

A REVISIONIST THESIS FOR THE ESTHETICS OF THE OTTOMAN GAZEL

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If one considers the Ottoman *gazel* as a body of texts produced during the period from approximately the 14th through the 19th centuries, one can isolate a number of characteristic features upon which most, if not all, experienced observers would readily agree. Some of the most significant of these features are as follows :

1. The language of the *gazel* deviates rather sharply from the other co-existing sub-sets of Western Turkish. It is distinguishable in both vocabulary and syntax from the contemporaneous spoken and written languages of the mass of Turkish speakers and even, primarily in syntax, from written language of the educated elites.

2. The *gazel* uses a limited number of tropes with standard interpretations *completely* accessible only to a limited audience¹.

3. The subject matter and internal contexts of the *gazel* are also quite limited.

4. There is a heavy emphasis on the innovative rhetorical manipulation of the standard tropes which results in a highly ornamented, allusive and complex mode of expression.

5. The *gazel* has an extremely low incidence of recognizable reference. Neither actual events nor historical persons impinge on the

1 I would argue that the basic material of the *gazel* was to some degree accessible to a very wide audience, although it was, in large part, consumed indirectly through such media as music and its echos in the popular poetry.

poetry to any significant degree - at least insofar as can be observed in the texts themselves².

6. All of these features persist without major change over the life of the genre in spite of noticeable changes in the functioning of important governmental, economic, religious and social institutions.

These generally accepted features have, in turn, a rather standard interpretation which manifests itself in the most common view of the esthetics of the Ottoman *gazel*. The major premise of this view is that the Ottoman *gazel* (and, usually, the *divan* tradition as a whole) was the borrowed artifact of a foreign culture, divorced from its socio-cultural context, preoccupied with intellectual games and a mindless musicality, and essentially lacking meaning for the culture which produced it. This is a harsh, unadorned statement of a premise usually more delicately or obscurely presented. It is, however, necessary that this premise be clearly understood if the prevalent state of Ottoman *gazel* esthetics is to be adequately assessed.

The history and psychology of the general view of the esthetics of the Ottoman *gazel* are rather complex and it is not the purpose of this essay to explore either in detail. However, it may be said that the critical, esthetic examination of the *divan* tradition, including the *gazel* begins with the Europeanization of Turkish views about literature³. With the introduction of a critical method came a series of esthetic premises and a set of critical conclusions based less on dispassionate application of method than on widely held beliefs about cultural and racial superiority. The overwhelmingly influential purveyor of these premises, conclusions and beliefs has been E. J. W. Gibb's *A History of Ottoman Poetry*. The unmatched comprehensiveness of Gibb's work and its undeniable usefulness have obscured the fact of its character as a polemic

2 Of course there are exceptions. Zâti, for example, has several *gazels* in which the *redif* is the name of a real person. However, in terms of the tradition these are *only* exceptions.

3 This statement is not meant to deny the obvious fact that an indigenous, contemporary esthetic existed for *divan* poetry — this is a major part of what our study of the poetry tries to understand. It also is true, however, that there was no indigenous genre which attempted to associate texts and groups of texts with an articulated theory. The fact that such things were not written about is evidence more of the nature of the esthetic than of any inabilities on part of Ottoman critics. (c.f. below, Note 8).

for a view never substantiated by anything but generalizations and impressions of hazy provenance.

Gibb sums up four volumes on *divan* poetry as follows :

We have learned how, throughout this long period, no voice has ever reached it (Ottoman poetry) from outside the narrow school where it was reared; how, Persian in its inception, Persian in substance it has remained down to the very end, driven back after a blind struggle to win free, baffled and helpless into the stagnant swamp of a dead culture. (My parentheses)⁴.

How, one might ask, does one come to the conclusion that a poetic tradition which developed and survived from about 1300 to 1860, according to Gibb's own reckoning, had nothing to do with its immediate socio-cultural context and that the major literary expression of that culture was essentially without life? Why would one not initiate the critical process on the premise that a culture and its poetry with such powers of endurance over such a long period must have had an especially crucial and vital relationship with the society which produced it? Gibb's answer is quite clear: the poetry fails because it does not correspond to European esthetic values. The coming of European values to Turkish literature means, to Gibb, that :

... Asia is on the point of giving place to Europe, and the tradition of ages is about to become a memory of the past. A voice from the Western world rings through the orient skies like the trumpet blast of Isrāfil; and lo, the muse of Turkey wakes from her death-like trance, and all the land is jubilant with life and song, for a new heaven and a new earth are made visible before the eyes of men. Now for the first time the ears of the people are opened to hear the speech of hill and valley, and their eyes unsealed to read the message of cloud and wave⁵.

Unless one can be persuaded to believe that the Turks were incapable of expressing either themselves or their culture through literature until

4 E. J. W. Gibb, *A History of Ottoman Poetry*, Vol. V. (London, 1907), p. 3. I do not intend to imply that Gibb is alone in putting these premises forward. In fact, it is difficult to find any source which does not, in some degree, reflect what Gibb portrays so clearly. This is exactly what is so pernicious about unexamined premises : that by repetition they acquire the status of proven fact and scholars may feel relieved of any obligation to question their validity.

