THE OTTOMAN GHAZAL IN THE AGE OF BELOVEDS

Poems about Poetry

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"... As in the case of the poet shaykhs of the past, the verses (of the moderns) should be possessed of double meanings and the union of opposites, and the intent and wish and heart's desire when speaking of wine and tavern, the grape and the glass, should be the attractions of drunkenness with divine love and the wine-worship of the glass of holy desire..."[1]

Aşık olanda sabr olur pişe
Öpmek ü koçmak olmaz endişe

Aşık-ı sadık olana mutlak
Merhabadur visal-i yar ancak[2]

To the lover what comes first is patience
Kisses and hugs are never considerations

For certainly to the lover who's sincere
"Hello" alone is union with his dear

In a previous paper we argued for recognition of a period of Ottoman Turkish high-culture lasting from the early sixteenth to the early seventeenth centuries which we called "the age of beloveds."[3]

Our intent was to foreground the significance to poetic production of a particular social milieu in which romantic emotional attachments to notoriously "beautiful" young men were universally the rage. When this circumstance is taken into account, the "love poetry" genres, of which the

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1 Latifi: *Tezkire-i şuara*. Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Halet Efendi 342, fol. 165a.

2 Mehmed Çavuşoğlu: Taşlıcalı Dukakin-zade Yahya Bey'in İstanbul Şehr-engizi. In: *Türk Dili ve Edebiyatı Dergisi* XVII (1969), 77.

3 Walter Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı: Gazels and the World: Some Notes on the 'Occasionalness' of the Ottoman Poetry. In: *The Ghazal as a Genre of World Literature: International Symposium*. İstanbul 1999.

gazel is the most prominent, carry with them a presumed relation to actual instances of romantic attachment. This is suggestively parallel to the case of the popular culture "*aşık*" whose poetry is informed by the narrative (*hikaye*), presumed to recount the actual life-story of the poet/singer, which relates his sorrowful and desperate search for an unavailable beloved or dream lover.[4]

In our paper we will argue that, in the case of Ottoman gazels during the long sixteenth century, the narrative, or presumed narrative is most generally the story of an encounter with one of the local "beauties," and emphasizes the emotional consequences of that encounter. In order to highlight some aspects of how this context influences the reading of a gazel, we will focus on a cycle of poems about poetry (*şi'r*) and the relation of "poetry," as conceptualized in these poems, to gazels and the supposedly non-fictional narratives about the behavior of lovers and beloveds that inform them. In addition this will require that we look briefly at the ethos of "poetic" or "poeticized" love and at the tensions and ambiguities existing between "romantic" or "spiritual/Platonic" love and sexual behaviors.

The poems about poetry, mentioned above, are clearly parallels or *nazires* but we have no idea which came first. They all have the same rhyme (in "*-ar*" with the *redif* "*şi'r*") and the same rhythm (*remel*), and include two poems by Zati, and one each by İshak Ġelebi, Yahya Bey, Fevri, and Emri. The Emri poem is only a partial parallel because it is in a different rhythm (*muzari*). We will take the following by Zati as our starting point:

Vasf-ı envar-ı ruhunla Matla'ul-Envar şi'r
Şerh-i esrar-i lebünle Mahzenü'l-Esrar şi'r

Bir murassa' tacdur başında anun matla'ı
Şehlere taklid ider bir tatlu şirin-kar şi'r

Kim görürse yüzini bir bülbül-i guya olur
Pür-gül-i ma'na-yı rengin ile bir gülzar şi'r

Şah-ı tab' anunla feth eyler belagat mülkini
Kişver-i dil açıcı bir tig-i cevher-dar şi'r

Müşteridür arifün ey meh meta'ı vaslına
Bi-mezak u cahil ile eylemez bazar şi'r

Ben disem şevk-ı lebünle okusan sen ey sanem
Mürdeler ihya ider nutk-ı Mesiha-var şi'r

[4] See for example: Umay Gümay: *Türkiye'de Aşık Tarzı Şiir Geleneği ve Rüya Motifi*. Ankara 1993. Also articles by İlhan Başgöz cited in Gümay 1993: XIX, notes 134-38.

