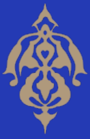

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ḠAZAL II. CHARACTERISTICS AND CONVENTIONS

ḠAZAL

ii. CHARACTERISTICS AND CONVENTIONS

The origins of the Persian *ḡazal* (ghazal, □□□), its development in the course of time and its formal features have been described in detail in *ḠAZAL* i. by Professor J. T. P. de Bruijn. This entry concentrates on the typical characteristics of the ḡazal and its peculiarities and conventions.

Persian love poetry is mostly embodied in a verse form called ḡazal, a short lyric poem of some seven to fourteen lines. The unit of ḡazal, as in most other forms of Persian poetry, is a line (*beyt*), which consists of two hemistiches (*meṣrāʿ*s) with a distinct caesura between the two. As a rule, each line contains a complete statement; sometimes the entire poetic statement is contained in one hemistich, and the second hemistich is then used to either emphasize the idea expressed in the first hemistich, or reiterate it in a different way, or illustrate it, or to introduce a new idea, or else as mere padding to complete the meter.

The Persian ḡazal, especially the Hafezian and the post-Hafezian, does not usually follow a sustained narrative, but consists of a number of lines and statements largely independent of each other. In a sense, one can say that each line of a ḡazal, or of a *qaṣida* (panegyric ode) for that matter, is often a short

poem in which a poetic idea, theme, or motif is expressed, such as a description of the beloved's beauty, a lament of the poet's separation from the beloved, a praise of wine and inebriation, a description of a natural scene such as a garden, a satire of hypocrisy, or an allegory of the lover's state.

In earlier ḡazals, thematic unity is often observed throughout the poem. Even in Saʿdi's and Rumi's ḡazals (13th century) this unity of subject, or at least the unity of mood, is often preserved. With Hafez (circa 1320-1389), however, multiplicity of themes becomes prevalent (cf. Arberry, pp. 31-32). In the post-Hafezian era, this tendency became even more prevalent and many ḡazals were composed with a number of separate poetic strokes, each containing a different idea. The ḡazal is, however, held together by a robust formal frame made of a single quantitative, rhythmical meter, and a single rhyme throughout.

As a line provides only a short space for the expression of a poetic idea, brevity and concision are the hallmark of the statements made in ḡazal lines. Elaborate and drawn out comparisons, in the manner of Homeric similes, are rare. Similes are often shortened into metaphors; for instance, the poets speak metonymically of narcissus, cypress and the moon, meaning the beloved's eyes, his figure and his face, respectively.

The treatment of love and its ramifications as described in the Persian ḡazaldiffers widely from what can be found in the poetry of other cultures, such as Western or Far Eastern. The Persian ḡazalcannot be readily understood or appreciated without familiarity with the themes, motifs, imagery, and conventions peculiar to it. The same contextual hurdle presents the translators of the ḡazal with a formidable challenge: since the sub-text and the conventions of the ḡazalcannot be spelt out in the translation of individual ḡazals, not only the ingenuity and charm of their poetic expression are lost, but sometimes their translations fail to make any sense at all.

The underlying assumptions and thematic, imaginal, and rhetorical conventions of Persian ḡazalmay be discussed under the following rubrics: the Beloved, the Lover, the Love, Concepts of Beauty, the Wine Cult, the *Rend*s, *Qalandar*s and their Ilk, Mystical Ḡazals, and the Later Development of the Ḡazal.

The Beloved. The key to the characteristics and peculiarities of the ḡazalis the beloved. He is usually a young male, often a soldier, sometimes a page or a

cupbearer (*sāqi*, almost the equivalent of the classical Ganymede) in festive sessions when men gather together to have a convivial time. His age generally ranges between that of late adolescence to early manhood, when the callow down begins to show on his pubescent face and forms a darkish line on the upper lip. This is called *ḵ-aṭṭ*, literally a "line," and is often mentioned in the description of the beloved's face, not infrequently together with *ḵ-āl* "beauty-spot, mole," probably originally because of the homophony of their initial sound. *Ḵaṭṭ* and *ḵ-āl* are among the attractive features of the beloved. It is true that in some poems, particularly those tinged with humor, the onset of hair on the beloved's face is said to herald the dissipation of his charm, but in general both *ḵ-aṭṭ* and *ḵ-āl* are regarded as desirable attributes.

The beloved is called an idol (*bot*, *ṣanam*), a friend (*yār, dust*), the loved one (*ḥabib, maḥbub,* and *maʿšuq*,all denoting beloved); a Turk; the soul (*jān, jānān*); and by a number of epithets such asmoon-faced (*māh-ru*) or simply moon (*māh*), *deldār* (the keeper of one's heart), *delbar* (one who carries off one's heart). The appellation, *bot* (from Buddha) is a legacy of Buddhist culture and its temples in eastern Iran, where Buddhism was practiced for several centuries prior to Islam. "Turk" had come to mean a handsome young man or the beloved by the ninth and tenth centuries. When early ḡazals were being written during these centuries, young soldiers of Turkish stock were either captured and enslaved in frontier wars in Central Asia, or were bought at slave markets; they were highly prized. Many of them were trained as soldiers destined to serve in the army, while others were engaged as pages at the court of rulers or in the household of courtiers and other notables. They were admired for their looks and were targets of amorous desires (de Bruijn, 1990, pp. 128-28; Yarshater, 1955, pp. 153-160; Idem, 1960, "1960, pp. 43-53; see HOMOSEXUALITY iii. IN PERSIAN LITERATURE).