5 Gibb, *HOP*, Vol V, p. 3.

taught to do so by Europeans, this and much more of Gibb is the most arrant racist nonsense. It is also very destructive nonsense because, in the face of European *certainty* about the essential correctness of this view, key elements of it have been incorporated into the Turkish evaluation of their own historical culture. For example, Fuad Köprülü is quoted as describing *divan* poetry as follows :

It is a literature which does not display life to its most hidden, most confused crannies, which does not relate the efforts of our spirit, which does not make our feelings felt as in a pure and deep manner, which does not frankly reflect our pains, our tragedies, our moral wounds; it is a sham literature having no relation to life... (My translation)⁶.

While this may seem an excessively harsh judgment it is actually a very frank statement of an evaluation which pervades critical writing about Ottoman *divan* poetry. To be sure Turkish scholars do not overtly accept Gibb's not-so-hidden premise that Turks and Muslim «orientals» in general are culturally inferior to Europeans. Nevertheless, the tendency in Turkey has been to claim that the «true» expression of Turkish culture was and is derivable from the folk literature. This claim which defends Turks from the absurd allegation of intellectual inferiority exacts a high price: the admission that some 500 years of Turkish high-culture *was* inferior, and the acceptance of a set of premises about the esthetics of *divan* poetry which are damaging, demeaning and founded more on psychological and political fantasies than on dispassionate literary analysis.

It is true that since the middle of the 19th Century Turkish literary tastes have undergone a rather drastic change in a context where literary change was accompanied by equally drastic and difficult changes

⁶ Seyit Kemal Karaalioğlu, *Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi* (İstanbul, 1973), pp. 567-568.

One should not assume that Köprülü or any other Turkish scholar was directly influenced in his or her views by Gibb. In fact, Gibb was most likely strongly influenced by Turkish literature and scholars who held Europeanized esthetic and critical views which harmonized with his own cultural bias.

The chapter from Karaalioğlu from which the Köprülü quote was taken contains a number of other statements by various scholars on the nature of *divan* poetry. These make very instructive reading in the light of assertions made in this essay. For a more complete statement of the same viewpoint in a more sympathetic context see : A. H. Tanpınar, «Eski Şiir» in *Edebiyat Üzerine Makaleler* (İstanbul, 1969), pp. 186-188.

in governmental, economic, religious and social institutions. However, one must also remember that the development of new literary tastes in Turkey paralleled and was influenced by a similar development in the European literatures. The «new» Romantic literature brought with it an esthetic dogma which in England, for example, resulted in the surprising conclusion that Pope and Dryden could not even be thought of as poets - an attack on the past strikingly similar to Namik Kemal's rejection of *divan* poetry in his diatribes against Ziya Paşa's *Harâbât*⁷. Unfortunately, while the excesses of 19th century esthetics have been corrected with regard to the Western literatures through more scientific and less emotional methods, Ottoman literature remains in an esthetic / critical limbo seemingly untouched by decades of progress.

Although it is tempting to avoid what is still a sensitive political issue it is necessary to point out that the present canon of *divan* poetry esthetics is itself inexorably linked to a crucial aspect of the psychology of the Turkish Republic. In the early years of this century Turkey was saved, by the heroism and sacrifice of its people, from the multiple horrors of governmental collapse, bloody wars and a ghoulish attempt at foreign occupation. These past horrors are firmly linked, in one aspect of the Turkish social psyche, to the Ottoman Empire and thence to what is seen as «Ottoman» culture. The view of Ottoman culture as a lifeless, foreign, meaningless veneer over a «true» Turkish core has been useful, and perhaps even necessary, in helping Turkey to cope with difficult, radical and often painful changes in basic institutions during a period in which the problems of change could well have given to a dangerous nostalgia for the past.

As a result of this view, however, scholars, both Turkish and non-Turkish, have been predisposed to accept an unexamined negative portrayal of *divan* poetry and to focus attention on isolated aspects of the poetry such as difficult passages or vocabulary, allusions or parallels to Persian poetry, rhetoric, etc. As important as such work is, as vital as it is to our understanding of the poetry, each of these aspects is, by itself, trivial in the absence of some attempt to achieve a comprehensive and sympathetic appreciation of the meaning and function of the poetry. It would be unfortunate indeed in Turkey could not come to terms with its

7 A concise and informative account of the situation in English poetry can be found in: Philip Harth, «The New Criticism and Eighteenth Century Poetry», *Critical Inquiry* (Vol. 7, No. 3, Spring 1981), pp. 521-537.

Ottoman past. Surely it is not necessary to long for the past or desire to recreate it in order to appreciate its glorious moments, to see the beauty it created and to respect the ways in which one's ancestors faced the problems of life.

Thus far I have cited some basic facts about the Ottoman *gazel* and have outlined some extrinsic forces which have contributed to the usual esthetic interpretation of those facts. In addition, I have indicated some reasons to believe that this interpretation is based on inadequate methodology and is fundamentally mistaken in its critical conclusions. The evidence for this hypothesis and the case for a substantial revision of our esthetic approach to *divan* poetry and the *gazel* in particular rests on arguments at two levels.

The first level consists of basic premises about the nature of poetry as a universal human phenomenon and about the relation between culture and society. On this level the arguments depend on indirect, circumstantial evidence. The second level includes specific issues which can conceivably be substantiated by evidence taken directly from literary sources.

