (1982), a comprehensive book on the concepts related to Genette's critical and poetic project, especially concerning the concept of poetics, which crystallized in this book and became concerned with the transcendentals of the text, or more precisely the text's transcendent relation, i.e., everything that makes a text enter into an overt or covert relationship with other texts, which can be defined in five types, which Genette called textual transcendence, namely:

- **Intertextuality:** The actual presence of one text within another, either directly or indirectly, with or without the author's awareness. Examples include citations enclosed in quotation marks, whether documented or not.
- **Paratext:** Also called the parallel text or textual thresholds, this refers to the text surrounding the main text (the body of the text) such as the title, introduction, and conclusion.
- **Metatext:** The relationship that unites two texts where one talks about the other without necessarily mentioning it. This relationship can involve explanation, interpretation, commentary, or critique.
- **Post-text:** This refers to the relationship between a later text and an earlier one, where the second reproduces the first in a new manner.
- **Unified Text:** Mentioned by Genette in his book Introduction to the Unified Text, he defined it as a set of general or transcendent characteristics to which each individual text belongs.

Thresholds (1987), in which he elaborated one of the complex concepts of contemporary poetics, paratext, with explanation and analysis. It is a term still witnessing ongoing use and communication in the global critical field, concerning the relationship it creates with what surrounds the text, its accompanying and parallel texts, and the effectiveness of its audience. In its general sense, paratext refers to thresholds, as indicated by the book's title, and in its specific sense, it refers to a parallel text to the original text, whose task is to describe what surrounds the text, it is only known through it and by it. This is where paratext gains its importance, especially since its principle is based on three questions in order to determine (place: where? time: when? manner: how?), and it includes the following types:

- **Surrounding Text:** These are the texts accompanying the original text within the book, such as the cover image, the author's name, the title, the subtitle, the preface,

the dedication, the publisher's note, and other internal accompanying texts. Under this type, we have (publishing surrounding text and compositional surrounding text).

- External Text: These are the texts accompanying the original text from outside the book, such as interviews, private correspondence, conferences, symposiums, and other external accompanying texts. Under this type, we have (publishing external text, compositional external text (general and specific) (Genette, 1997).

2. Thresholds in Classical Arabic Heritage

Upon examining classical Arabic heritage, we can discern a certain alignment between the ancient Arab conceptualization of writing, book composition, and consideration for the reader's taste and some of the theoretical foundations that gave rise to the modern Western literary notion of textual thresholds. Classical Arab scholars distinguished between two levels of discourse in any given text:

1. The core text level: This refers to the main body of the discourse, whether prose or poetry, that the author intends to convey to readers.
2. The paratextual level: This consists of the accompanying elements that frame the core text, typically appearing as introductory material as was customary in classical Arabic book composition. The function of the paratext is defined by two key processes:
 - Description (Al-Wasf): An exposition of the core discourse.
 - Presentation (Al-Taqdim): The prefatory remarks that introduce the discourse to the readers (El-Idrissi, 2015, p. 27).

Due to their civilizational advancement, classical Arab scholars recognized the necessity of adhering to specific compositional conventions. They developed a practice of prefacing their works with introductory elements that preceded the core intent of their discourse. This awareness emerged gradually, initially manifesting as scattered guidelines and directives within general treatises before evolving into dedicated, standalone works. These conventions and prefatory elements, which precede the main discourse, were meticulously detailed in certain classical Arabic texts.

2.1. The foreword

The concept of the foreword dominated, and quite prominently, the texts of early-generation writers. It was frequently used to denote the opening sections of texts, whether they were poems, epistles, speeches, or books.

The term foreword derived its authority from its linguistic connotation of primacy: Sadr Al-Amr (the beginning of a matter) means its origin, and Saddara Kitabaho (to preface one's book) means to give it a foreword, as noted in Lissan Al-Arab.