Given the confinement of women to their homes in Islamic Persia, and the obligation to wear veils in public, even the mere mention of their name, let alone a description of their features, was considered against public morality and injurious to the concept of chastity. It is understandable, therefore, that addressing amorous feelings towards them could not be permitted in ḡazals, which were often meant to be sung in friendly gatherings or at parties (*bazm*s). Paradoxically, whereas the description of wine-drinking and intoxication, although anti-Islamic, became from the outset one of the salient themes of Persian lyric poetry, this privilege was not extended to the description of women or the expression of amorous feelings towards them.

Any portrayal of heterosexual love remained anti-social and offensive to the manly honor of a woman's male relations. In narrative poetry, exemplified by Fak̲-r-al-Din Asʿad Gorgāni's *Vis o Rāmin* and Neẓāmi's romances, however, a female beloved could be described with impunity.

Thus, all the fervor of love in the Persian ḡazal is directed towards a male beloved. Yet he remains an abstract figure and totally anonymous. Not only is he bereft of a name, even his descriptions are not specific to any recognizable individual and the poet provides no clue to his true portrayal. He possesses an ideal beauty, described in exaggerated terms: his face shines like the sun, which he puts to shame when he reveals his own face; his face is the moon incarnate; his stature is like the slender Persian cypress, nay, the cypress vainly tries to emulate his graceful figure and his gait; his waist is so narrow as to resemble a hair; his mouth is a rosebud; his lips are red rubies; when he talks, sugar pours out of his mouth, so sweet is his speech; his beautiful eyes and his elegant gait are those of a doe; when he stands up he causes a commotion among his admirers comparable to that of the resurrection; his black curls are like the night shrouding the sun or the moon of his face; as he walks all eyes follow him in wondrous awe; his glance pierces the heart of his lovers like a sharp arrow; his chin is an apple; the dimple on his chin a pit in which many a heart is trapped; he has languid eyes, seemingly drunk (*mast*) or ailing (*bimār*); he is a hunter of hearts; innumerable hearts are chained within his curls; peerless in beauty and charm, he has hordes of lovers; no one can resist his beauty; he is full of coquetry (*nāz*); he robs people of their heart; his commands are obeyed, even if he orders his lover to die; prospective martyrs, prepared to die for his love, throng around his street; he is imperious and self-indulgent and totally indifferent to his lover; the lover's profession of love and devotion often make him lose his temper; he is prone to draw his sword and attack his lover(s) when importuned by him/them; he may be given to drinking and may grow obstreperous. A famous ḡazalof Hafez begins with the description of a care-free, drunken beloved:

With disheveled tresses, perspiring, laughter on his lips, and inebriated

With unbuttoned shirt, singing a love song, and a jug of wine in hand

(*zolf āšofta ʷo, k̲-oy karda ʷo, k̲-andān-lab ʷo, mast/*

pirhan čāk o, ḡazal- k̲-ʷān o, ṣorāḥi dar dast)

(Arberry, p. 43; *Divān,* ed. Ḵānlari, I, no. 22, p. 60)

Yet it is impossible to establish whether the poet is singing the praise of a beloved who is short or tall, fair or swarthy, whether he has straight or curly hair; whether the tresses of his hair and the pupils of his eyes are black or not. It is not possible to tell the beloved of one poet from that of another, or to distinguish the beloved that the poet has described in his youth from the one he portrays in old age. This gives the Persian ḡazala universal applicability that may not be found in more specific descriptions of a beloved. Any reader can read in the Persian ḡazal a description of his own ideal sweetheart.

The description of the beloved as possessing unmatched beauty, with all his attributes, and the metaphors employed in his description soon became conventional tropes, and the poets fell into the habit of repeating them in innumerable variations.

The Lover. In the ḡazalthe poet generally poses as the lover. He is desperately in love with the beloved who, as pointed out above, is generally reluctant, haughty, and indifferent at best, but more often contentious, combative, and quarrelsome in his protestations.

The poet often falls in love at the first glance. He will give his life, nay, his faith and his hope of salvation, if only the beloved would deign to cast half a glance at him or merely acknowledge his existence. He is happy to sweep up the dust of the beloved's threshold with his eyelashes. Rarely is he rewarded with a hint of attention on the part of the beloved. His days pass in lamenting his separation (*ferāq*) from the beloved and in yearning for the union (*waṣl*) with him. He bemoans the never-ending nights of separation and welcomes the dawn, which puts an end to his sleepless and miserable nights. He laments his fate, complains against the harshness of the beloved's keeper (*raqib*) and the better luck of his competitors. His tears run like a stream; he sheds drops of blood that gush forth from his wounded heart. He never gives up, but remains loyal to his cruel beloved and puts up with all manner of offense and oppression (*jowr o jafā*) from the beloved, without his profound devotion to him being diminished in the least. His fate is exemplified by the moth, which burns itself out of love for the candle's flame. The nightingale that sings its desperate love for the inconstant rose is an allegory of his love for the beloved, and the thorns on the rose's stem symbolize the difficulties he encounters in his love.