It is clearly impossible to assemble sufficient proof of the correctness of any particular view in a brief essay - such would be the work of a lifetime. However, it is the purpose of this essay to do the following :

- 1) To present a hypothesis about the nature of poetry and its function which has not been adequately considered in the case of the *gazel*.
- 2) To indicate some ways in which this hypothesis casts doubt on the prevalent esthetic approach to the *gazel*.
- 3) To show how a radically different esthetic approach might focus attention on hitherto neglected ways of understanding both the poetry and its interaction with its socio-cultural context.

A productive to the esthetics of the Ottoman *gazel* must begin with the premise that *all* social behavior is meaningful behavior, the only question being whether or not we have the means to understand and articulate that meaning. Thus, one could say that a poetic *tradition* exists because it has a meaningful relation to the society and culture in which it exists and that the task of the literary scholar is to make the terms of that relationship explicit.

As an example of the distinctions implied by this premise it might be helpful to risk a broad generalization on some characteristics of the

Ottoman experience. As a rule, Ottoman society was, for many centuries, relatively stable, static and free of drastic change. Both the social order and the natural order were *perceived* as fixed in divinely ordained patterns reflected in the Quran and Shari'a - patterns which manifest themselves truly only outside the confines of this world. According to this manner of perception (rather than as a result of any particular article of belief), there is little to be gained by seeking truth out in the world or by altering the established order. Truth was seen to exist independent of what one might observe in the natural world and so any observation of worldly phenomena was likely to be in error just as any societal change was likely as not to lead to increasing deviation from the divine pattern.

In such a context there is little point to scientific method, to reasoning from the observation of particulars to establish general principles - the principles already exist and the vast array of particulars only serves to veil their truth. It is not surprising, then, that the poetic tradition of that time and place was itself stable, static and fixed in regular patterns, that it focused not on particular persons, places or «real» objects but on abstractions from the «real» and *irrational* modes of understanding, and that its language represented a highly refined abstraction from actual language.

In contrast, a more recent world view or manner of perception has as its primary articles of faith the notions that the individual human mind can arrive at beneficial truths by reasoning from observation and experimentation, and that it is possible to discover a non-random, linear order or change leading toward the perfection of life in this world - the notion we identify as *progress*. These two principles work hand in hand. The scientific method continuously disgorges «new» truths which demand adaptation and change at the sacrifice of stability and static belief in a cosmic order. This perceptual context is clearly reflected in an esthetic of poetry which emphasizes the observation and interpretation of the real world (ie. Gibb's «speech of hill and valley», «message of cloud and wave»), which asks poetry to speak to the emotional experience of the individual as an individual (ie., Köprülü's «displaying life», «making our feelings felt as in life») and which permits a dynamic, experimental approach to formal features resulting in continuous changes in our idea of what constitutes a poem.

One function of any particular poetic tradition is to constitute and reflect the perceptual context of the society which produces it and to

interpret the world according to that perception. Accordingly, many of the differences between poetic traditions can be seen to simply reflect differences in socio-cultural context. The way in which masses of human beings live their lives and the way in which they interpret the universe are in a dynamic relationship; each creates and reinforces the other. The esthetic of any particular group in any particular era can be seen as the pattern which selects and defines those artistic expressions which most meaningfully interpret the experience of that group.

It is, perhaps, a truism that we should assess different cultures on their own terms. However, it seems that every society and every age necessarily see *its* world view as ultimately correct. As a result there is also the tendency to see the *manner* of interpreting one particular world view as the only universally valid esthetic pattern. We have an idea of how human beings *should* think, how they *should* live together, what their goals *should* be and how this perception *should* be interpreted through art. Moreover, it is safe to say that we believe that our view, being so obviously true, will persist henceforth. Nonetheless, such false universals - such «shoulds» - are inevitably matters *only* of belief, not of demonstrable fact. The assertions cited above by Gibb and Köprülü, for example, are based *primarily* on views about what a poetic tradition *should* do; as a result they serve to demonstrate more about 19th and early 20th century beliefs about esthetic universals than anything intrinsic to Ottoman poetry or society. If there are valid esthetic universals they lie in the abstract realm of relationship and involve issues such as the effectiveness of the relation between an artistic tradition and its socio-cultural context in satisfying universal human needs.

The problem with attempting to understand *divan* poetry on its own terms is that, within the framework of the above hypothesis, those terms are extremely difficult to discover. In an era when writing about literary objects is, at least, as popular in the high culture as the actual production of literature, it seems inconceivable that *no* work exists in which someone totally within the Ottoman literary mileau attempts a detailed discussion of what and how *divan* poetry means to its audience. However, in our terms this is exactly the case. There are works on poetic craft, works elucidating the grammar and vocabulary of difficult passages, works on the mystical interpretation of some literary objects, and even works discussing the relative merits of poets. Each of these types of work represents an area in which a systematic understanding existed in Ottoman culture - the areas of mysticism, rhetoric, lexicography, grammar.

