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TURKIC LITERATURE – Early Modern Period

PART I : **OTTOMAN LITERATURE - Overview**

Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman state had a life span of more than six centuries , from (1299 to 1922). A single dynasty reigned in unbroken continuity. Islam was not only the religious faith, but also the political ideology of the basically theocratic Ottoman state. The empire was multiracial, multinational, multireligious, multilingual. In ruling over these disparate elements, the Ottoman establishment achieved remarkable success in administrative, military, and fiscal organization.

Overview. Ottoman literature, which stressed poetry as the superior art, utilized the form and the aeshetic values of Islamic Arabo-Persian literature. The educated elite, led by the sultans (many of whom were accomplished poets themselves), produced a huge body of verse whose hallmarks included refined diction, abstruse vocabulary, euphony, romantic agony, and dedication to formalism and tradition, and the Sufi brand of mysticism. Although prose was not held in high esteem by the Ottoman literary establishment, accounts for some excellent achievements, particularly the travelogues of the seventeenth-century cultural commentator Evliya Çelebi. The Ottoman Empire also nurtured a rich theatrical tradition, which consisted of Karagöz (shadow plays), Meddah (storyteller and impersonator), and Orta oyunu(a type of commedia dell'arte).

Traditions. Three main literary traditions evolved: 1) Tekke (sect,denomination) literature; 2) Oral folk literature; 3) Divan (elite) literature. Oral folk literature and Divan literature hardly ever influenced each other; in fact, they remained oblivious of one another. Tekke literature, however, had an easy intercoursewith both, utilizing their forms, prosody, vocabulary, and stylistic devices in a pragmatic fashion.

PART II **: OTTOMAN POETRY** (Divan Poetry)

Position of Poetry. The Ottoman elite was passionately devoted to poetry. Perhaps the crowning achievement of Ottoman culture was poetry, which also served as the propaedeutic to all other literary arts and as an element of visual and plastic arts like calligraphy, architecture, and miniature painting as well as of the decorative arts. Divan poetry, as the Turkish elite poetry that was influenced by Arabic and Persian literature is often called, found favor at the court and at the coffeehouse, it satisfied the aesthetic needs of both the elite and the man in the street. Significantly, two thirds of the sultans were poets—some, in particularly Mehmed "the Conqueror" (1432-81) and Süleyman the Magnificent (1494-1566),were first rate.

Elite Poetry. Divan poetry was composed by and for an intellectual elite mostly affiliated with the court. Most of the prominent poets received a theological education at a medrese (Muslim academy) where instruction was given in Arabic and Persian, both considered a sine qua non for a man of letters. The Ottoman poets as a rule viewed it the epitome of literary achievement to publish a collection of poems in one of these two languages—or preferably in both. Fuzuli (d.1556),ranked among the two or three greatest classical poets,wrote three divans (collections of poems)—in Turkish,Arabic, and Persian.

Influences. From beginning to end, classical poetry remained under the pervasive influence of Persian and Arabic poetry: it imitated and tried to emulate the verse forms, rhyme-and-rhythm patterns, meters, mythology, and even Weltanschauung of the Persian and Arabic masters. It also adopted a substantial portion of their vocabulary.

Prosody. Aruz (Arabic: arud), a quantitative prosody devised by the Arabs and perfected by the Persians, dominated Divan poetry. This metric form is based on the arrangement of syllables

according to vowel length and consonantal ending. Each short vowel at the end of a syllable accounts for a short sound (.). A syllable ending in a consonant or a long vowel is taken as a long sound (–)The meter of one famous line would thus be:

Â-şık ol-dur kim kı-lar câ-nın fe-dâ câ-nâ-nı-na

In this complaint by Fuzuli, that "The lover is he who sacrifices his life to his loved one,"the meter as it stands is one of the most frequently used. The name of the meter is Fâilâtün / fâilâtün / fâilâtün / fâilün, which reproduces the sound pattern. The final k of âşık is linked with the word oldur and the final syllable of the line, as in the case of all meters, is automatically accepted as long even though it ends in a short vowel. The poet could choose from about a hundred different meters.

Incompability. This prosodic structure was essentially ill suited to Turkish phonology. Aruz meters have a preponderance of long syllables, whereas Turkish makes frequent use of short vowels. Three successive short syllables, for instance, can be used only at the end of just a few meters, and no meter can accommodate four successive short syllables. (The name "A-na-do-lu," meaning Anatolia, to cite one blatant example, could not fit any aruz meter.) This incongruity caused two anomalous situations: it forced poets to distort the pronunciation of hundreds of Turkish words in order to fit them into the molds of the meters and to borrow in huge numbers Persian and Arabic words with long vowels. The prosody afforded definite rhythms and predetermined euphonic structures which, as pleasing to the ear as they certainly are, can become repetitious and tedious to the point where the substance is virtually subjugated to the meter.

Forms. Divan poetry also used the major verse forms of Persian and Arabic literatures: gazel, the lyric ode, with a minimum of five and a maximum of fifteen couplets (aa / ba / ca / da / ea); kaside (often used for the panegyric, with the same rhyme pattern as the gazel, but running as long as thirty-three to ninety-nine couplets); mesnevi (self-rhyming couplets by the hundreds or thousands used for narratives or didactic works); rubai (the quatrain a / a / b / a expressing a distilled idea); tuyuğ(a quatrain utilizing a specific aruz meter); şarkı (originally
called murabba, often used for lyrics of love and levity); and musammat (extended versions of many of the other basic verse forms).