In earlier love lyrics, that is, of the Samanid, Ghaznavid and early Salujqid eras (9th through 11th century), the lover is not depicted as so hapless and deprived. He is more proud and enjoys moments or even nights of ecstatic union with the beloved; sometimes he even puts on airs and graces and considers his love a precious gift that he has bestowed upon the beloved, and does not mind reminding him that as the panegyrist to the ruler, he expects deferential treatment. But gradually he becomes more and more of a supplicant, and the gaiety of the early love lyrics, which appear mostly in the introductory parts of panegyrics (*nasib, tašbib*), gives way to a melancholy mood – a mood that intensifies in ḡazals with the passage of time. The spread of mysticism and the Sufi's total devotion to God, and his desire to find refuge in self-effacement and self-annihilation in the divine without any expectation of a reward, all expressed in terms of mundane love, may have contributed to the formation of the image of the lover as a slavish figure who abandons his pride and becomes a target of the beloved's disdain and disregard.

The general trends and conventions noted above do not imply an uncritical conformity and an all-pervading lack of creative diversity. The great masters of the ḡazal exhibit distinctive features that mark their different personalities and styles. For instance, Saʿdi (circa 1193-1290) has written some ḡazals that celebrate the joys of union with the beloved, and the rhythmic music of his ḡazals counteract the somber mood induced by the privation of the lover, while in Hafez, his philosophical musings, his love of wine motifs and inebriation, his satirical jibes at the hypocritical figures of the religious establishment, and the relatively restrained musical tone of his ḡazals mitigate against his despondent amorous yearnings. As for Rumi (1207-1273), his ḡazals are often celebratory rhapsodies of someone drunk with love and incapable of containing the uncontrollable expressions of his love, his ecstatic outpourings crystallizing into musically and dramatically spectacular verses. The ḡazals of the Indian Style, from about the 16th century or a little earlier, however, follow the trend described above and the lover becomes more and more humble, wretched, and slavish.

Love. Love is the reigning passion in the Persian ḡazal. It is often contrasted with Reason, whose helplessness before Love has become proverbial, and manifests itself in a variety of ways: Love is the sovereign, Reason is its obedient servant or slave; where Love pitches its tent, Reason has to humbly leave the grounds. Love is instantaneous and all consuming; it is kindled, as a rule, by physical beauty, by the captivating eyes of the beloved, by his slender,

graceful figure, by the paradisiacal beauty of his face. Love, being homoerotic, like heterosexual love outside of marriage, is a forbidden passion, and the lover knows this; therefore, the poet-lover often talks of the scandal (*rosvāʾi*) that will ensue once his love is revealed; even if he should want to keep his love to himself, the stream of his tears and the pallor of his face betray his secret; sometimes he even masochistically boasts of having been found out (*rosvā*) and basks in the attendant blame and shame heaped upon him. There are friends and wise well-wishers (*nāṣeḥ*s) who advise the lover against his impossible passion, but he does not heed their advice; love has possessed him and for him there is no escape.

Love, as slowly nurtured through the appreciation of the moral qualities or personal merits of the beloved, is not generally encountered in the ḡazal. It is taken as understood from the very first lines of the ḡazal that the poet is deep in love and the lines that follow explain the state of the lover and the indifference or cruelty of the beloved as well as aspects of his beauty.

Concepts of Beauty. Beauty is a major theme of the Persian ḡazal and its description occupies many of its verses. Beauty as described in the ḡazal is idealized and indivisible; it is not specific to any particular beloved, but conventional. All beloveds are extraordinarily beautiful, possessing unmatched beauty; all tresses are captivating and curly; all eyes are enchanting, starry and languid; all eyelashes are as pointed as darts; all lips are ruby-red like a rosebud; teeth are pearls; skin is silvery; waists are as narrow as a hair (the alliteration in *muy* "hair" and *miyān* "waist, the middle," enriches the simile); the beloved is so beautiful that sometimes the poet-lover thinks that his beauty reflects divine beauty and his looks, an intimation of divine splendor. In the ḡazals written by the mystical poets, the reflection of divine beauty upon the face of the beloved finds support in pantheistic notions of the Sufis.

At the end of the first stage of ḡazal writing, when it gradually took its classical shape in the ḡazals of Sanāʾi, ʿAṭṭār, Neẓāmi, Ḵāqāni, and ʿErāqi, most of the lyrical concepts, themes, and imageries of the ḡazal became formalized and conventionalized, encouraging poets to explore and elaborate on variations of already tried motifs and familiar metaphors.