2.2. The Author's Name

In classical Arabic tradition, the author's name serves as a fundamental marker of textual identity. A text without an author is considered a non-text - lacking legitimacy and identity. As Abdelfattah Kilito observes in classical Arabic culture, an utterance becomes a literary text only when attributed to an acknowledged source... In other words, literature rests on the concept of original authorship, making every discourse dependent on an author who guarantees its validity as text... No text

can establish itself without an author's name to authenticate it (Kilito, 1983). This practice of textual attribution was deeply rooted in Arab tradition, leaving anonymous works largely disregarded.

2.3. The title

The semantic significance of the term title and its derivational forms reveals its essential function as a textual marker. Linguistically, a title is defined as the distinctive feature by which something is identified. This lexical understanding allows us to conceptualize the title as a signifier for the text, characterized by conciseness and economy of expression, possessing two fundamental semiotic dimensions: intentionality and interpretability. The title holds paramount importance as the reader's first point of contact with a text. In Arabic scholarly tradition, titles carry two significant functions:

- **Intentional Meaning:** Expressing the work's general content and summarizing its core ideas
- **Communicative Function:** Serving as a semiotic bridge between sender (author) and receiver (reader)

As Al-Kalai explicitly states in his explanation of titles "a book's title may be so called for two reasons: First, it indicates the work's purpose... Second, it's termed a title because it identifies both the work's origin and destination" (Al-Kalai, 1966, p. 52). This dual function finds support in the linguistic roots of the word (title), which lexically means the distinguishing mark by which something is recognized. Through this linguistic lens, we can conceptualize the title as a textual signifier characterized by conciseness, embodying two crucial semiotic dimensions: intentionality and interpretability (Kilito, 1983).

2.4. The introduction

Since the introduction plays a crucial role in creating a descriptive discourse for the book's texts and covers every aspect of the book's journey from idea to existence, and from a project in the author's mind to a tangible reality in the hands of readers and recipients, it has garnered careful consideration and attention in the Arab heritage. The text's descriptive discourse elucidates the nature of the subject matter, delineates the cognitive scope of the work, discloses the author's subjective and objective motivations for writing it, and occasionally highlights the theoretical foundations that inform his concepts and conclusions as well as the methodological constraints that govern the ways in which they are presented, analyzed, and defended. It also contained a succinct synopsis of the book's key themes as well as its key chapters and sections (El-Idrissi, 2015). These contents certainly show the recipient how to approach the text with all the information he need to comprehend and get the most out of it.

3. Forbidden Discourse in Arabic Heritage

The concept of forbidden discourse intersects with two related but distinct concepts the implicit and the implied all sharing the common trait of being unspoken. According to the reasons for avoiding explicit expression fall into three categories:

A. **Ambiguity of expression:** Uncertainty about whether a subject should be addressed openly.

B. The allure of indirectness: The rhetorical power of suggestion often surpasses that of direct statement.

C. Social propriety: Norms of decorum may prohibit straightforward discussion.

D. While these reasons explain many instances of indirect communication, they do not fully account for forbidden discourse what is deliberately left unsaid. Recognizing this gap, Kerbrat-Orecchioni introduced a fourth reason, central to forbidden discourse:

E. Strategic intent where the speaker consciously avoids any hint or allusion to the subject altogether. This aligns with the Arabic concept of intentionality which serves as the defining criterion distinguishing forbidden discourse from other forms of unspoken meaning (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1998).

In this context, answering the question about the reason of deliberate silence on the sexual discourse in Arabic heritage amounts into two conflicting tendencies:

- Moral and religious constraints: many topics were suppressed due to ethical and doctrinal sensitivities.
- Partial disclosure: despite this silence, sexual themes surfaced sporadically in general works before appearing in specialized treatises.