Form vesus Content. Form reigned supreme over Divan poetry. Content, most Divan poets felt, should be the self-generating substance whose concepts and values were not to be questioned, let alone renovated. As in the case of the performance of classical music in the West, craftsmanship was creative artistry, virtuosity was virtue.

Achievements. Despite the tyranny of form, which even forced on the poet the requirement that each poetic statement be contained within the couplet or distich and that a static metaphorical system be regenerated with such sets of conceptual congruity as gül, the rose representing the beautiful sweetheart, and the bülbül, the distraught nightingale symbolizing the eloquent poet in love, prominent Divan poets attained a profound spirituality, a trenchant sensitivity, an overflowing eroticism.

Themes. The themes recurring in the work of the masters range from self-glorification to self-abnegation, from agony to ebullient joy, from fanatic abstinence to uninhibited hedonism. Islamic mysticism, as the soul's passionate yearning to merge with God, constitutes the superstructure of much Divan poetry.

Early Poets. Among the early masters of the Divan tradition are Ahmedî (d. 1413), Ahmed Pasha (d. 1497), Ahmed-i-Dâi (fourteenth–fiveteenth century), and Necatî (d. 1509).

Fuzuli. Fuzuli, the great figure of Ottoman literature in the sixteenth century,emerged at the peak of the Ottoman Empire's grandeur. He is the author of the mesnevi entitled Leylâ vü Mecnun(Leylā and Mejnūn), a long narrative poem of close to four thousand couplets ,that

explores the philosophical implications of worldly and mystic love. Perhaps no other poet exerted as much influence as Fuzuli on the elite poetry of the succeeding few centuries.

Other Classical Poets. Hayalî (d. 1557), Yahya of Taşlıca (d. 1582), Şeyhülislâm Yahya (d. 1644), and Nailî (d. 1666) achieved well-deserved renown for virtuosity, graceful lyricism, and an elegant use of the language.

Baki. Baki, the great sixteenth-century poet laureate,attained wide fame for the aesthetic perfection of his secular gazels and kasides.

Turkification Movement. Because Divan literature was inundated by Arabic and Persian vocabulary much of it arcane and inaccessible, some poets opted for a more dominant use of words of Turkish origin. This "re-Turkification" process received impetus from literary precedents. s. In the first half of the sixteenth century, for instance, a movement called Türki-i basit (Simple Turkish), led by Nazmi of Edirne (d. after 1554) and Mahremî of Tatavla (d. ca. 1536), advocated the use of colloquial Turkish, free of Arabic and Persian borrowings and of all Persian izafet formulations, in the classical stanzaic forms utilizing the Arabic-Persian prosody (aruz) and showed, on the strength of their large and impressive output, that success could be achieved along these lines, pointing to the emergence of an original body of "national literature."

Criticism. Ottoman elite poetry has often been criticized for being too abstract, too repetitious, and excessively divorced from society and concrete reality. Modernists in the latter part of the nineteenth century took the classical poets to task for having abandoned the mainstream of Turkish national literary tradition in favor of servile imitations of Arabic and Persian poetry. In Republican Turkey, not only the advocates of folk poetry and of modern European poetry, but also a prominent scholar of Ottoman literature, Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı (d. 1982), launched frontal attacks on this elite poetry. Among the principal objections were stringent formalism, abstract substance and formulations, frozen metaphors and cliché images, and a masochistic and misogynistic view of love and life.

Achievement. Although there is a measure of truth in these critical comments , Divan poetry achieved impressive succes as poésie pure with a commintment, in Platonic terms, to abstraction's being more real than reality itself. The auditory imagination operative in its aesthetics never fails to impress the sensitive ear.Although it may be steeped in evocattions of la belle dame sans merci the emotional dimensions than the most accomplished classical poets such as Fuzuli and Şeyh Galib (d. 1799) establish in their poems sway the romantic souls on one level and the cerebral readers on another. And despite much repetition of metaphor and stock epithets, Divan poets offer innumerable fresh, compelling imaginative metaphors and images.
Baki's proverbial line, which posited the supremacy of eloquent sound in a fleeting world, still holds true:

What endures in this dome is but a pleasant echo.

The mystic strain seems to have embodied the sense of alienation experienced by the Ottoman intellectual. A famous couplet by Neşatî (d. 1674) epitomizes this feeling:

We have so removed our physical existence
We are now hidden in the gleaming mirror.

The same sense of dissociation from reality in its worldly or external aspects, the anguish of exile, and the sorrow of spiritual banishment that run through Ottoman mystic poetry are not simply the stock sentiments of Islamic Sufism, but also statements of discontent about the structure and the functioning of society. The tone is almost always pessimistic and often nihilistic, albeit in anticipation of ultimate happiness. A sullen craft and art, the poetry of the mystics nurtured a special branch of literature, as it were—a,literature of complaint, chronic dissatisfaction, and disenchantment with the times. Fuzuli voiced this gloomy attitude in many well-known lines:

Friends are heartless, the world ruthless, time without peace,
Trouble abounds, no one befriends you, the foe is strong, fortune is weak.