The Wine Cult. In the antinomian and almost blasphemous atmosphere of the ḡazal, which provides space for the kind of freedom of expression that is denied in prose and in didactic writings, not only is love homoerotic, but the

cult of wine and the praise of intoxication are among the most frequent themes. Wine is the great consoler; it relieves the lover from the pains of separation. He drowns his sorrows in wine, seeking refuge in the cup. The color and the bitter taste of wine and its magical effects are described; its abundant consumption is also depicted gleefully, and portrayed in such aspirations as to be ritually washed with wine instead of with water when dead, or taking one's leave of this world in such a drunken stupor that on Resurrection Day one would arise from the grave, still inebriated.

Wine is served at friendly gatherings by a *sāqi* or wine server. He is normally a youth who is frequently called upon to serve wine to help dissipate the lover's cares. Inevitably, he is also a target of amorous desires or advances. A genre of Persian lyric poetry in couplet form has developed, called *sāqi-nāma*, in which the appeal to the *sāqi* to pass the cup around, the laudatory description of wine and its curative virtues, together with some love-related ideas are the most frequent themes. The most popular example is by Hafez, of which the number of lines differ in manuscripts, ranging between 15 and 57 lines (*Divān*, ed. Ḵānlari, II, p. 1050). It is often sung in the *Isfahan* mode of traditional Persian music.

The theme of wine-drinking is closely related to several figures who appear most prominently in the ḡazals of Hafez, namely, the *rend*, the *qalandar*, the *ḵ-arābāti*, the wine seller and the Zoroastrian tavern-keeper (see below).

*The Rend*s, *Qalandar*s *and their Ilk.* The chief personae of the ḡazal consist of the beloved, the poet-lover, his rivals (*raqib*s, originally meaning "guardian, keeper"), the admonishing wise man who warns the lover against his scandalous passion, the wine server (*sāqi*) who alleviates the lover's pains with his precious liquid, the *rend*s, the *qalandar*s and the *ḵ-arābāti*s, all debauchees anddisreputable figures, and the tavern-keeper and the wine seller. Although the use of rend and qalandar in the ḡazal predates both Saʿdi and Hafez, it is with Hafez that they find much wider use as antinomian figures who are ironically placed on a pedestal of respectability as symbols of honesty and paragons of virtue. They are sharply contrasted with these hypocritical and double-dealing figures of religious establishments and organized Sufism.

The development of these characters and the genre of poetry called *qalandariyāt* is related to the development of Sufism in Islam and the endeavor by the Sufis to avoid any possibilities of smugness and self-

approbation that may result from contemplating one's own fervent religiosity and devotion. To avoid such pitfalls of excessive piety, a tendency developed among some Sufis to perform blameworthy and shameful deeds proscribed by Islam so as to kill one's pride and to become totally indifferent to the opinion of others in pursuit of the mystic path (de Bruijn, 1992, pp. 75-86; Bürgel, pp. 7-39).

Gradually this antinomian (*ebāḥi*) attitude found favor with more Sufis, by which they would indulge in a way of life that included drinking in public, frequenting taverns and committing deeds proscribed by Islam, ostensibly trying to subject themselves to blame and to show that they did not care about other peoples' opinion. One may suspect that freedom from the shackles of religious duties and the inherent pleasure derived from these antisocial acts also played a part, at least in some cases. As expected, some of the more conservative Sufis who regarded the performance of religious ordinances their duty objected to the mode of behavior adopted by the rends and qalandars. Yet adherence to the tenets of "qalandari" manner of living found enough adepts to give rise to a school of Sufism, that of the *malāmati*s or "those worthy of blame."

Persian poetry from the beginning presented a profane and almost blasphemous context, whereby the poet would sing the praise of wine and the ecstatic effects of inebriation, describe his flirtation with young male beauties and express joy at the termination of the fasting month of Ramadan. In such a context rends and their ilk had naturally a respectable place and many poets, particularly Hafez, used their praise as a thorn in the eyes of the false ascetics (*zāhed*s), hypocritical preachers, sheikhs, judges, muftis, censors of morality (*moḥtaseb*s), and insincere and deceptive Sufis. Hafez' worshipful eulogy of the wine seller (sarcastically dubbed *pir-e may-foruš*, the saintly wine seller) and the Zoroastrian tavern-keeper (dubbed *pir-e moḡān*, the saintly Zoroastrian mentor), are both passed on as perfect embodiments of ultimate wisdom (see HAFEZ i. AN OVERVIEW); the poet-lover much prefers their company to that of the false preacher and his like. In fact, he finds the Christian convents (*deyr*s) where wine can be had, and the tavern rather than the mosque (generally called *ṣawmaʿa*, "convent" in Hafez so as not to risk the accusation of blasphemy) as his refuge and a place where he can find frankness and honesty and where he acquires more wisdom than by listening to the preachers who preach one thing and do the opposite in secret. He often talks about and even revels in pawning his books and his prayer rug in order

to purchase wine. The denying hypocrites are also partial to drinking when safely shielded from the people's gaze.

Mystical Ġazals. Mysticism is essentially based on establishing a direct and personal relation with the creator of the world or godhead, a feeling of oneness with the universe, and an intuitive perception or knowledge of the ultimate reality. Addressing a human psychological need, it is practically common to all religions in one form or another. In essence, it may be related to the human fear of the unknown and man's desire to establish an intimate relationship with the power that directs the universe, thus establishing a friendly bond with an alien and threatening world that surrounds him. The highest pitch is reached when in rare moments the mystic feels that he has lost himself in Him and has become one with Him.