However, in areas which are now considered vital to the interpretation of literature - social structure (cultural anthropology), psychology, linguistics, criticism - no overt, systematic understanding existed and, hence, there were simply no terms and no discursive genres for the discussion of such matters⁸. This does not mean that the significant aspects of Ottoman *divan* poetry are those aspects which the contemporary culture recorded in writing; nor does it mean that the Ottomans did not understand the social structure, psychology and modes of communication of their society. As paradoxical as it may seem, understanding a culture on its own terms does not mean limiting ourselves to the terminological systems available to that culture. No one seriously believes that gravity did not exist or was not practically understood before Newton; what Newton created was a system for *talking about* gravity. In the same way, if we are to achieve a sympathetic understanding of the esthetic principles which motivate *divan* poetry we cannot rely on contemporary extrinsic sources for our insights, nor can we shrink from the direct observation and interpretation of literary objects and the discussion of those observations in the terms of systems specially developed for talking about socio-cultural phenomena.

Ultimately our description of the esthetics of *divan* poetry, if it is to be valid, must be based not so much on theoretical generalities but on clear and convincing evidence. Thus the real case for substantially revising our approach rests on the ability of a revised approach to indicate areas of investigation which, in turn, generate sound and meaningful interpretations of the poetry consistent with the relevant socio-cultural context. In the light of the basic hypotheses outlined above - 1) that a poetic tradition exists *because* it is meaningful in its context; 2) that an adequate esthetic approach should describe the nature and value of artistic phenomena rather than impose extrinsic prescriptions, and 3) that poetry is a mode of expressing exactly those aspects of experience that are difficult or impossible for a culture to express discursively - it is possible to point to several potentially valuable avenues of investigation excluded by the prevalent esthetic premises⁹.

8 The characteristics of Ottoman critical work and its contrast to later, Europeanized criticism is summed up in: Bilge Ercilasun, *Servet-i Fünun'da Edebi Tenkit* (Ankara, 1981). See also, A. H. Tampınar, «Bizde Tenkit,» *Makaleler*, pp. 65-68.

9 If, as the prevalent premises seem to indicate, meaning is a secondary consideration in the *gazel* then all avenues which are concerned with meaning and its importance are excluded.

In order to make the discussion somewhat more concrete at this point, let us take as a text a rather typical *gazel* from the first quarter of the 16th century.

1. a. Bâde-i la'l içelüm bi-ser ü sāmānlar ile
b. 'İşk tācın urunan başına sultānlar ile
2. a. Gel ki gül naḥlin alup meykedeye 'azm idelüm
b. Başka sancaḳ çekelum biz daḫi yārānlar ile
3. a. Yaḳalum sīnemüze lāle gibi yir yir dāḡ
b. 'İşk serḫōşları aşüfte vu ḫayrānlar ile
4. a. Vāy Ferḫād ile Mecnuni ele girseydi ḫanı
b. Ağlaşayduk dil-i şūrīde ḡamın anlar ile
5. a. Āhiretde sorusın vire güzelsüz mey içüp
b. Ol ki şoḫbet hevesin ide girān-cānlar ile
6. a. Huldı zühhāda naşib eyle İlahī bizi ko
b. 'İşk serḫōşları aşüfte vü ḫayrānlar ile
7. a. Muṭribā sāzuna 'Amrī sözini demsāz it
b. Ki düşe ḡulguleler 'āleme eḡḡānlar ile¹⁰

(English Paraphrase)

1. Let us drink a ruby cup with the bewildered and destitue, Those sultans who put the crown of love on their heads.
2. Come, let us take up the rose-branch and make for the wine-temple
Let us raise another flag together with (our) friends.
3. Let us burn brands like the tulip into our breasts here
With the drunkards of love, the agitated and bewildered.
4. Alas, if only Ferhad and Mecnun were brought together someplace
We would, with them, bewail the grief of a distraught heart.
5. If one enjoys drinking with boring people instead of taking a beauty to ones side
He must answer for it in the after life.

10 Mehmed Çavuşođlu ed., 'Amrī : Divān (Istanbul, 1979), p. 143.

6. Oh Divine, set paradise aside for the ascetics and place us
With the drunkards of love, the agitated and bewildered.
7. Oh musician, make the words of 'Amri accompaniment to your
saz. So that uproar and groaning fall upon the world.

It is not the purpose of this essay to deal with the special nature of this poem, its particular beauties, conceits and imagery, but to use it as an example of a poetic type which has its roots in many past poems and branches in the poetry of its long future. The general features of *divan* poetry listed at the beginning of this discussion are abundantly and clearly represented in this *gazel*: the peculiar language, traditional tropes, limited subjects, ornamented, allusive discourse and lack of topical reference. What is *said* is quite commonplace within the context of the tradition, and how it is said is unique only as the unique manifestation of a limited set of rules broadly and persistently adhered to by generations of poets. However, if we could trace the history and interpretation of every trope, of every expression, of every rhetorical usage; if we could fix the poem absolutely in the framework of the tradition (as we conceivably might be able to do), does this suppose that we would then exhaust or even comprehend its *meaning*?

Traditionally our approach has been to seek meaning through linguistic/philological models. We search out the proper chronological setting for vocabulary items and syntax, locating their sense in a matrix of similar usages developed out an orderly process of influence and assimilation reaching backwards in time. This work obviously is crucial in treating the poetry and the accomplishments of scholars in this difficult area have been truly awesome. However, too often the search for meaning begins and ends in the same place, without considering the fact that language is only one of many meaning producing systems in a culture and that our vital philological tools are not designed to encompass more than a fraction of the potential meaning for any concept.