Rifts are rampant, the community of peace is rent with fear,
I am at a loss, for I can find no true pathfinder.

Beloved. Within the theocratic framework, the poets saw and showed the sultan as sacrosanct. Ottoman panegyrics charted a progression of love—from an ordinary sweetheart to the sultan and ultimately to God. In fact, in many Ottoman poems written by the court poets as well as by the independents and mystics, a three-level interpretation of the "beloved" is possible: darling, king, and divine being.

This progression—or perhaps deliberate obfuscation—growing in concentric circles is reinforced by the attribution of absolute beauty (cemâl-i mutlak) and absolute perfection (kemâl-i mutlak) to God. The element of celâl (implying might, greatness, and awesome presence) also figured prominently. So the composite picture of the "loved one," of the sultan, and of God in Divan literature is one of inaccessibility, beauty, glory, and cruelty. In a much subtler conception than mere masochism, the Divan metaphor equates beauty with pain and strives to arrive at pathei mathos— that is, wisdom through suffering. In a sense, establishment poets seemed to present the sultan or any person in power as having the divine right—like God—to inflict pain and misery. The mystics, in their insistence on the human predicament whereby separation from God is woeful, intensified the myth—particularly when they offered the ideals of love's torture and self-sacrifice.

The metaphorical progression from the "beloved" to the sultan and further on to God had its concomitant of complaint. Prostration became, in effect, a form of protest:

Fuzuli is a beggar imploring your grace's favor;
Alive he is your dog, dead he is dust at your feet.
Make him live or die, the judgment and the power are yours,
My vision my life my master my loved one my royal Sultan.

Because the poets frequently bemoaned their suffering at the hands of the loved one, the complaint was thereby about the sultan and about God, whose will the sultan represented on earth.

Sultan. Those sultans who were themselves poets also contributed to the view of their reign as being less valuable than love,in particularly the love of God. Mehmed "the Conqueror "(d. 1481) expressed this concept in a pithy line:

I am the slave of a Sultan whose slave is the world's sultan.

Kanuni Süleyman (better known in the West as Süleyman the Magnificent), like many other sultan-poets, including Selim I, Ahmed I, Mustafa III, and Selim III, denigrated worldly power, choosing to glorify the supremacy of love:

What they call reigning is nothing but worldly quarrel;
There is no greater throne on the earth than the love of God.

So it devolved on the fifteenth-century poet Ali Şîr Nevâî to indicate the focal significance of the monarchy in mystical as well as political terms:

Away from the loved one, the heart is a country without a king,
And that country stands as a body whose life and soul are lacking.

Tell me, Muslims, what good is a body without its life and soul—
Just black earth that nurtures no life-giving basil nor rose of spring

And the black earth where no life-giving basil nor sweet roses grow
Resembles the darkest of nights in which the moon has stopped gleaming.

Oh, Nevâî, tortures abound, but the worst punishment is when
Separation's pain is all and reunion's solace is nothing

A thorough study of the ramifications of the darling–king–divine being triad, which is offered here more in speculation than in substantiation, would give us a new understanding of Divan poetry—particularly mystic poetry—as a massive subversive literature, a strong protest about ruthless rule by the sultan who dispenses cruelty although his subjects profess their love for him.
Seen in this light, the sultan, metaphorically depicted, is a ruthless tyrant who symbolizes cruel love, a supreme being, like God, who has no feelings for his suppliants. Mystic poetry eventually lost its nonconformist function when it veered away from its original concept of man as an extension of God and instead insisted on the bondage of the lover to God the beloved, thereby becoming almost identical with the orthodox view of "submission," and suffered a weakening of its valuation of man as possessing godly attributes. But Ottoman mystic poetry in general validates Péguy's observation: "Tout commence en mystique et finit en politique."

Conformist Poetry. By and large, Divan poetry conformed almost subserviently to the empire. An empire can seldom afford to be empirical, and its literature runs the risk of becoming empyrean. So the conformist poets, perpetuating the same norms and values century after century, offering only variations on unchanging themes, and looking to virtuosity as the highest literary virtue, wrote celebrations of the triad of the Ottoman system: dynasty, faith, and conquest. When no special occasion was being committed to verse, these "establishment poets" turned out lyrics of private joy and agony sufficiently safe as comments on life and couched in abstractions. That is why Divan poetry is often characterized as having been "hermetically sealed" from life.

Nonconformist Poetry. In my opinion, however, this "house organ" aspect of Ottoman poetry has been oversimplified and overemphasized. The empire also produced a large body of nonconformist, subversive, protest poetry.
Taken in its entirety and in anagogic terms, mystic poetry may be regarded as a continuing opposition to and an undermining of the theocratic establishment—a quiet,undeclared war against central authority.Not only by refusing to serve as the amanuensis of imperial glory, but also, far more significantly, by insisting on the supremacy of love over "cardinal virtues," by passing over the sultan in favor of absolute allegiance to God, by ascribing the highest value to the afterlife and denouncing mundane involvements, and by rallying against the orthodox views and institutions of Islam, the mystics not only maintained a stand as "independent" spirits, that in itself was detrimental to a literature and culture seeking to be monolithic, but that also eroded entrenched institutions and endeavored to explode some of the myths of the empire. Soallthough the palace poets subserved, most of those outside of the cultural hierarchy subverted. The mystics maintained over the centuries a vision of apocalypse not only in the metaphysical but also in a political sense.