In Islam, Sufism developed from the piety and asceticism of early believers, the concentration of their thought on the Divine, possibly with influences from earlier cultures. Persia provided a particularly fertile ground for the development of mystical thought and practice. Gnostic religions such as Manichaeism, and the spread of Buddhism in eastern and northeastern Iran in pre-Islamic times may have prepared the ground for adopting and developing mystical sentiments. By the 11th century, Sufi centers (ḵ-ānaqāhs) were established, where *pir*s or spiritual mentors guided novices on the mystical path by prescribing resistance to physical and worldly pleasures, control over one's desires, undergoing yogi-like hardships (*riāżat*), losing one's will in the will of God and making one's heart a mirror of Divine light and the abode of His love. In rare moments, it was possible for the Sufis who had followed "the path" (*ṭariqat*) successfully to feel united with Him and be privileged by experiencing an ineffable and indescribable joy, not dissimilar to the ecstatic feelings of a devoted lover reuniting with his beloved after a long period of separation.

The Sufis, like lovers compelled to sing of their love, wanted to vent their intoxication with the love of God and the ecstasy that they were occasionally experiencing or aiming at. Finding language an inadequate vehicle for expressing these ecstatic feelings and failing to distill their emotions directly into words, they had to resort to the vocabulary of profane love: an experience analogous to their divine encounters. God or the ultimate Truth was their beloved. They yearned to reach Him as a lover yearns to reach his beloved. It was only natural that they should choose the language of erotic love and the description of the human beloved and his/her beauty to express their mystical

love.

So it came about that some quatrains or ḡazals had mystical love as their theme and the mystical beloved as their subject, though couched in the language of earthly love. This gave rise to some of the most tender, profound, and moving poems in the Persian language. The practice also induced an element of ambiguity into such poems as they could be read on two levels: mundane and mystical (cf. Lazard). Already Abu Saʿid Abi'l Ḵayr (967-1049), the famous Sufi of Khorasan, cites quatrains of this nature; others followed. It became customary in Sufi gatherings and at their *samāʿ* or musical sessions to recite or chant love poems intended to express mystical sentiments. Some mystic poets like ʿErāqi (1213-1289), ʿAṭṭār (1119-1193), and Rumi wrote ḡazals with mystical purport.

Yet, most such poems, except when they have a specific reference to mystical intent, can be read as fervent love poems without mystical reference. This also explains their great popularity. In fact, even in the ḡazals of acknowledged Sufis like ʿAṭṭār and Rumi and later, Neʿmat-Allāh Wali, it is difficult to believe that it is not a sublimation of earthly love that they are singing in their lyrics. There are lines in their ḡazals that defy a mystical interpretation and can only be regarded as a spontaneous or fervent expression of mundane love. Note for instance ʿAṭṭār's ḡazal beginning with the following line:

O sāqi, pass us the cup, now and then, drink up from the cup, now and then / if you are truly mature, drink immature wine (*Sāqiā gah jām deh, gah jām ḵ-ʷor / gar be-maʿni poḵ-taʾi, mey ḵ-ām ḵ-ʷor*) (ʿAṭṭār, ed. Tafażżoli, no. 411, p. 331); or ʿErāqi's ḡazal, beginning with the line: From head to toe you embody life itself with your grace my boy! / Whatever is more savory than life, you are *that*, my boy! (*Sar ba sar az loṭf jāni, ey pesar /ḵ-ʷoštar az jān čist? āni ey pesar*) (ʿErāqi, ed. Nafisi, p. 209); or Rumi's ḡazal,beginning with the line: With me, O my idol! Play it straight / If I don't toe the line, then lodge a complaint! *(Bā man, ṣanamā, del yek-dela kon / gar sar naneham, āngah gela kon.*)(*Divān-e Šams*, ed. Foruzānfar, IV, p. 286, no. 2095); or his ḡazal beginning with the line: Feast your eyes on that form and see that manner and that figure and those cheeks and arms and legs / See that hue and that poise and that full moon inside a gown (*ān šekl bin, w'ān šiva bin w'ān qadd o ḵ-add o dast o pā /ān rang bin w'ān hang bin w'ān māh-e badr andar qabā*) (ibid, I, no. 5, p. 7); or a ḡazal by Hafez, who is sometimes erroneously taken to be a mystic, beginning with the line: If the thread of my rosary has snapped, absolve me of any blame: /My hand was busy elsewhere, arm-in-arm as I was, with the silver-legged cupbearer (*Rešta-*

ye tasbiḥ agar bogsašt maʿḏuram bedār / dastam andar sāʿed-e sāqi-ye simin-sāq bud)(*Divān,* ed. Ḵānlari, I, no. 202, p. 420, line 8).