An essential characteristic of poetry is that it *mean* much more than it *says*. In poetry there is always a tension between the expectations of ordinary communication, which demand focus on a particular message by means of a high level of redundancy and the suppression of ambiguity, and the special nature of poetic communication, in which the «message» is intentionally ambiguous with the result that «what it says» will have multiple interpretations. In addition, poetic meaning

may be more accurately derived from the interaction of the multiple elements of its ambiguity than from any consistent interpretation of the language of the poem. That is, the question will not be, «Does it mean this or does it mean that?» but, «How does it mean all of these things?»

As example, let us look at some features of the 'Amrī *gazel*. The first line introduces the two major themes of the *gazel* tradition : love and intoxication (symbolized by the ruby cup). Each of these themes has a long history in the Persian and Arabic traditions prior to their adoption by the Ottomans. In the context of the *gazel* the two themes are inexorably linked. Both represent a type of obsessive attachment - to an object (the beloved or the wine) on one hand, and to a state of being and way of perceiving the world on the other. The attachment produces irrational modes of perception (eg. *bi-ser. āşūfte, hayrān, serhoş*), suffering (eg. *dağ yakma, aqlama, gam*, etc.) and lack of success in the ordinary ways of life (eg. *bī-sāmān*).

The lover - beloved, inebriate - wine relationships are also acted out in a dramatic context which repeats itself in a persistent and unified manner throughout the tradition. The cast of characters includes the poet persona (the lover/inebriate speaker) and a sympathetic «insider» group of fellow lover/inebriates (represented in the 'Amirī poem by the sultans of love, the bewildered and destitute, the intoxicated ones, the close companions). This group engages in certain activities, typically intoxication or passion induced irrational behavior (eg. «let us burn brands like the tulip.»), in a certain context - an entertainment gathering or e.g. *şöhet*, one of the meanings of 'ālem) - in a certain location, usually a garden or garden-like setting (indirectly referred to by the flower images)¹¹.

In conjunction with this interaction is another set of characters who help to define the nature of the «insider» group by contrast. This group includes all outsiders, all those who do not share the motivations of the primary group, such as the uninitiated masses, religious bigots (the *zühhā* in the 'Amrī *gazel*), rivals in love, enviers, strangers, enemies, etc. In addition to these there is a group of characters usually tied solely to

11. The generalizations about the Ottoman *gazel* in this and the following are based on as yet unpublished evidence taken from my work on the Ottoman *gazel* tradition. For an overview of *gazel* features without any statistical determination of frequency see : M. Çavuşoğlu, *Necatî Bey Divanı'nın Tahlili* (Istanbul, 1971), and H. Tolasa, *Ahmet Paşa'nın Şiir Dünyası* (Ankara, 1973).

the party context, including various kinds of entertainers (e.g. the musician, *maṭrib*) some of whom (for example, the *sāḳī*, dancers) may participate in the primary interaction as the objects of obsessive attachment.

Also firmly embedded in the poetic drama of the Ottoman *gazel* is the mystical interpretation of the obsessive attachment and the irrational behavior it produces. The love/intoxication themes and each feature of the ritualized acting out of these themes in the poetry are traditionally recognized as analogs for aspects of the progress toward mystical union. The details of the mystical interpretation are so well known and so accessible that they do not require repeating here. However, it is important to note that this interpretation is *not*, in itself, a mystery. Its inclusion in the poetry is quite overt - the «sultans» who wear «the crown of love» are, for example, a very clear reference to the Turkish mystics with their distinctive caps or «crowns» (*tāc*). Moreover, overt recognition of the mystical analogy not only characterizes the awareness of the poetic audience but also is a component of the fictionalized awareness of *some* of the actors in the internal poetic drama. Within the poetry, one thing that distinguishes the insiders from the outsiders is that the insiders accept the mystical interpretation of their behavior.

It is important to understand the distinctions implicit in this view of the mystical dimension of the *gazel*. Too often the interpretation of *gazel* poetry focuses on an assessment of its coherence as a mystical analogy, raising the entirely irrelevant issue of the «sincerity» of the poet, who may or may not have been a practicing mystic¹². If, however, we accept that the poet is creating a dramatic fiction within which one group of characters interprets its behavior sincerely and consistently according to the mystical analogy, then a significant distance has been created between the poet, the audience and the poetic drama. This distance permits the mystical interpretation of that limited aspect of experience represented by the dramatic context - the gathering or party -

12 In fact, it is not difficult to determine which poets are practicing mystics. The *tezkires* are rather clear on the subject. However, if we were left to decide the matter solely from the poetry it is doubtful that such a determination could be made. One general characteristic of the poet persona *in* the poetry is that he/she is a dervish. To identify sincerity with a requirement that the poet conduct his/her life in a manner consistent with a poetic role both misinterprets the nature of artistic creation and results in the common fallacy which binds the poetry to the character of the poet. The danger of confusing the inner world of the poetry with the outer world of the poet lies in forgetting that the poem is most properly the property of its audience and means what that audience perceives it to mean.

without assuming that either the behavior or the interpretation will be extended to other areas of life (as it would be for the practicing mystic). Likewise, the separate and apparently prior existence of the poetic drama may be a powerful force in shaping and sanctioning a range of actual entertainments and rituals which take on the character of the poetic gathering. That is, in real-life parties, gatherings or party like activities the participants - by identifying with the insider group of the poetry behavior which might be unacceptable in other contexts¹³. It would be and the sanctioning (mystical) interpretation - would be permitted quite possible to begin to test the validity and value of this perspective by comparing the principles of in-group formation, group behaviors and group activities in Ottoman society to the dramatic situation of the poetry in order to determine what meaningful correspondences might exist.