3.1. Forbidden Discourse in Arabic Heritage

Sexual discourse infiltrated classical literature through multiple disciplinary lenses:

- Literature: Treated sexuality as a subject of humor and wit (e.g., *Al-Iqd Al-Farid* by Ibn Abd Rabbih, *Kitab Al-Aghani* by Al-Iṣfahani).
- Linguistics: Addressed sexual vocabulary as an integral part of lexical heritage (e.g., *Al-Mukhassas* by Ibn Sidah).
- Islamic law: Framed sexuality within legal and ethical boundaries (e.g., *Ahkam Al-Nisa* by Ibn Al-Jawzi, *Tuhfat Al-Aarosse* by Al-Tijani).
- Medicine: Approached sex as a therapeutic subject (e.g., *Al-Qanoun Fi Al-Tibb* by Ibn Sina, *Al-Hawi* by Al-Razi).
- Erotic art: Elevated sexuality to an autonomous artistic discipline.

Though ostensibly forbidden sexual discourse proved unavoidable woven into the fabric of human life and thus addressed, however obliquely, across genres.

3.2. Forbidden Discourse in Specialized Erotic Literature

A group of literary works has transcended the boundaries of forbidden discourse and discussed sex as an independent topic in and of itself. In doing so, they have moved from the concept of sexual prose to the concept of specialized books that address sex from different angles, embodying the tension between prohibition and necessity, and moving societal taboos into strategic authorship (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1998). This is what we will discover through our applied study of a selected sample of specialized books.

4. Textual Thresholds: An Applied Study

4.1. The Book of Nuzhat Al-Albab Fima La Yujad fi Kitab

4.1.1. External Paratextual Thresholds

a. Author's Name Threshold

The author is the eminent judge Shihab Eddine Abu Al-Abbas Ahmad Ibn Yusuf Al-Tifashi Al-Qaysi (580–651 AH). Born in the village of Tifash near Souk Ahras in eastern Algeria, he grew up between Tifash (Algeria) and Gafsa (Tunisia) under the care of his father, a judge, and his teacher, Abu Al-Abbas Ahmad Ibn Abi Bakr Al-Maqdisi. He later studied in Tunis under Muwaffaq Eddine Abd Al-Latif Al-Baghdadi, then moved to Damascus to work under Taj Eddine Al-Kindi. He returned to his homeland to serve as a judge under the Hafids before assuming the same position in Egypt. His travels took him to Armenia, Iraq, and Persia (Al-Tifashi, 1992, pp. 38,41). The author's name threshold conveys two key meanings:

- Intellectual ownership of the work through the explicit attribution.
- The author's religious, literary, and intellectual stature, evident in his titles (Al-Qadi Al-Fadil, Al-Adib Al-Arib, Al-Alim Al-Mutqin).

b. Title Threshold

The author explicitly states the title *Nuzhat Al-Albab Fima La Yujad fi Kitab* consists of an introduction and chapters... The title reflects justificatory and directive aims, presenting the work as an intellectual excursion into uncharted territory as the sexual discourse is a unique scholarly field untouched by prior authors. It represents **an appeal to mind** to explore its secrets.

c. Generic Designation Threshold

In the introduction, the author describes the book as a collection of rare anecdotes, witty poetry, strange tales, and curious accounts that entertain, replace idle chatter, and are preferred over musical melodies. Though some content may seem crude, the intent is moral and educational, drawing from firsthand experiences or reliable sources. The book's editor notes its rarity in Arabic erotic literature, offering a comprehensive survey of overt and covert sexual phenomena in Islamic society up to the mid-7th century AH.

4.1.2. Internal Paratextual Thresholds

a. Dedication Threshold

The book lacks a formal dedication, suggesting the author was motivated by personal interest rather than patronage.

b. Prefatory Discourse Threshold

The introduction follows classical conventions, opening with praise to God and blessings upon the Prophet. It frames the work as a permissible shift from seriousness to levity (Al-Ihmad), blending edification with amusement for discerning readers. The author's religious background is evident in his citation of prophetic hadiths and wise sayings endorsing humor in moderation, justifying his unconventional topic despite his solemn reputation as a judge.

a. Internal Chapter Headings

The twelve chapter titles reflect the book's focus on hidden and overt sexual phenomena in medieval Islamic society, with one exception:

- Chapter 1: On Al-Safaa (slapping) and its benefits referring not to literal slapping but to a parasitic class in royal courts who endured slaps as a form of sadistic patronage.
- Chapters 2–12: Cover pimps, prostitutes, male prostitutes, lesbianism, and other taboo subjects, blending anecdotes, poetry, and social critique.