The spread of Sufism in Iran was extraordinary. Many Sufi orders were established, numerous ḵ-ānaqāhs were instituted, Sufi vocabulary entered the Persian language, and mystical notions grew popular. If Persia could be said to have a philosophy distinct from the philosophical heritage of the Greeks, it can be said to be mysticism. Many treaties were written by Iranians in both Arabic and Persian expounding mystical thought and explaining mystical theories. Sayings, parables, aphorisms, and paradoxes of the Sufis, best exemplified in ʿAṭṭār's *Taḏkerat al-awliāʾ*, were collected and found wide circulation.

Ebn al-ʿArabi's pantheistic theories, spread by his followers in Iran, became almost universally adopted by Persian Sufis and poets, although one must say that what the Persian Sufis already believed was not too far from a form of pantheism; Ebn al-ʿArabi, however, provided the Sufi worldview of finding God everywhere and manifested in everything with a theoretical basis. It became a major theme of mystical poems, and also a license to write love poems about young boys with the pretext that their beauty was a manifestation of Divine beauty.

In fact, except in the case of some genuine and profoundly convinced Sufi poets, it is difficult to draw a line between the expression of spiritual love and a desire to escape censure by disguising erotic feelings as if they were purely mystical and ethereal outpourings. In ḵ-ānaqāhs, and in *langar*s (the common term used in the Subcontinent for ḵ-ānaqāh) in the same way, the shady practices of the Sufis and their abuse of both charitable donations and their proximity to young novices went side by side with genuine belief in Sufi principles and ethics (Riazul Islam, pp. 345-54).

Like any culture, dynasty, art school or literary style, organized Sufism, too, followed an ascending and then a descending curve, ending in many cases in a travesty of its original piety and purity and became a deserving target for the biting satire and sharp invectives of the sardonic Hafez. Later, the uninspired life of mendicant dervishes going round with a beggar's bowl (*kaškul*) and other paraphernalia of the profession and singing poems in praise of God, the Prophet and Imam ʿAli to attract alms, offered a debased form of Sufism.

But irrespective of the development of Sufism, Sufi notions and vocabulary became part of the Iranian cultural climate, adopted also by the poets of the

Ottoman Empire, Muslim India, and Turkic Central Asia. They were used by poets, among others, not necessarily with either an understanding of Sufi principles or subscription to Sufi ideals, in the same way that the use of expressions such as *al-ḥamdo le-l'lāh* "praise be to God" in response to "how are you?" and *enšāʾ Allāh* "God willing" and *ḵ-odā ḥāfeẓ* "Goodbye" and scores of similar phrases does not necessarily imply religious belief.

The fact that Persian love lyrics, as in some love lyrics in other literatures, can occasionally be read or interpreted on two different levels, spiritual and earthly, has led some Sufis, or pseudo-Sufis, to establish a correlation between some common vocabulary in ḡazals and a mystical meaning. For instance, "tresses" (*zolf*) signifies "the hidden recesses of the Divine Selfhood unto which no one can penetrate" (Nurbakhsh, I, p. 75). Further, all the combinations in which *zolf* appear have their own mystical meaning, for instance, the "tresses' coil" (*pič-e zolf*) means "Divine manifestations" (ibid, p. 80); the "curl's chain" (*zanjir-e zolf*) is "an allusion to the constrictions and bonds of multiplicity and archetypal determinations" (ibid, p. 82); "the footstep" (*qadam*) "personifies the attraction and the attention of God upon the seeker" (ibid, p. 109); "wine" (*mey*) "symbolizes the intuitive savour of the recollection of God within a Sufi's heart" (ibid, p. 143); "ruby wine" (*mey-e laʿl*) "symbolizes tidings of the Beloved and the pleasurable savour of love" (ibid., p. 145); "rebeck" (*rabāb*) "symbolizes the cry of žReturn!' heard by the wayfarer from his Beloved" (ibid., p. 168); "wailing" (*nāla*) "symbolizes spiritual communion" (Nurbakhsh, XIII, p.73); "amorous glance" (*ḡamza*) "stands for the emanation of grace and inner attraction which are experienced by the wayfarer" (ibid., p. 123).

If one were to believe such interpretations, poets like Sanāʾi, ʿAṭṭār, ʿErāqi, Rumi, and particularly Hafez, never wrote anything in a direct manner but always in codes, and the reader needs to carefully decode every single word, find their symbolic interpretations, and combine them in order to make sense of the poem. In short, Sufi poets wrote puzzles and riddles, not poems to be read and enjoyed by ordinary mortals. It is rather surprising that the lucid, transparent, and straightforward lyrics of these poets and their like, expressed in the normal, literary language of each period—a language that most Persians, even those with a low degree of education, can understand and enjoy—should be subjected to the mystifying and obfuscating interpretations offered by traders of mystical wares.

Some Western authors have also taken such interpretations seriously and have produced works of remarkable absurdity. This approach is best

exemplified in the edition and translation of Hafez (*The Dīvān*, Calcutta, 1891, rep. London, 1974) by Lieut.-Col. H. Wilberforce Clarke, who was completely taken in by such misguided interpretations and did not leave a single line of Hafez without finding a spiritual and mystical meaning in it, to the point that one suspects that he was capable of finding mystical meanings even in prepositions and postpositions! He has not been alone in taking Hafez's broad worldview, philosophical musings, and his comments on life, mankind, and the world for mysticism, and ignoring his repeated jibes at Sufi *pir*s along with his vituperative satire aimed at other pseudo-religious figures (See HAFEZ i.); but then there are some devotees of mysticism who have made a Sufi even out of such an arch-skeptic as Omar Khayyam.