Mardur sahhar tab'umdan togar da'im benüm
Ademün aklın ugurlar Zatiya 'ayyar şi'r[5]

By describing the illuminations of your cheek,
a poem becomes the *Dawn of Illuminations*
By commentary on the secrets of your lip
a poem becomes the *Treasury of Secrets*

Its *matla* is a bejeweled crown upon its head
[Thus does] a poem of sweet behavior
imitate the monarchs

Whosoever sees its face
becomes like a speaking nightingale
[For] poetry is a flowerbed filled with
roses of colorful meaning

With it the ruler of natural talent
conquers the dominion of eloquence
The poem is a jewel encrusted sword
that captures the land of the heart

It is a customer, oh moon, for the wise one's
goods of union
The poem never does business
with the tasteless and stupid

If, longing for your lip, I should say,
"would you recite a poem,"
Oh idol, it would bring the dead to life
like the speech of Jesus

It is a serpent ever born
of my magician-talent
The poem is a highwayman, oh Zati,
that robs the wits of humankind[6]

Like the *nazire* series with the *redif* "gazel" mentioned in our previous communication, Zati's poem begins with the beloved, who is the purpose and center of the love poem. By also referencing Amir Husrev's *Matlau'l-Envar* and Nizami's *Mahzenu'l-Esrar* which it paralleled, he is able to tie himself – and the beloved – to the Persian tradition, to introduce the

[5] *Zati Divanı* I, ed. Ali Nihad Tarlan. İstanbul 1967, 346.

[6] Unless otherwise noted, all English translations are by the authors.

"parallel" (*nazire*) theme, to mention the word "*matla*'" in the *matla*', and to conclude with an oblique reference to the crucial notion of "the secret" (*sırr/esrar*). In his second *nazire*, Zati casts the poem itself as a beloved:

Vasf-ı la'l-ı yar ile şeker-güftar şi'r
Lafz-ı şekker-bar ile bir tatlu nazüg yar şi'r [7]

By describing the beloved's ruby (lip)
the poem becomes a sweet-spoken beloved
With sugar-bearing words,
the poem becomes a sweet and delicate beloved

Both İshak and Fevri begin by focussing on the effects of the poem on the beloved:

Yüzine bakmazdı almazdı ele dildar şi'r
Kendüye mihr ü mahabbet itmese izhar şi'r [8]

The heart-holder wouldn't take up a poem
or look it in the face
If the poem didn't display love and affection
for him

Olmasa ah-ı derunum gibi ateş-bar şi'r
Ahen-i kalb-i nigara eylemezdi kar şi'r [9]

If the poem were not aflame
like the sigh from deep within me
It would have no effect
on the iron of the beloved's heart

Yahya picks up on the theme of the "secret" and ties it directly to the narrative of an interaction with the beloved:

Yüzine tutmuş nikab-ı hattı Yusuf-var şi'r
Şivesindendür hicab ile ider güftar şi'r

Çekdügüm derdi bilürdi nalemi guş eylese
Halüme vakıf olurdı okusa dildar şi'r [10]

7 Tarlan: *Zati Divanı* I, 347.

8 Üsküblü İshak Çelebi: *Divan*, ed. Mehmed Çavuşoğlu and M. Ali Tanyeri. İstanbul 1989, 176.

9 Fevri: *Divan*. Topkapı Sarayı Kütüphanesi, Revan 763, fol. 139a.

10 Yahya Bey: *Divan*, ed. Mehmed Çavuşoğlu. İstanbul 1977, 349.

Over its face the poem held the veil of writing
like Joseph
In its coquettish way, the poem speaks
in a veiled manner

If the beloved were to hear my cries,
he would know the pain I suffer
He would be aware of my condition
if he would read a poem [11]

The "secret" will, of course, have a host of associations when the spiritual/mystical reading is brought to bear. However, we would like to draw special attention to the "real-world" social setting that we believe grounds all other readings. As an example of this setting in narrativized form, let us look briefly at a story found in the *Tezkire* of Aşık Çelebi from the entry for the poet Hayali:

> Bir gün yine, Selimi Muslı nam dilber ki hüsn ile dehrün şehr-aşubı ve şehrün vaz'-ı selimle matbu' vü mahbubı idi. Sünnet düğüni idüp, erbab-ı tab' cem' oldılar ve mehabib-i şehr dahi müstakil bir köşkde oturup birer şerer-i ışkla pervane gibi 'uşşaka yan başı gelüp her biri bezmde par par yanar birer şem' oldılar. Guyendeler ve sazendeler 'ud-nevazendeler susen gibi ser-ta-pa zeban olup hazırlar istima' itmege gül gibi başdan başa sem' oldılar. Hayali Beg dahi nim-mest saki-i mest sa'idinde olan sagar ayagı savuşup cam-ı endamı şikest gelüp oturdı. Turak Bali dirler bir dilber-i Turu'n-nurdı. Ol dahi ol cem'de eşcar içinde serv gibi nümayan ve ezhar arasında gül gibi füruzan idi. Bir rakib-i na-saz-ı keç-endam u bala-dıraz herif dahi ol köşk kapusında nigeh-ban idi. Anlar, bununla ebr-i tire ardında mihr-i sipihr gibi pinhan idi. Bu halde Hayali Beg galebe-i keyfiyyete münasib-i hal ba'zı ebyat okıyup ve bi'l-cümle keşf-i raz ve 'arz-ı niyaz itdi. Dilber bu encümende bu vaz'dan azürde-hatır olup hazırlar dehşetinden ve Hayali Beg satvetinden havf idüp izhar idemeyüp amma gamze-künan-ı ser-füru ve güruh-ı zülf ve çin-ebruyla dahi kana'at idemeyüp ber-mukteza-yı istigna-yı hubi ve celal-i kemal-i mahbubi zir-leb harf-zenan-ı ta'ne-künan dehan-cünban oldı. Çün Hayali Beg dilberün sevdügine vakıf oldı, bedihaten bu matla'ı didi, okıdı ve 'arif oldı. Matla':
>
> *Nigarun itdügi düşnam bana zevk-i canidür*
> *Nice zevk itmeyem ki 'alem-i gayb armaganıdur*

11 For a more poetic translation of this poem see: Walter Andrews, Najaat Black and Mehmet Kalpaklı: *Ottoman Lyric Poetry: An Anthology*. Texas 1997, 101.

Hakire nazire tekellüf itdi. Zuhur iden hasb-i hali nazire zımnında bu vechile eda itdüm, okıdum. Beyt:

Rakib-i div ki kasr-ı nigarun pasbanıdur
Bela-yı nagehanidür kaza-yı asümanidür[12]

One day a beloved named Selimi Muslı, who stirred the city of our day with his beauty and was loved and adored by the town for his wholesome behavior, held a circumcision feast. All the talented people gathered and the beloveds of the city sat in a separate pavilion and as sparks of love to moths each came together with the lovers and each burned like a candle in the party. Those who played the saz or lute and sang became all tongue from head to toe and those who were there to listen became all ear like the rose-blossom. Hayali came in half-drunk, like a wine-bowl on the arm of an intoxicated saki, shuffling his feet, his limbs like a broken glass, and sat down. A beloved like Sinai the Illumined named Turak Bali was there and when Hayali saw him in the gathering he gave a great sigh. I too was flirting with one of [the beloveds], who was like a cypress among trees in that gathering, bright as a rose among flowers. A guardian (*rakib*) crude, misshapen and tall, stood watch at the door and the beloveds were hidden by him like the sun of heaven behind a dark cloud. Under the influence of intoxication, Hayali Beg recited a few apropos lines completely revealing his secret and presenting his plea. The beloved, because this had happened in this company, in fear of those present and terrified by Hayali's effrontery could not openly reveal what he felt. But unable to content himself [by communicating] with glances from a lowered head, with the knot of his curls and the curve of his brow, he spoke reproachfully, with the proud independence of the beloved, by a pouting of the lower lip and a trembling of the mouth. When Hayali [thus] became aware that the beloved was attracted to him, he extemporized this *matla'* and recited it, thereby revealing his knowledge:

The beloved's reproaches are to me
the soul's delight
How should I not be delighted
they're a gift from the unseen world

This miserable one then tested himself with a parallel verse. I expressed my account of the situation in the form of a parallel in this manner:

12 G. M. Meredith-Owens (ed.): *Aşık Çelebi: Meşa'irü'ş-şuara*. London 1971, fol. 273a-273b.

That monstrous guardian
watchman of [my] beauty's palace
Is an unexpected disaster
a celestial calamity

Here we have a context which makes immediate and lively many of the common features of the 16th century gazel. We see that the world of lovers and beloveds in this period was an ambiguous and conflicted one for beloveds. They were celebrated, pampered, and showered with gifts and invitations. Prominent among the gifts that could gain the attention of a beloved was poetry. As a result poetry becomes commodified and poets often reference the world of commerce to make a case for the value of their products. For example:

[Zati]
Müşteridür 'arifün ey meh meta'ı vaslına
Bi-mezak u cahil ile eylemez bazar şi'r[13]

It is a customer, oh moon, for the wise one's
goods of union
The poem never does business
with the tasteless and stupid

[Zati]
Nice meyyal olmasun sarraf-ı tab'-ı pür-mezak
Zatiya bir dürcdür pür-lulu-yı şeh-var şi'r[14]

Why shouldn't the tasteful money-changer
be attracted?
Oh Zati, the poem is a coffer
filled with royal pearls

[İshak]
Bilmez idi kadrini söz cevherinün cevheri
Nakd-i tahsin-i kelama olmasa mi'yar şi'r

Fazl u ihsan ebr-i nisanı idelden terbiyet
Kulzüm-i tab'umda oldı lulu-yı şeh-var şi'r

Nazm kadrin bilmeyenler malik olmaz cevhere
'Aleme farza ki olsa ebr gevher-bar şi'r[15]

13 Tarlan: *Zati Divanı* I, 346.
14 *Ibid.*, 347.
15 İshak Çelebi: *Divan*, 176.

The jeweler would not know the value
of the word-jewel
If poetry were not the touchstone
of the coin of embellished speech

Since excellence and kindness
seasoned the cloud of April
Poetry has become a royal pearl
in the Red Sea of my talent

Those who know not the value of verse
will never posses a jewel
Even though everyone admits that poe
is a pearl-bearing cloud

However, beloveds were also subject to vicious gossip and even the possibility of punishment for public lewdness. Moreover, it is clear that there were a range of "beloveds" from sexually available male equivalents of the Venetian courtesans to handsome young men who had no desire whatsoever to be the focus of romantic attention. As a result, the bestowal of attention was dangerous for both lovers and beloveds. There are a number of stories about lovers killed by offended beloveds. For example, Helaki was stabbed by an angry beloved for expressing his affection too openly in a gathering. The poet Ferdi became the object of affection of a young man whose attachment became the subject of gossip all over town. Ferdi tried everything he could think of to discourage his lover but to no avail. Finally the lover told Ferdi that the only way the affair would end was if the beloved would kill his lover. So the two met in a rural park and the lover, dressed as if in a shroud, gave his dagger to Ferdi who slit the lover's throat and was known thenceforth as Ferdi the Lover-Killer (*aşık-kuş*). In some versions of the story Ferdi regretted his act and himself died of grief.

As a result, a language of glances, subtle signs, sighs, shy airs develops as exemplified by the Hayali story and enacted in the delicate ambiguities of the poetry, which seems never to say anything in an open and unequivocal way. What makes both the party and the poetry lively and exciting is precisely this tantalizing dance of cleverly ambiguous poems, powerful passions expressed and concealed by subtle signs, shy or unwilling beloveds, lovers intoxicated and maddened by desire. The maintenance of tension between the desire that draws the lover to his beloved and the very real dangers that keep them apart seems to be a necessary component of the situation. In the narratives, seeking or

attaining a purely sexual union seldom has a good outcome: Me'ali is frightened and embarrassed,[16] Sihri is castrated,[17] Esiri is killed.[18]