Many Divan poets protested against the chasm between the rich and the poor. In the sixteenth century, Yahya of Taşlıca wrote:

The poor must survive on one slice of bread,
The lord devours the world and isn't fed.

— — —

He who gives a poor man's heart sorrow,
May his breast be pierced by God's arrow.

Janissary commander and poet, Gazi Giray, at the end of the sixteenth century, sent the following report in verse to the sultan about impending defeat and disaster:

Infidels routed the lands which belong to true Muslims,
You have no fear of God, you take bribes and just sit there.

If no action is taken, this country is as good as lost,
If you don't believe what I say, ask anyone in the world.

From: Elegy to the Cat

I.
He's dead and gone! Alas! What shall I do? Pity, pussy!

The flames of death devoured you! A calamity, pussy!
The lion of doom tricked and mauled you: Woe is me, pussy!
Alas! What shall I do now? O, pity, pretty pussy!

III.
That cat of mine was so playful, such a wonderful guy.
He had a grand time catching the birds that fly in the sky.
He'd eat anything he got—a roll, a patty, a pie.
Alas! What shall I do now? O, pity, pretty pussy!

IV.
Sure, he caught sparrows just like that, but hens and geese as well;
Great fighter, he even turned the lion's life into hell;
Soldier of faith, he'd kill mice as though they were the infidel.
Alas! What shall I do now? O, pity, pretty pussy!

VII.
Fearless like a lion, a ferocious beast in combat . . .
You think he was old? No, he was a young and sprightly cat:
Every hair of his whiskers was a scimitar, that's that.
Alas! What shall I do now? O, pity, pretty pussy!

Me'âlî, sixteenth century

There were animadversions against tyranny. Pir Mahmut wrote in the latter part of the fourteenth century:

The oppressed who stay awake and moan from torment
Will bring on their oppressors' dismemberment.

In the sixteenth century, Usûlî defied the sultan with the following words:

We never bow our heads to this land's crown and throne,
On our own thrones we are sultans in our own right.

Also in the sixteenth century, Ruhi of Baghdad, a vehement critic of the establishment, railed against the peddlers of status:

What good is a lofty place if it has its price,
Boo to the base fellow who sells it, boo to the buyer.

Ruhi distilled the theme of inequity into one couplet:

Hungry for the world, some people work nonstop
While some sit down and Joyfully eat the world up.

Numerous poems of protest and complaint were directed against not the central government, but the local authorities and religious judges. In the fifteenth century, Andelibî denounced a judge for taking bribes:

Go empty-handed, his honor is asleep, they say;
Go with gold, they say: "Sir, please come this way."

Some poets offered critical views of Ottoman life and manners in kasides (long odes) and mesnevis (narrative poems). Among these poems, the detailed commentaries by Osmanzade Taib (d. 1724) on commodity shortages, black- market operations and profiteering, the plight of the poor people, and the indifference of the officials and judges are particularly noteworthy.

The nineteenth-century satirist İzzet Molla wrote many verses in which he denounced prominent public servants by name. In the following quatrain built on satiric puns, his victims are Yasinizade and Halet, names that can roughly translated as “Prayer” and “State”:

Mr. Prayer and Mr. State joined hands
To inflict all this on the populace:
One brought it into a state of coma,
The other gave his prayers for solace

The great debate through the course of Divan poetry was between the mystic and the orthodox, the independent spirit and the fanatic, the nonconformist and the dogmatist, the latitudinarian and the zealot (rind versus zahid), who hurled insults at each other.

Nesimi. In the early fifteenth century when Nesimi was being skinned alive for heresy, the religious dignitary who had decreed his death was on hand watching the proceedings. Shaking his finger, the mufti said: “This creature’s blood is filthy. If it spills on anyone, that limb must be cut off at once.” Right then, a drop of blood squirted, smearing the Mufti’s finger. Someone said: “Sir, there is a drop of blood on your finger. According to your pronouncement, your finger should be chopped off.” Scared, the Mufti protested: “That won’t be necessary, because just a little bit of water will wash this off.” Hearing this, Nesimi produced the following couplet in extempore and in flawless prosody while being skinned alive:

With his finger cut, the pharisee will flee from God’s truth,
They strip this poor believer naked, yet he doesn’t even cry.

Nefi. The supreme satirist of Ottoman literature was Nef’î (d. 1635), who put down a conventional theologian with the following invective:

The wily pharisee is bound by beads of fraud;
The rosary he spins becomes the web of cant.

In addition to resonant panegyrics, Nef’ î wrote many devastating poems lampooning hypocrisy and affectation. In a famous quatrain, he gave the following retort to Şeyhülislâm Yahya, the empire’s chief religious dignitary at the time as well as a prominent poet:

So the Mufti has branded me an infidel:
In turn I shall call him a Muslim, let us say.
The day will come for both of us to face judgment
And we shall both emerge as liars that day.