The headings reveal a cohesive exploration of marginal sexual practices, positioning the book as a pioneering study in its field (Al-Tifashi, 1992).

4.2. The Book of Al-Wishah fi Fawa'id Al-Nikah

4.2.1. External Surrounding Paratexts

a. Author's Name Threshold

The author is Al-Imam Al-Hafed Abu A-Fadl Abd Al-Rahman Ibn Abi Bakr Ibn Muhammad Ibn Sabeq Eddine, known as Jalal Eddine Al-Suyuti (849–911 AH). He was born in Assiout to a jurist father who worked as a judge in Assiout and later as a mufti in the Shafii School in Egypt. Among his teachers were Siraj Eddine Al-Belqini, Taqi Eddine Al-Shibli Al-Hanafī, and Izz Al-Din Al-Hanbali. He engaged in teaching and issuing fatwas, then withdrew from both upon reaching the age of forty. He wrote a brief treatise on this decision entitled Al-Tanfīs Fi Al-Ia'atidar An Tark Al-Ifta Wa Al-Tadris and devoted himself to worship and writing until his death in Damascus. Through the author name threshold, we can identify two important significations. The first is the intellectual property right of the book, through the author's real and explicit name. The second is the status and position of this author (religious, literary, and intellectual) as he is the Imam and pride of the later scholars, a leading figure in religion, and the seal of the huffads.

b. Title Threshold

Al-tawashshuh in language means to wear, and Al-Wishah is what a woman wears as an adornment. As mentioned in Lissan Al-Arab, Al-Wishah is all women's adornment... it is woven from broad leather, studded with jewels, and tied by a woman between her shoulders and waist. The author explicitly states the title of his work in the introduction of the book; saying and I named it Al-Wishah fi Fawa'id Al-Nikah (Al-Suyuti, Unknown, p. 35)

From an interpretive perspective, the title carries the following significations:

- The first is the indication of covering and adornment, based on the linguistic meaning of

Al-Wishah, which inherently includes two boundaries: covering (veiling) on one hand, and adornment on the other. It is as if the author borrowed the linguistic meaning of Al-Wishah and clothed it with another concept, the benefits of marriage (Nikah), intending through this projection to reflect both meanings, by:

- Stripping the concept of Nikah from the excesses of aggressors, the vulgarity of exaggerators, and the obscenity of the indecent, and clothing it with the garment of modesty, by treating this concept through three main sources: religion, language, and custom.

○ Revealing the adornment through this relationship between male and female, considered the greatest sensual pleasure in humans, within the framework of legitimacy (halal).

• Another signification is the indication of the multiple and diverse benefits that result from realizing this concept in a sound and correct manner, far from all forms of deviance and perversion. Foremost among these benefits is the stability of society and its protection from the negative manifestations related to this concept allowing members of the community opportunities to work toward prosperity and growth. It is **an appeal to savor the secrets of this kind of discourse**.

c. Gender Identification Threshold

This book is a summary of another work by the author, titled *Mabasim Al-Milah wa Mabasim Al-Sabah fi Mawsim Al-Nikah*, which included several genres: the genre of ḥadīth and narrations, the genre of language, the genre of anecdotes and news, the genre of rhyme and poetry, the genre of anatomy, the genre of medicine, and the genre of marriage. Due to its length, the author decided to summarize it. He states in his introduction that he found it long, he grew tired of its length, and he became weary of it, so he made this abridgment in about one-tenth of it. He summarized its best qualities from its prose and poetry, and although if he had included only what is commendable in that draft, he have brought here the best of what was good. He has selected every precious gem that is light in weight but high in value. Therefore, this book is a selection of the benefits and pearls found in the other book, which no one can do without in the subject of this book.