Another effect of the dramatic distance obtaining in the *gazel* is that the behavior portrayed becomes distinguishable from the interpretation of that behavior. What the characters are doing, both physically and emotionally, is distinct from how they interpret what they are doing. It is, therefore, possible to separate the pattern of relationships in the poetry from a single (mystical) interpretation and to apply the pattern to other aspects of life. A simple diagram of some obvious aspects of the poetic pattern follows :

Dramatic element	Relationship	Dramatic element
lover/inebriate	<p>↔ obsessive attachment ↔</p> <p>↔ submission ↔ dominance ↔</p>	beloved/wine
lover/inebriate	<p>↔ intimacy/support ↔</p> <p>↔ friendship/group identity ↔</p>	insider group
lover/inebriate insider group	↔ hostility/alienation ↔	outsiders
lover/inebriate insider group	↔ formalized, group activity ↔	party
party	↔ location ↔	garden
lover/inebriate insider group	↔ security/safety ↔	garden

13 I would argue that, like the *gazel*, Ottoman culture at all levels is colored by the mystical interpretation which gives significance of a particular sort to those

This diagram is an abbreviated, mechanical representation of a useful mode of investigating potential relationships between the *gazel* and its socio-cultural context. The middle column identifies a set of relationships the nature of which is defined and described by the poetry. These relationships are so fundamental that they undoubtedly repeat themselves in real-life interactions. Thus, the question of the relevance of the poetry can be approached by asking whether or not equivalent interactions in Ottoman society reflect and are reflected by the poetic pattern. That is, can we substitute other sets of related elements in the flanking columns and produce patterns which contemporary society interprets in terms similar to those of the poetry? This type of investigation must be far-reaching and complex. It demands analysis not only of social processes and poetry but also of descriptive prose, of architecture, of art and decoration, as well as the interpretation of types of social interaction¹⁴. As an example of how such an investigation might proceed let us look at one rather simple case.

The lover-beloved relationship in the poetry is described, in the shorthand of the diagram, as a dominance-submission relationship. This summarizes the character of the lover-beloved interaction in which the lover is generally depicted as the helpless, obsessed, distraught, selfless supplicant to a beloved who is powerful, aloof, protected and the unmoved mover of the relationship. In the Ottoman *gazel* the beloved is regularly and

experiences which are part of the mystical symbology (eg. gatherings of friends, the party, the garden, passionate love, etc.). In this context it is important to distinguish the role of mysticism as a way of life from its role as a mode of interpreting life experiences. In the former case a person chooses a path leading to the goal of mystical union, in the latter the world is interpreted according to the mystical formulation of how the world works and what human experiences mean. Thus, certain types of behavior (passionate attraction, intoxication) can be interpreted in a manner consistent with a popularly accepted religious perspective and can even be acted out in a limited manner. (It is important to note that while there are numerous examples of such acting out, there are also numerous examples of the severe punishment of such behavior when it exceeded the limits of the private domain and impinged on the public morality — the story of the poet/vizier Ahmet Paşa is but one of many examples).

14 There are a number of promising models for the interpretation of socio-cultural phenomena. The ideas expressed in this paper have been influenced by the work of Gregory Beteson [see, G. Beteson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York, 1972)]; Erich Fromm [see, E. Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York, 1965)]; Clifford Geertz [see, C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973)]; and Claude Levi-Strauss [see, C. Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York, 1967)].

often referred to by terms identifying the ruler (*şāh*, *pādişāh*, *sultān*)¹⁵. The beloved-Ottoman Sultan connection is quite overt and commonly recognized but its relation to the poetic drama and the implications of this relationship have not been seriously explored.

If we consider the dramatic elements in the diagram it is easy to see how some elements of the subject/supplicant-ruler relation can be substituted: supplicant for lover, ruler for beloved, supporters for the insider group, detractors/enemies for the outsiders. Other elements have less obvious (and, perhaps, more interesting) substitutes: what interactions might be equivalent to the poetic gathering/party? A royal audience? A royal *meclis*? What locations substitute for the garden? Each of these questions raises new questions about the interpretation of real-life features of Ottoman society.

In order to arrive at answers we would be required to ask, for example, if features of royal gatherings are described and perceived in patterns developed in the poetry, if garden symbolism is transposed meaningfully to the decoration of locations in which such gatherings take place, if individuals are seen to adopt an obsessively attached «lover» posture toward the ruler, if the general rules of the poetic interaction can be seen to interpret the real-life situations. Moreover, the subject-ruler relationship is a paradigm for this-wordly dominance-submission relationships (just as the human - Divine relationship is the universal paradigm) which indicates that there might be a whole range of actual relationships - parent-child, apprentice-master, officer-soldier, powerholder - retinue, etc. - having a character strongly influenced by the poetic prescription. It is difficult to see how we can dismiss lightly the role of Ottoman poetry in interpreting and shaping Ottoman society without serious consideration of such avenues of investigation.