Nef’î once devastated the orthodox theologian Hoca Tahir Efendi in four lines utilizing a wordplay on Tahir, which means “clean”:

Mr. Clean, they say, has called me a dog;
This word displays his compliment indeed,
For I belong to the Maliki sect:
A dog is clean according to my creed.

Women Poets. Poetry was an Ottoman passion not only for men, but also for women who reveled in listening to or reading poems. Some women composed impressive poems in the formidably difficult conventional forms and meters. From the fifteenth century until the end of the empire in 1922, they produced a considerable number of polished verses, vying with the best of their male counterparts and often achieving prominence.

Zeyneb. Zeyneb, who died in 1474, was a cultivated lady. This first major Ottoman woman poet was also a fine musician. One of her couplets is symptomatic of the male domination that in Ottoman society as well as in many other often made woman poets follow the aesthetic norms established by men:

Zeyneb, renounce womanly fondness for the decorative life;
Like men, be simple of heart and tongue, shun flashy embellishment.

In the following exquisite quatrain, she expresses the pain of love. The second line refers to the story of Joseph,who was regarded as the embodiment of ideal human beauty,in the Koran's twelfth sura.

To you, O Lord, those enchanting looks are God's grace:
The story of Joseph is a verse from your lovely face.
Your beauty and love, your tortures and my endurance
Never ebb or end, but grow in eternal time and space.

Mihri Hatun. Mihri Hatun (d. 1506) proclaims women's—and her own—superiority over men in the prefatory verse of her divan(collected poems):

Since, they say, woman has no brains or wit,
Whatever she speaks, they excuse it.

But your humble servant Mihri demurs
And states with that mature wisdom of hers:

Far better to have one woman with class
Than a thousand males all of whom are crass;

I would take one woman with acumen
Over a thousand muddleheaded men.

Mihri Hatun
(d. 1506)

This woman poet lived a free life of lovemaking and levity. Her beauty was legendary, and she had affairs with some of the celebrities of her time. For many years, she was a member of the intellectual circle around Prince Ahmed. When she was criticised for her affairs, she struck back in verse:

At one glance
I loved you
With a thousand hearts

They can hold against me
No sin except my love for you
Come to me
Don't go away

Let the zealots think
Loving is sinful
Never mind
Let me burn in the hellfire
Of that sin

One of Mihri's most accomplished poems is a gazel (lyric ode). Her mention of Alexander is a reference to her lover İskender.

I woke, opened my eyes, raised my head: There with his face bright
And exquisite like the full moon, he was standing upright.

Was it my lucky star, was I blessed with divine power?
In my field of vision, Jupiter ascended tonight.

He looked like a Muslim, but was wearing pagan garments;
From his enchanting face—I saw clearly—came streaming light.

By the time I had opened and closed my eyes, he vanished:
He was—I divined—a heavenly angel or a sprite.

Mihri shall never die: She found the elixir of life,
She saw Alexander beaming in the dark of the night.

Leyla Hanim. A remarkable woman poet was Leylâ Hanım (d. 1847). Her marriage lasted one week. Many of her own love poems were presumably addressed to women. By the standards of her day, she led a liberated life. Some of her daring verses scandalized the moralists of the period.

Drink all you want in the rose-garden. Who cares what they say!
Better enjoy life to the hilt. Who cares what the say!

Could it be that my cruel lover sees my tears as dewdrops?
Like a blooming rose, s/he is all smiles. Who cares what they say!

I am your lover and your loyal slave, my beautiful—
And shall remain so till Doomsday. Who cares what they say . . .

I see my rival is chasing you—Come lie beside me.
You say No? Well, then, so much for you. Who cares what they say.

Leylâ, indulge in pleasure with your lovely, moon-faced friend;
Make sure you pass all your days in joy. Who cares what they say!

Seyh Galib. Şeyh Galib,the last of the great romantic mystics of the eighteenth century, also made an important renovation by getting away from the clichés and the frozen conceits and making original metaphors a new vehicle of artistic expression in his masterwork Hüsn ü Aşk(Beauty and Love), an allegorical work of passionate mysticism. Galib, who served as a sheikh—that is,Mevlevi leader— in Istanbul, was profoundly influenced by Rumi's spirituality and poetics—and emphatically acknowledged his impact. Among Şeyh Galib's masterful verses is a superb onomatopoeic invitation to whirling:

Edvar-ı çarha uy, mevlevi ol:
Seyran edersin, devran edersin

The couplet reproduces perfectly the rhythmic pattern of whirling. It is rife with mystic connotations. Edvar-ı çarh means the Mevlevi style of whirling as well as the revolving arches of the sky, the wheels of fortune, or firmament. Seyran is the reference to a "pleasure trip," but also signifies a dream, gazing at a lovely sight, and contemplation. Devran refers to whirling, to transcendence of time, the wheels of fortune, and blissful life. Combining these various implications, Şeyh Galib's couplet could be translated as

Join the heavenly circles, become a Mevlevi:
You can whirl and dream and gaze and turn and revel.

Although the classical tradition continued until the early part of the twentieth century, after Şeyh Galib it produced few figures or works of significance.

Discussion

Does the extreme formality of Divan poetry relate circetly to the formality of the Sultan's court and of official protocol during the Ottoman Empire? You may want to devote special attention to Fuzuli's *Leyla and Mejnun*, a formalized investigation of love, through which much insight and fresh perception trickles. Or consider, for another example of formality co existing with deep feeling, the poetry of John Donne in England, or Clement Marot in France.