The main subject of this book is the art of marriage (Al-Nikah), explored through three aspects (religious, linguistic, and humorous), with the author elaborating and providing examples:

- First, the verses, ḥadīth, and the sayings of virtuous scholars that highlights the virtue and nobility of this art, which God has made one of the means for the continuation of the human race. Without it, humanity would have ceased to exist. The best practitioners of this divine tradition are the prophets and messengers, scholars and imams, kings and leaders... and every rational person.
- Second, the Arabic language, which has enriched this art with a vast, rich, and diverse linguistic resource. The author traced and summarized this linguistic treasure through two important linguistic encyclopedias: *Fiqh Al-Lugha* by Al-Thaalebi and *Al-Afaal* by Ibn Al-Qattaa.
- Third, the anecdotes and stories that have become subjects of amusement and casual conversation, in which the scholar finds an opportunity to relax and break the serious routine that often accompanies him, and the ordinary person finds both benefit and enjoyment.

4.2.2. Internal Surrounding Paratexts

a. Dedication Threshold

The author does not mention a dedication but instead cites the reason that led him to delve into such a subject. This reason generally revolves around two phenomena:

- The large number of people who have written on this topic, ranging from extensive and brief treatments to comprehensive and concise ones. The best work written on this subject is *Tuhfat Al-Aarosse and Motaate Al-Nufousse* by Abu Abd Allah Muhammad Ibn Ahmad Al-Tijani, which is an acknowledgment of excellence and a selfless gesture.
- The author has previously addressed this topic in a several books (the author mentions three titles). This is the fourth book, a selection from and refinement of his last work.

b. Introductory Discourse Threshold

The introduction is composed in rhyme, fitting the subject of the book, particularly the following passage:

"...And the woman was adorned with the head and the private parts, blessed be the one who created the chest, removed the coldness, guided the two paths, honored the cheeks, the prominent breasts, worked with the hands, moved the hips, shook the thighs, directed the two ears, caused the two nostrils to flow, relaxed the nostrils, made the sight more focused, and opened the body's cavities, perfected the forms, and beautified the elbows, increased the lifters, made the waist more attractive, and enhanced the beauty of the hair..." (Al-Suyuti, Unknown, p. 33) .

The overall meaning of these expressions carries sexual connotations that set the stage for the subject of the book. Through the introduction, we can identify the following sectional characteristics:

- Praise of God through His cosmic signs
- Praise of God for the beautiful physical attributes He granted to women
- Praise of God for the sending of the Prophet (PBUH), the guide to the straight path
- Sending blessings upon the Prophet (PBUH)
- The separation of the discourse (and then)
- Entering into the reason that encouraged him to write this book and the method he followed in doing so.
- The conclusion of the introductory discourse with a weak ḥadīth, as if seeking an excuse for discussing women and delving into their affairs.

From the methodology of this introductory discourse, we can discern the author's seriousness in addressing this subject and his adherence to a research-oriented, scientific approach based on this thematic sequence, which is predominant in most of his other works. This is particularly evident given the author's reputation for depth and encyclopedic knowledge across various sciences and fields of study. We also find that his religious and jurisprudential background strongly influenced his treatment of this subject, due to the high scientific standing and status of the scholar.

c. Internal Titles Threshold

The book is divided into three sections:

- The First Section: The Art of Ḥadīth and Narrations
- The Second Section: The Art of Language, which is further divided into four parts:

- Part One: On the Names of Sexual Intercourse (arranged alphabetically and summarized from *Fiqh Al-Lugha* by Al-Thaalebi).
- Part Two: On the Names of Sexual Intercourse (arranged alphabetically and summarized from *Al-Afaal* by Ibn Al-Qattaa).
- Part Three: The Names of the Male
- Part Four: The Names of the Female Sexual Organs
- The Third Section: The Art of Anecdotes and Stories