Yet another aspect of the Ottoman *gazel* which appears worthy of more careful attention is its emotional dimension. The emotionalism of *gazel* poetry is clear and unmistakable. In general, the *gazel* is presented as a monolog by a speaker/poet persona who is affected by passion and/or intoxication. The peculiar nature of the language of the poetry is, in part, derived from the liberal use of the syntactic inversions (*devrik cümle*) associated with emotional dialog in the commonly spoken language

15. For example, in a word count of 160 *gazels* from two 16th century *divans* (Fıgānī, Yahyā) the word *şāh* was the second most often repeated word (after *cān*) while *pādişāh* and *sultān* were in the middle range of repetitions.

in conjunction with a very specialized and uncommon vocabulary¹⁶. Additionally, the focus of the poetic drama is not on the actions of the characters but on the emotional content of their behavior.

It is, perhaps, a function of the predictability of the poetic drama that the implications of this emotionalism have been so little explored. Because the characters, situation and behavior are quite formalized, there exists a dramatic distance at odds with our present expectations for lyric poetry. We are accustomed to think of lyric poetry as the poet's response to actual experience and of the reader's contact with the poetry as contact directly with the poet's response. In the Ottoman *gazel*, however, only a few, limited situations are presented, rehearsing emotional responses which may or may not be related to some actual experience. Thus, there is an ambiguity concerning whose emotion is being displayed - that of the poet or that of a character in the poetic drama. This appears to be what M. F. Köprülü is responding to in the quotation cited above when he says that *divan* poetry «... does not make our feelings felt in a pure and deep manner...» In terms of our esthetic preconceptions this is true; the emotion is, for us, adulterated by being filtered through a formalized situation. However, if we consider the premise that, in the Ottoman context, basic emotions are universals essentially unqualified by their context whether it be contact with the Divine or the most mundane interaction, then the particulars of any real-life situation become singularly unimportant. The actual attitude underlying *divan* poetry may well be more akin to that which underlies Greek tragedy than to our present day expectations of the lyric. In Greek tragedy the audience *knows* the story; the focus is not on experiencing something in any way novel or realistic but on experiencing, through a significant and familiar pattern, emotions which are generalizable to the myriad particulars of actual life. From the point of view of Ottoman esthetics, diluting the emotional content of the *gazel* with a confusing array of actual, idiosyncratic experiences might indeed be the *least* pure and deep manner of presentation.

Suppose we were to take the emotional/psychological dimension of the Ottoman *gazel* seriously, to consider that the emotions presented

16 An example of syntactic inversion would be line 3a. of the 'Amrî *gazel* in which the usual subject-objects-verb order has been distorted by pre-posing the verb to the sentence initial position. Although the subject-objects-verb order is the structural base order, the rules of sentence emphasis in Turkish make inverted sentences very common in the spoken language.

are both deeply felt and highly important to both the poets and their audience? On the most immediately manifest level, the *gazel* treats a very specific set of painful and anxiety producing emotional states. The obsessive passion/intoxication theme clearly represents the experience of abandoning control to the unconscious. Loss of conscious control is, not surprisingly, depicted as dangerous, frightening and painful. It is initially associated with the suicidal, self-destructive behavior of the great heroes of romance (*Ferhād, Mecnūn*), with burning anguish, alienation from society, loneliness and poverty. The resolution of this extremely perilous emotional situation (the dominance of the unconscious) appears to be accessible through the poetry in two dimensions.

In the first dimension, the poetry creates a climate of socially acceptable contexts in which abandonment of conscious control is both safe and interpretable in a positive manner. On this level the interpretation revolves about the symbols of the garden and the party/gathering. The poetic garden can be seen as an enclosing space, containing the ritual of irrational/unconscious behavior (as it contains the various flora and fauna which themselves symbolize characters in the poetic drama) and walling out the forces of an inimical, prudish, authoritarian consciousness. The notions of enclosure, of security and of a location permitting a safe regression to a preconscious state relate the garden to the primal locations - the home, the womb. Likewise, the party recreates the structure of a basic childhood situation. The first person character (the lover/inebriate) is surrounded by a group to which he is bound by ties of deep mutual affection. Among these people he finds sympathy and understanding, he is accepted unconditionally and he is able to express his innocent emotional self without fear of censure. The fact that this basic situation is tied to a widely accepted religious (mystical) interpretation serves to underscore the acceptability of a limited acting out of the emotional drama. Thus it is highly likely that the *gazel* can provide a window into the emotional content of fundamental social interactions in Ottoman life - the family, friendship, etc. - illuminating the human stratum underlying the ebb and flow of political, economic and historical forces.