Central themes of divan poetry were the sacrosanct being of the Sultan, and the worthlessness of the world itself. Do you see some connection between misogyny and disillusionment, on the one hand, and on the other a fidelity to pure form, to stlylized art for art's sake? Can we say that the replacement of other values by art—as in French l9th century art pour art, or perhaps in Kabuki theater, typically goes together with a static or royalist conception of government?

How did proficient Ottoman poets—Sultans included—learn their craft? Were there schools of poetry learning, tutors in writing, advisory textbooks? Where did the audience for such poetry come from? Was there a book publishing business? How did the 'nonconformist' poets get known?

There were a number of well known women poets during the Ottoman period. Did they recite their poetry in public? What was the condition of women under Islam during this period? Did it vary from century to century?

Seyh Galib eighteenth century

My darling with the rosy face—at one glance—
You turned my heart's mirror into a wine glass,
Passing on to me your joy and nonchalance . . .
Here's my heart, for you to ignore or to grace:
May the home of my heart be your drinking place.

Such a flame has the candle of the spirit
That the dome of the skies cannot contain it;
Not even Mount Sinai saw from its summit
The lightning bolts that my chest nurtures within it:
My bosom is up in flames thanks to your grace.

Over the apex, the royal falcon flies
Ignoring the hunt of the bird of paradise;
Nesting in your hair is a joy it denies.
Show mercy, O king, who rides the horse of the skies:
To which your generous hand gives sustenance.

In a new realm where my life has come upon,
Each dewdrop looms as enormous as the sun
And no barrier can block the sunbeams, none.
Where I arrive might be close at hand or gone:
There, your absence is the same as your embrace.

Seyhi. In the early fifteenth century, Şeyhî, a physician-poet, wrote one of the most remarkable satires of socioeconomic inequity, a verse allegory called "Harname" (The Donkey Story) in which he contrasted a starving donkey with well-fed oxen. This depiction of oxen graced by crowns was certainly courageous as satire because the target in the allegory could well be the sultan and his entourage.

Seyhi

Once there was a feeble donkey, pining away,
Bent under the weight of his load, he used to bray.

Carrying wood here and water there was his plight.
He felt miserable, and languished day and night.

So heavy were the burdens he was forced to bear
That the sore spots on his skin left him without hair.

His flesh and skin, too, nearly fell off his body;
Under his loads, from top to toe, he was bloody.

Whoever saw his appearance remarked, in fact,
"Surprising that this bag of bones can walk intact!"

His lips dangled, and his jaws had begun to droop;
He got tired if a fly rested on his croup.

Goose pimples covered his body whenever he saw,
With those starving eyes, just a handful of straw.

On his ears there was an assembly of crows;
Over the slime of his eyes flies marched in rows.

Whenever the saddle was taken off his rumps,
What remained looked altogether like a dog's dumps.

One day, his master decided to show pity,
And for once he treated the beast with charity:
He took the saddle off, let him loose on the grass;
As he walked on, while grazing, suddenly the ass

Saw some robust oxen pacing the pastureland:
Their eyes were fiery and their buttocks grand.

With all the grass they gobbled up, they were so stout
That if one hair were plucked, all that fat would seep out.

Jauntily they walked, carefree, their hearts filled with zest;
Summer sheds, winter barns, and nice places to rest.

No halter's pain for them nor the saddle's anguish,
No heavy loads causing them to wail or languish.

Struck with wonder and full of envy, he stood there,
Brooding over his own plight which was beyond compare:

We were meant to be the equals of these creatures,
We have the same hands and feet, same forms and features.

Why then is the head of each ox graced by a crown
And why must poverty and dire need weigh us down?

Fuzuli. Fuzuli, the great figure of Ottoman literature in the sixteenth century,emerged at the peak of the Ottoman Empire's grandeur. He is the author of the mesnevi entitled Leylâ vü Mecnun(Leylā and Mejnūn), a long narrative poem of close to four thousand couplets ,that explores the philosophical implications of worldly and mystic love. Perhaps no other poet exerted as much influence as Fuzuli on the elite poetry of the succeeding few centuries.

Fuzuli

I wish I had a thousand lives in this broken heart of mine
So I could sacrifice myself to you once with each one.

The state is topsy-turvy like a cypress reflected on water.

I reap no gains but trouble at your place when I come near;
My wish to die on your love's path is all that I hold dear.

I am the reed-flute when griefs assemble. Cast to the winds
What you find in my burnt-up, dried-up body except desire.

May bloody tears draw curtains on my face the day we part
So that my eyes will see just that moon-faced love when they peer.

My loneliness has grown to such extremes that not a soul
Except the whirlwind of disaster spins within my sphere.

There's nobody to burn for my sake but my heart's own fire;
My door is opened by none other than the soft zephyr.

O waves, don't ravage all my surging teardrops, for this flood
Has caused all welfare buildings save this one to disappear.

The rites of love are on; how can the poet hold his sighs:
Except for sound, what profit could be found in me to clear?