The author gathered relevant material from each art related to the topic. He began by mentioning some noble verses from the Qur'an, ḥadith, and the sayings of the Companions, Imams, and virtuous scholars that address the virtue and etiquette of sexual intercourse. Then he moved on to the names of sexual intercourse, tracing these terms through two important linguistic encyclopedias: *Fiqh Al-Lugha* by Al-Thaalebi and *Al-Afaal* by Ibn Al-Qattaa. He explicitly cited these two linguistic sources, reflecting his integrity and honesty, stating that Al-Thaalebi mentions in *Fiqh Al-Lugha* that there are 100 names, both explicit and metaphorical, and Ibn Al-Qattaa mentions 1000 names... After researching the linguistic books, the author found about 400 names (Al-Suyuti, Unknown, p. 91) that explicitly or metaphorically refer to sexual intercourse. He also linguistically addressed the two parts of marriage, the male organ and the female organ, and concluded with some anecdotes, stories, and humorous remarks related to the book's subject. The religious personality of the author predominates, followed by his linguistic expertise, in the structuring of this book, which, despite its small size, is an encyclopedic work on its subject. It is an indispensable resource for researchers, especially given the author's status as a scholar, virtuous figure, and renowned linguist

4.3. The Book of *Rojoua Al-Cheikh Ila Sibah fi Alkowa ala Albah*

4.3.1. External Surrounding Paratexts

a. Author's Name Threshold

The work is attributed to Cheikh Chams Eddine Ahmad Ibn Ben Suleiman Alhanafi, famously known as Ibn Kamal Pasha (d. 940 AH). A distinguished Ottoman polymath, he served as a professor, judge (qadi), and ultimately as the Grand Mufti of Istanbul until his death. His dual authority in both judicial (qada) and juridical (ifta) domains, combined with his expertise in Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), lends the work unique scholarly weight.

b. Title Threshold

- Linguistic Definition: The term *Albah* lexically denotes marital intercourse, as confirmed by Al-Moadjem Al-Wasitt Bah: marriage/coitus. Thus, the title translates literally to The Elder's Return to Youthful Vigor in Sexual Potency
- Semiotic Paradox: The title juxtaposes two antithetical life stages:
 - Siba (youth): A phase of growth, pre-legal accountability (Adam El-Taklif), and physical/mental development.
 - Shaykhukha (old age): The zenith of maturity—intellectual, social, and religious. The return (*rojoua*) is inherently metaphorical, as time cannot reverse. This constructs an oxymoron: youth (*sibah*) biologically lacks the capacity for intercourse, which peaks in *shabab* (young adulthood). The forced parallelism with

sibah (instead of shabab) prioritizes rhymed prose (Sajaa) over semantic precision, sacrificing logical coherence for stylistic symmetry.

○ **Thematic Focus:** The strength (Alkowa) specified is singular: sexual potency, the book's exclusive focus. This narrows the title's apparent grandiosity represented by **an appeal to life** to a clinical purpose of restoring virility in aging men.

Critical Analysis of the Title's Rhetoric

- **Compromised Semantics for Stylism:** The choice of Sibah over Shabab exposes a tension between:
 - **Persuasive Accuracy:** Return to Young Adulthood would better reflect biological reality.
 - **Aesthetic Convention:** The Sibah-Albah rhyme adheres to classical Arabic's love of sajaa, even at the expense of factual alignment.
- **Authorial Intent vs. Literal Meaning:** The title's hyperbole (reversing aging) serves as a marketing device, promising miraculous renewal. Yet the content is pragmatic—medical and erotic advice for sustaining sexual function in later life.
- **Cultural Subtext:** The metaphor of rejuvenation taps into premodern Islamicate discourses on:
 - **Geriatric Medicine:** Ottoman interest in longevity and vitality.
 - **Male Anxiety:** The social pressure on elite men to maintain sexual performance as a marker of authority.