In the second dimension, the Ottoman *gazel* appears to have a distinct universal quality. It is especially amenable to psychological interpretation on the model employed by Jung in his analyses of fairy

tales and other literary materials¹⁷. The mystical substrata of the *gazel* recognizes openly that the emotional drama is an analog of the quest of the psyche for total integration or union. Moreover, the characters of the drama correspond suggestively to the aspects of the Jungian psyche. The image of the beloved - as, at once, the promise and the faithless one, the cruel tyrant and the granter of perfect solace, the focus of hope and the agent of despair - is strikingly similar to the Jungian *anima*, sharing even the common identification with royalty (the *şāh*, *pādişāh*, *sultān* of the *gazel*) observed in fairy tale analyses¹⁸. The *animus* aspect of the syzygy - characterized by Jung as the Wise Old Man - is represented by the perfect lovers (the sultans of love in the 'Amrī *gazel* and the circle of friends (here the linguistic parallelism of *yār* beloved and *yārān* close friends, *dōst*, *dōstān* seems to reflect the paired nature of the syzygy). In the *gazel* drama the positive psychic forces are opposed by the personifications of a negating spirit representing a censoring morality (eg. the *zūhhād*) or rivals competing for possession of the beloved figure or protecting it from the hero's attentions (the *ağyār*, *raķīb*, *dūşmān*, etc.). This opposing spirit stands exterior to the insider group (the ego, syzygy group) acting as a mundane, prudish consciousness (similar to the Freudian super-ego) which intrudes its dogmatic dictates on the gathering.

It is important to note here that the paradigmatic quality of the poetic drama implies that this psychological element is not merely the unconscious imprint of the poet's psyche on individual works but is the expression of a highly sophisticated, developed understanding of the *a priori* existence of archetypes (symbolized by the '*ālem-i temsīl* of the cosmology) of which the poetic characters are only reflections. Moreover, the *gazel* and the mystical interpretation insist on limiting the drama to the internal, psychic sphere by resisting projection of the archetypes onto an external reality. (A clear symbol of this is the process of internalizing the beloved/*anima*, which is most strikingly portrayed in Meenūn's rejection of the «real» Leyla.)¹⁹

17 C. G. Jung, *Psyche and Symbol*, ed. V.S. de Laszlo (Garden City, 1958). There are, of course, a variety of approaches to the psychology of literary works but because of its fundamental nature and the fact that it paid serious attention to non-western sources, Jung's work seems to be an excellent starting point.

18 C. G. Jung; «The Phenomenology of the Spirit in Fairy Tales» in *Psyche and Symbol*, pp. 61-112.

19 This is to say that the mystical view reflected in the poetry sees the essence of the human spirit as part of the universal, Divine existence. Thus the archetypes

If we take this universal, psychological dimension of the Ottoman *gazel* seriously - and it would seem a great mistake not to do so - then many features of the poetry hitherto regarded as solely ornamental will come to be endowed with meaning. The interpretation of psychological materials - primarily dreams and fantasies - indicates that the unconscious aspects of the psyche express themselves through complex metaphors and word play especially the various forms of punning (*cinās*) familiar to any student of Ottoman rhetoric²⁰. In a context which insists on the primacy of the irrational and unconscious, it seems appropriate that the mode of expression parallel that of the products of rationality's shadow.

Thus far, this essay has touched lightly on a few of many potentially productive approaches to the Ottoman *gazel*. It would, of course, be preferable to give an extended and complete exposition of each point; however, the purpose of this essay is not to exhibit any particular interpretation but to indicate some reasons why it is reasonable, possible and even necessary to re-evaluate our notion of *gazel* esthetics..

The loss of Professor Ali Nihat Tarlan is a sad reminder of how tenuous our links are to the reality of *gazel* esthetics. The intuitive comprehension, the sympathy, the feeling for *divan* poetry which inform Professor Tarlan's scholarship and shine in his creative work are irreplaceable. In one of his editions he compares his sense for the proper editorial choice to the inexplicable sensitivity of a winetaster. The truth about *gazel* esthetics was an inseparable part of this being as is the truth about wine that exists on the taster's palate - neither distinct from the totality of the individual's experience nor describable to anyone who would need a description. However, the sobering fact of *divan* poetry is that *there can be no new wine-tasters*. There is certainly a new ge-

of human feelings such as loneliness, separation passionate attraction, etc. are the yearnings of that essence for re-union with the Divine, and the true source of human feelings is not in relationships with this-worldly objects but in the primal yearning. By this interpretation the focus is not on any love object but on transcending the love object through what is fundamentally an internal, individual resolution. Theologically, this interpretation is quite a bit more complex than its exposition here but as a psychological paradigm it very clearly and soundly locates responsibility for common anxieties within the individual psyche and resists projection of emotional states onto external objects or forces.

20 There are numerous examples in Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, ed. and trans. by J. Strachey (New York, 1961).

neration of excellent scholars but the experience of Ottoman culture and society which underlies the true Ottoman esthetics is no longer directly accessible. The new generation cannot lean heavily on intuition and it cannot, secure in an inner knowledge, co-exist peacefully with a shallow, anachronistic portrayal of Ottoman esthetics.

At the beginning of this essay, a number of characteristic features of the Ottoman *gazel* were listed. In the subsequent discussion, these features have been shown to be potentially meaningful and explicable in terms of established approaches which have never been adequately considered in assessing our present esthetic assumptions. It follows minimally then that these assumptions are open to question. Moreover, considerable evidence seems to indicate that a re-assessment based on sounder and less prejudicial esthetic premises will eventually establish, at the very least, that :

1) The Ottoman *gazel* is a far more interesting and valuable object of study than it appears to be through the filter of the received esthetics.

2) No aspect of Ottoman Literature, and especially *divan* poetry, is in any significant way inferior to other world literatures - in fact, it may well provide insights into the human condition found nowhere else.

3) The Ottoman *gazel* is an authentic and worthwhile product of *Turkish* culture, imbued with the peculiar experiences and wisdom of that culture and an invaluable source for understanding its story.