Fuzuli,sixteenth century

Sultan Suleyman

Love letter in poetic form sent by Süleyman the Magnificent to his wife, Hürrem

My very own queen, my everything, my beloved, my bright moon;
My intimate companion, my one and all, sovereign of all beauties, my sultan.

My life, the gift I own, my be-all, my elixir of Paradise, my Eden,
My spring, my joy, my glittering day, my exquisite one who smiles on and on.

My sheer delight, my revelry, my feast, my torch, my sunshine, my sun in heaven;
My orange, my pomegranate, the flaming candle that lights up my pavilion.

My plant, my candy, my treasure who gives no sorrow but the world's purest pleasure;
Dearest, my turtledove, my all, the ruler of my heart's Egyptian dominion.

My Istanbul, my Karaman, and all the Anatolian lands that are mine;
My Bedakhshan and my Kipchak territories, my Baghdad and my Khorasan.

My darling with that lovely hair, brows curved like a bow, eyes that ravish: I am ill.
If I die, yours is the guilt. Help, I beg you, my love from a different religion.

I am at your door to glorify you. Singing your praises, I go on and on:
My heart is filled with sorrow, my eyes with tears. I am the Lover—this joy is mine.

Muhibbi (Sultan Süleyman's pen name),sixteenth century

Baki

With all our heart, we're at love's beck and call:
We don't resist the will of fate at all.

We never bow to knaves for this vile world;
In God we trust, we're only in His thrall.

We don't rely on the state's golden staff—
The grace of God grants us our wherewithal.

Although our vices shock the universe,
We want no pious acts to save our soul.

Thank God, all earthly glory must perish,
But Baki's name endures on the world's scroll.

Nedim. After serving its function of heralding change and once established in its genre and confident in its intellectual orientation, Divan poetry remained recalcitrant to internal change. It was only after several centuries of sclerotic continuity that, Divan verse introduced various formal and substantive changes. A significant innovation was undertaken by Nedim (d. 1730), the poet of the so-called Tulip Age, who lived la dolce vita and wrote of Sardanapalian pleasures. He dropped his predecessors' abstractions and hackneyed clichés predecessors in favor of depictions of physical beauty (aesthetic, human, and topographical), made an attempt to "democratize" conventional verse by increasing its appeal through greater intelligibility, and

dispensed with the masochistic and misogynistic implications of the Divan poetry of the previous centuries, replacing them with the joys of love and living.

Nedimi eighteenthcentury

Song

Come, let's grant joy to this heart of ours that founders in distress:
Let's go to the pleasure gardens, come, my sauntering cypress.
Look, at the quay, a six-oared boat is waiting in readiness—
Let's go to the pleasure gardens, come, my sauntering cypress.

Let's laugh and play, let's enjoy the world to the hilt while we may
Drink nectar at the fountain which was unveiled the other day,
And watch the gargoyle spatter the elixir of life away—
Let's go to the pleasure gardens, come, my sauntering cypress.

First, for a while, let's take a stroll around the pond in leisure,
And gaze in marvel at that palace of heavenly pleasure;
Now and then, let's sing songs or recite poems for good measure—
Let's go to the pleasure gardens, come, my sauntering cypress.

Get your mother's leave, say it's for holy prayers this Friday:
Out of time's tormenting clutches let you and I steal a day,
And slinking through the secret roads and alleys down to the quay,
Let's go to the pleasure gardens, come, my sauntering cypress.

Just you and I, and a singer with exquisite airs—and yet
Another: with your kind permission, Nedim, the mad poet.
Let's forget our boon companions today, my joyful coquette—
Let's go to the pleasure gardens, come, my sauntering cypress.

PART III **: OTTOMAN RELIGIOUS LITERATURE**

Mystical Literature. Religious (Tekke) poetry flourished among the mystics, the Muslim clergy, and the adherents of various doctrines and denominations. It served as the main repository of theological sectarianism and was in itself a poetry of dissent and discord. It embodied the schism between the Sunni and Shiite segments of the Muslim-Turkish population and embraced a spate of unorthodox doctrines (tarikat), from tasavvuf, libertarian mysticism, to anarchical Bektashiism and the Hurufi, Yesevi, Mevlevi, Bayrami, Alevi, Kadiri, Halveti, and Melami sects that were often hotbeds of political opposition within the theocratic system and contributed to unrest and strife in Anatolia.

Tekke Literature. Members of the tekkes (sect lodges, theological centers) were particularly prolific in the domain of religious verse. In the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, Sultan Veled (son of Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi), Âşık Pasha (also a fervent advocate of developing the literary resources of Turkish), and Gülşehrî and Şeyyat Hamza (both early masters of Islamic poetry) set the inspirational tone that would remain the hallmark of this voluminous literature.

Didacticism. The fourteenth century produced a remarkable collection of religious epics, tales, and stories in verse marked by didacticism rather than lyric artistry. These poems, composed principally for uneducated listeners, served to spread the Islamic faith.

Mevlid-i Serif. The magnum opus of religious literature emerged in 1409: the Mevlid-i Şerif by Süleyman Çelebi (d. 1422), an adulation of the Prophet Muhammad chanted as a requiem among

Muslim Turks. The tradition that yielded this masterpiece about the Prophet's life and the magnificence of Islam also produced many other verse narratives about the Prophet and Islam.