An offshoot of this tendency and of considering Hafez a Sufi is the assumed meaning of rend, qalandar, and ḵ-arābāti in his poems as praiseworthy characters. They are all in fact debauchees, abject and antisocial figures whom Hafez almost sanctifies as virtues incarnate, dispensers of inspired wisdom, and practitioners of the right way of living, all as a jibe against the two-faced preachers and hypocritical sheikhs, muftis, judges and censors of morality, in the same way that he elevates the tavern-keeper to the station of a saintly figure, fount of wisdom and source of spiritual guidance. In fact Hafez uses rend and similar terms in the literal and common meaning that they had during his period.

Mystical interpretations of so many otherwise love lyrics have partly derived from the fact that people who indulged in reading love poetry appreciated finding an excuse for their enjoyment of sensuous poems by attributing spiritual intent to their authors, and the poets likewise appreciated their interpretation. The general tendency of Persian readership to reject the apparent meaning in favor of a latent one as a mark of intelligence and perspicacity has helped lead to this development. By assuming hidden meanings in plain words and phrases one proves that one is not duped by appearances. It may be parenthetically noted that this tendency in political and social contexts has led to the prevalence of “conspiracy theory” (q.v.) in Persia.

Indeed, reading puzzles in Persian ḡazals defies reason, and to believe that a poet will start writing a ḡazal using only coded words and having some other meaning in mind when using such common words as head, eye, heart, step, rose, candle, finger, jug, cup, dimple in the chin, and hundreds like them is an aberrant tendency that tarnishes the name of the truly mystical ḡazal.

Some General Observations about the Ḡazaland Its Later Development. After the thirteenth century or even earlier, as mentioned above, poetic themes and ideas, and the metaphors employed to express them, nearly reach their limit and become conventional and fossilized. What later poets do is mostly to create variations on old themes and metaphors. There are literally hundreds of variations on the theme of the rose and the nightingale, or the moth and the candle, the flood of tears streaming out of the oppressed lover's eyes, or the poet's infatuation with wine. As time progresses, the creation of variations on old themes become more and more difficult and therefore necessitate greater subtlety and sophistication. By the fifteenth century, the natural development of the poetic art in Persia, from simple to complex, makes verbal and imaginal acrobatics a favorite occupation of the poets. The idea is to amaze the reader by one's dexterity at such acrobatics and by unprecedented poetic feats. Kātebi of Toršiz wrote a qaṣida in which he took it upon himself to use two Persian words, *šotor* (camel) and *ḥojra* (room), in every single line; and a poet by the name of Saḥāb wrote a qaṣida after ʿAlišir Navāʾi's death, from the first hemistiches of which the birth date of ʿAlišir can be extracted, and from each of the second the date of his death (*Majāles al-nafāʾes*, ed. ʿA. ḤOekmat, Tehran 1944, p. 207). And yet such poems pale in comparison with the verse acrostics and virtuoso compositions of poems that employ only dotted or un-dotted letters throughout (for details see Yarshater, 1955, pp. 119-37).

As the poetic practices of the later Timurid period practically exhausted all feats of verbal and formal virtuosity, Safavid poets chose mostly a different route. They took advantage of the early Safavid kings' neglect of panegyrics, and with their concentration on the enforcement of Shiʿism in Persia, coupled with the dissolution of the court's circle of poets, Safavid poets gave up the Timurid manner of poetic artistry and focused on a search for subtler and more complex variations on poetic themes, images, and tropes. With the passage of time, such subtleties grew more artificial and far-fetched so that the expression of natural feelings became subordinate to the poets' preoccupation with dreaming up ever more elaborate constructs, devoid of a firm basis in emotional reality.

This style thrived not only among Safavid poets, best represented by the ingenious poet Sāʾeb (circa 1603-1669), but more particularly among the Persian poets who left for India in search of patronage, and the Persian poets who were born in the Subcontinent and were attached to the courts of the Great Mughals. It is on their account that the style is dubbed the "Indian Style."

In this style a simple image or trope is hardly considered sufficient or worthwhile. The poet often uses these as material for more elaborate constructs: rhetorical figures are used abundantly and the poet tends to combine and cross them, twist and turn them around, substituting in the process allusion for expression, evocation for declaration, and intimation for statement. Bidel's (q.v.) constructs, in which he frequently breaks, combines, and orchestrates his crowded imagery, often have the effect of an ingenious contrapuntal composition with a number of strands, with which one has a hard time keeping up (cf. Arberry, pp. 28-30). Such complex constructions generally take place within the span of a line, even a mere hemistich; compactness is essential to its effect. Formulation of poetic thought leading to a dramatic climax or conclusion is alien to the artistic design of Persian lyrics. They follow a design that consists of a series of clever, independent strokes, held together by the formal cohesion of the poem.