Yahya argues in the introduction to his *Şah u Geda* that it is this emotional play and its intellectual and spiritual component which gives the most pleasure.[19] And this is why love for young men or boys who are both available publicly and have the intellectual resources to play the game is preferable to the love of women with its inevitably sexual, worldly, and familial overtones. So, he says, in attacking those who say they enjoy the traditional romances involving love between men and women:

İşidüp sözlerin didüm ne 'aceb
Bana hoş gelmedi bu sözler hep

Bir alay bi-mezak u zen-bare
Bir alay derd-mend ü bi-çare

Ne bilür sırr-ı ışk-ı pinhanı
Ne bilür vecd ü hal-i cananı

'Aşık oldur ki 'ışkı ile müdam
Eyleyüp uykuyı gözine haram

Seve bir serv boylı mahbubı
Derd-i 'ışkınun ola Eyyubı

Vire mir'at-ı cism ü cana cila
Bir celasun cuvana bende ola

'Işk-ı mahbub ile kim ola hazin
Eglemez anı Husrev ü Şirin[20]

I heard [their] words and said, how strange
These words were all unpleasant to me

One band is tasteless and woman-chasing
One band is suffering and without remedy

What does he know of the hidden secret of love
What does he know of rapture and ecstasy for the beloved

16 Meredith-Owens: *Aşık Çelebi*, fol. 113a-117a. (English translation of the story by Walter Andrews, see: Kemal Silay (ed.): *An Anthology of Turkish Literature*. Bloomington, Indiana 1996, 138-46.)

17 Meredith-Owens: *Aşık Çelebi*, fol. 151b-152a.

18 Latifi: *Tezkire-i şuara*, fol. 44a-44b.

19 Çavuşoğlu: *Taşlıcalı*, 77.

20 *Ibid.*

He is a [true] lover who ever with love
Makes sleep unlawful to his eyes
Let him love a cypress-bodied beloved
Let him be like Job for the pain of love

Let him polish the mirror of body and soul
Let him be the slave of a robust boy

Who grieves over the love of a beloved boy
Will not be entertained by Husrev and Shirin

This insistence on the superior purity of love between males, le ads us to another significant point about these "poems about poetry." In none of them is there any overt claim that the love expressed in poetry (*şi'r*) is "really" about love of the Divine. There are indeed tropes which refer to religious themes, which is to be expected in a situation where there is no "secular" alternative. For example:

[İshak]
Ol cemali mushafun zikriyle hatm olsun kelam
Okıma İshak gayrı dilbere zinhar şi'r [21]

Let me seal my speech with mention
of that beauty's holy book
Oh Ishak, beware! Recite poetry
to no other beloved

[Fevri]
Olsa divanum 'aceb mi mushaf-ı erbab-ı 'ışk
Hizb ana her bir kaside 'aşr ana tekrar şi'r [22]

Is it any wonder that my divan
is a Holy Text for the masters of love
The kaside is a sixtieth part
and the poem a section of ten verses

However, in not one of these poems do we see the kind of assertion we see commonly and expect to see in poems from the mid-17th century on, something more or less to the effect that the "love" we see in gazel poetry is "really" a metaphor for spiritual or *hakiki* love. We do not mean to say that there were not a huge number of gazels from this period in

21 Çelebi: *Divan*, 176.

22 Fevri: *Divan*, fol. 139a.

which "love" themes had spiritual referents or that the distinction between "metaphoric love" and "real love" was not made at the time. The quotation from Latifi at the beginning of this paper is a good example of the common understanding. What we do mean to say, at the very least, is this–and it can stand as the conclusion to our presentation: there is considerable evidence, including the poems about poems we have discussed here, that the Ottoman gazels of the sixteenth century interacted meaningfully with a culture of actual lovers and beloveds, which in turn provided a potential context and powerful reading of any gazel of the period. This also suggests that the common "metaphoric" and "aestheticized" reading of sixteenth century gazel poetry may be, at least in part, anachronistic and reads back on the sixteenth century a perspective that belongs more properly to a period from the seventeenth century on.