c. Threshold of Generic Classification

We can identify the generic classification threshold through the author's emphasis in the introduction that his book covers all aspects of sexual matters relevant to both genders both medically and descriptively. Thus, it is not merely a book of medicines, even if that is the predominant theme. Ibn Kamal Pasha explicitly absolves from any aiding or encouraging sin, as his intention is to strengthen the sexuality of every man afflicted with weakness so that he can live a healthy and lawful life (Pasha, 1902, p. 2). Empowered by these two respects, this book serves as an important reference for its treatment of all aspects of sexual matters, especially the therapeutic aspect

4.3.2. Internal Peritextual Thresholds

a. Dedication Threshold

The introduction contains no dedication, but we can identify the motivations that prompted the author to compose this work, which are twofold:

- Compliance with the order of Sultan Salim Khan
- The author's desire to assist the upper class of society in perfecting this matter and overcoming its pathological conditions, as he states:

"When I observed that all desires are tied to sexual matters and their inducements, and saw that the dignitaries, wealthy, and leaders in our era and previous times were preoccupied with women's company and dispersed in the houses of singing girls, with none free from infatuation with singers, recklessness with slave girls, or passion for debauchery..." (Pasha, 1902, p. 2).

The author seeks benefit and maximizes utility.

b. Dedication Threshold Introductory Discourse Threshold

The introductory discourse can be outlined through the reason(s), sources and purpose(s) and book chapters.

c. Internal Headings Threshold

The author divided his book into sixty chapters, all related to sexual matters, equally distributed into two sections by gender:

- Men's section: contains thirty chapters divided into:
 - Descriptive part (chapters 1 to 7): discusses the characteristics, benefits, and necessity of moderation in sexual matters, as well as its various commendable and reprehensible forms.
 - Therapeutic part: addresses the formulation of medicines and choice of foods to enhance sexual potency, increase penis size, and provide pleasurable aids for intercourse and conception (Chapters 8 to 30).
- Women's section: composed also of thirty chapters divided as for men in:
 - Descriptive part (chapters 1 and 2): discusses the women's beauty secrets mentioning the criteria for evaluating their sexual ability.
 - Therapeutic part: presents the adornment recipes and the formulation of medicines to provide pleasurable aids for intercourse and conception (Chapters 3 to 30).

Conclusion

The discourse on taboo subjects, particularly sexual discourse, constituted a significant tributary of Arabic heritage before maturing into independent works authored by eminent scholars. These scholars first compiled what had been scattered throughout literary works, then lifted its prohibition through four primary approaches:

- Prophetic Traditions and Historical Accounts
- Linguistics and Lexicography
- Pathology and Therapeutics
- Wit and Amusement

Through our applied study implementing Gérard Genette's concept of paratextual thresholds on three selected classical works specializing in sexual matters, we have reached the following conclusions:

a. The motivations of these scholars in undertaking this cautious yet challenging endeavor combined:

a.1. Subjective factors manifested through:

- The author's desire to provide benefit and utility.
- Compliance with authority's request.

a.2. Objective factors manifested through:

- Theoretical (descriptive) aspects
- Practical (therapeutic) applications

a.3. Formal considerations manifested through:

- Abridging lengthy works
- Expanding concise texts
- Original composition.

b. Their ultimate aims were manifested through five key characteristics:

- Compiling scattered material from diverse sources.
- Committing to objectivity and scientific rigor to refine the subject from impurities, ensuring broad utility.
- Establishing foundations through traditions, linguistics, therapeutics, and humor.
- Establishing it as an independent discipline with distinctive features.
- Breaking its taboo status and alleviating societal discomfort in addressing these health-related issues that shame had prevented from being properly treated.

This study reveals how classical scholars navigated cultural constraints to transform prohibited discourse into legitimate knowledge, balancing ethical concerns with medical and literary value. Their approach demonstrates the sophistication of Arabic-Islamic scholarship in addressing sensitive subjects through multiple disciplinary lenses while maintaining scholarly integrity.

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