To call rhetorical devices "embellishing devices," as is often done, is somewhat misleading. Persian poetry is *essentially* rhetorical. Rhetoric is its conceptual frame rather than an extraneous formal feature. The stringent requirements of rhythm and rhyme add their own challenges to the conceptual formulation of the poetic ideas. The aesthetic surprise emanates from the poet's success in spite of the restrictions that the rigid metrical frame and the requirements of rhyme and *radif* impose on the poem. The effortless ease and fluency of a Ferdowsi, a Saʿdi, or a Hafez do not represent an absence of rhetorical sophistication. It is the superb mastery of their art that disguises their ingenious craftsmanship. A poet who succeeds in the face of the tyranny of form and the exigency of rhetorical requirements excites our admiration, as does the flawless performance of an acrobat or a magician.

In discussing poetry, Avicenna, as a typical peripatetic philosopher, who wrote a commentary on *Aristotle's Poetics*, is well aware of the element of creating wonder or surprise (*taʿjib*): "And in imagination there is something of [a sense] of wonder, which is absent in the demonstrable truth... Imagination [which is the basis of the art of poetry] is a yielding to wonder and the pleasures that are in the utterance itself." (*Al-Šefāʾ, al-Manṭeq,* ix *al-Šeʿr*, ed. A. Badawi, pp. 22-23). He uses the word *moʿjeb* "that which causes wonder" in reference to the pleasurable quality of poetry (ibid, cf. a similar view by Naṣir-al-Din Ṭusi, *Asās al-eqtebās,* ed. Modarres-Rażavi, p. 590).

When Persian poetry began, the content was stressed. The expression was direct, naturalistic, and based on the poet's experience, as attested in the lyrics

of Rudaki, Daqiqi, Farroḵ-i, and Manučehri. The creation of poetic ideas and imagery was more important than the manner of their formulation. Of course, the formal frame was stringent from the beginning. Soon, however, the witty and ingenious manner of expressing poetic thoughts became the dominant aspect in lyric poetry. From the 14th century, almost during the lifetime of Hafez, a deepening interest in the ingenious formulation of poetic ideas and far-fetched variations of old metaphors sets in. Occasionally, the skillful orchestration of ideas and tropes produces brilliant lines. Anyone who would have the leisure to acquaint himself with the vast output of the Indian Style poets will find gems of glowing beauty in their single lines. Striving for novelty and for exploring subtle poetic ideas has on many occasions succeeded in producing terse, pithy, epigrammatic lines or clusters of lines that cannot be found in the poetry of other periods.

In this sense, and only in this sense, the Indian Style poetry shows a positive aspect and represents a welcome novelty. One cannot help being struck at times by the sheer conceptual subtlety and corresponding verbal acumen found in some individual lines of these poets. The skill with which these poets weave various strands of thoughts and metaphors into evocative, multifaceted webs, with fine invisible bridges subtly connecting the different levels of meaning, or their crossing and grafting them, leaves one breathless.

Such ingenious lines and occasional gems are, however, found at a price. The directness of expression suffers and natural emotions are lost in the web of tenuously connected and complex metaphors. Pulling at diverse images with elusive links, and building intricate if dazzling structures on precarious foundations, the poet becomes more of a juggler of images and tropes than an interpreter of feelings. With his deepening pursuit of mental acrobatics and his unrelenting attempt at impressing and amazing the reader or listener, he moves further and further away from real life experience and his poems become more and more abstract.

Furthermore, the music of the poems is affected; extra long syllables, and syncopated rhythms which impart to the Khorasani Style a lofty and dignified tone are replaced by a languid version of the same meters which fit the abject and pitiable state of the lover. What kind of combination of short and long syllables results in the virile or effete music of a line is an aspect of Persian poetry that deserves to be more fully investigated.

Conclusion. Odd as some of the premises of the Persian ḡazal may appear at

first glance, nevertheless, the ḡazal is a most intense expression of love and beauty, with a universality of application peculiar to itself. The fact that Persian does not make a distinction of grammatical gender and the same word denotes “he” and “she” allows the Persian ḡazal often to address both heterosexual and homoerotic love. In the 20th century, when Persian social and cultural conditions inevitably became deeply affected by Western culture, Persian readers began to read only heterosexual love in the ḡazals, notwithstanding some revealing signs to the contrary.

The ḡazal celebrates love and wine in a passionate and often ecstatic manner, with the poet ingeniously delineating all facets of love and yearning, such as the pain of separation from the beloved, of being the subject of his/her neglect, envying his more successful rivals, the rare pleasure and beatitude of having been favored by a kind glance from the beloved, giving up everything, from one’s sleep to one’s reputation or even one’s faith for the beloved, or becoming bereft of sense and reason like the proverbial lover Majnun who left his people and dwelled in the desert, making friends with beasts and losing his mind. Love shines in Persian ḡazals as an all-powerful force, irrespective of who the lover or the beloved is. It cannot leave one unaffected, once its premises are appreciated and its language—wrapped in all kinds of associated ideas and connotations—is understood.

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