Nesimi. A great poet to lose his life because of passionate mystic verse, a from that incensed the traditionalists, was Nesimi (d. early fifteenth century).

Alevi-Bektasi Movement. Two folk poets, Kaygusuz Abdal (fifteenth century) and Pir Sultan Abdal (sixteenth century), whose poetry represented the Alevi-Bektaşi movement (long considered heretical) and expressed a strong challenge to the orthodoxy of Islam, fired the imagination of many Anatolian communities. Even God was not spared from badinage. Kaygusuz Abdal wrote several poems that have barbs against God:

> You produced rebel slaves and cast them aside,
> You just left them there and made your exit, my God.
> You built a hair-thin bridge for your slaves to walk on,
> Let's see if you're brave enough to cross it, my God.

Pir Sultan Abdal challenged imperial power and local authorities in abrasive terms:

> In Istanbul he must come down:
> The sovereign with his empire's crown.

Legend has it that Pir Sultan Abdal became the leader of a popular uprising and urged kindred spirits to join the rebellion:

> Come, soul brothers, let's band together,
> Brandish our swords against the godless,
> And restore the poor people's rights.

He even lambasted a judge:

> You talk of faith which you don't heed,
> You shun God's truth, command and creed,
> A judge will always feed his own greed,
> Could Satan be worse than this devil?

He defied his persecutor Hızır Pasha, who was to have him captured and hanged:

> Come on, man! There, Hızır Pasha!
> Your wheel is bound to break in two;
> You put your faith in your sultan:
> Some day, though, he will tumble too.

Dadaloglu. The following lines, attributed to Dadaloğlu (d. ca. 1868) were meant, in Pir Sultan Abdal's tradition, to fire the blood of the masses:

> The state has issued an edict against us
> The edict is the sultan's but the mountains are ours.

PART IV **: OTTOMAN FOLK LITERATURE**

Oral Folk Literature. Oral folk literature, created by the collective poetic and narrative faculty of the common people of Anatolia, has been kept alive through the centuries by ozans (minstrels), saz poets (poet-musicians), and âşıks (troubadours). It uses Turkic verse forms, i.e., türkü, koşma, mani, destan, semai, varsağı. Unsophisticated and based on folk wisdom, it developed a serene realism, an earthy humor, and a mellifluous lyric quality.

Turkic Values. Popular culture in the Ottoman state, keeping alive the Turkic rather than the Islamic patterns of thought and values, also constituted a sub rosa system of deviation from the norms of the educated classes. Folk poetry came to typify and embody the gulf between the urban elite and the common people of the rural areas. It retained the Turks's pre-Islamic and nomadic values of and regenerated them in archetypal form. Written for (or composed) by ill-educated and often illiterate minstrels and troubadours, it had little susceptibility to or proclivity for the characteristics of Divan poetry, which boasted of erudition.

Vernacular Language. The folk poet probably had no sense of Arabo-Persian flavor of Ottoman culture; his concern was local and autochthonous, and for purposes of direct communication he used a simple vernacular immediately intelligible to his uneducated audiences. So the substratum of indigenous culture resisted the temptation to borrow from the elite poets who, inturn, were imitating their Persian and (occasionally) Arabic counterparts. In this sense, one could conceivably regard the corpus of folk poetry as a massive resistance to or a constant subversion of the values adopted by the Ottoman ruling class. It also gave voice at times to the spirit of rebellion against central authority and local feudal lords.

Poets. Anatolian minstrelsy produced such major figures as Köroğlu, the stentorian heroic poet of the sixteenth century; Karacaoğlan (seventeenth century), who wrote lilting lyrics of love and pastoral beauty, Âşık Ömer and Gevherî in the eighteenth century, and Dadaloğlu, Dertli, Bayburtlu Zihni, Erzurumlu Emrah, and Seyrani in the nineteenth century.

Moods. The moods of folk poetry ranged from tender love to angry protest. For instance, the closing lines of an old anonymous mani (quatrain) inquires:

> There's the trace of a gaze on your face
> Who has looked at you, my darling?

And in the nineteenth century, Serdari bemoans:

> The tax collector rips through the villages
> His whip in hand, he tramples on the poor.

Folk literature produced a large corpus of stories,tales,allegories, fables, and riddles.

Folk Drama. The common people's dramatic imagination nurtured the Karagöz shadow plays. It is significant that in these plays the two principal characters, Karagöz and Hacivat, respectively represent a folksy, good-hearted simpleton and a foxy, foolish blabbermouth who tries to simulate urbane speech.

In Ottoman culture, no tragedy evolved, and comedy was confined to Karagöz and commedia dell'arte (Orta oyunu). Tragedy places the human predicament in an identifiable setting and usually depicts personal or social rifts by dint of the vicissitudes of heroes, and comedy pokes fun at society in explicit terms. Ottoman society,in particular the establishment, conceivably had little sympathy for such representations by live actors. Or perhaps poetry was so pervasive and satisfying that authors did not consider it necessary or useful to experiment with other genres. In the vacuum, satire flourished. It performed the function of exposing folly, challenging prevailing values, unmasking hypocrisy, and denouncing injustice. In more recent times, the focal targets of satire have been morals and manners, cant, political norms, and politicians themselves.

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